



Mideast has turned into U.S. graveyard due to Iran's resistance **2**



Tehran says not interfering in Afghan affairs **2**

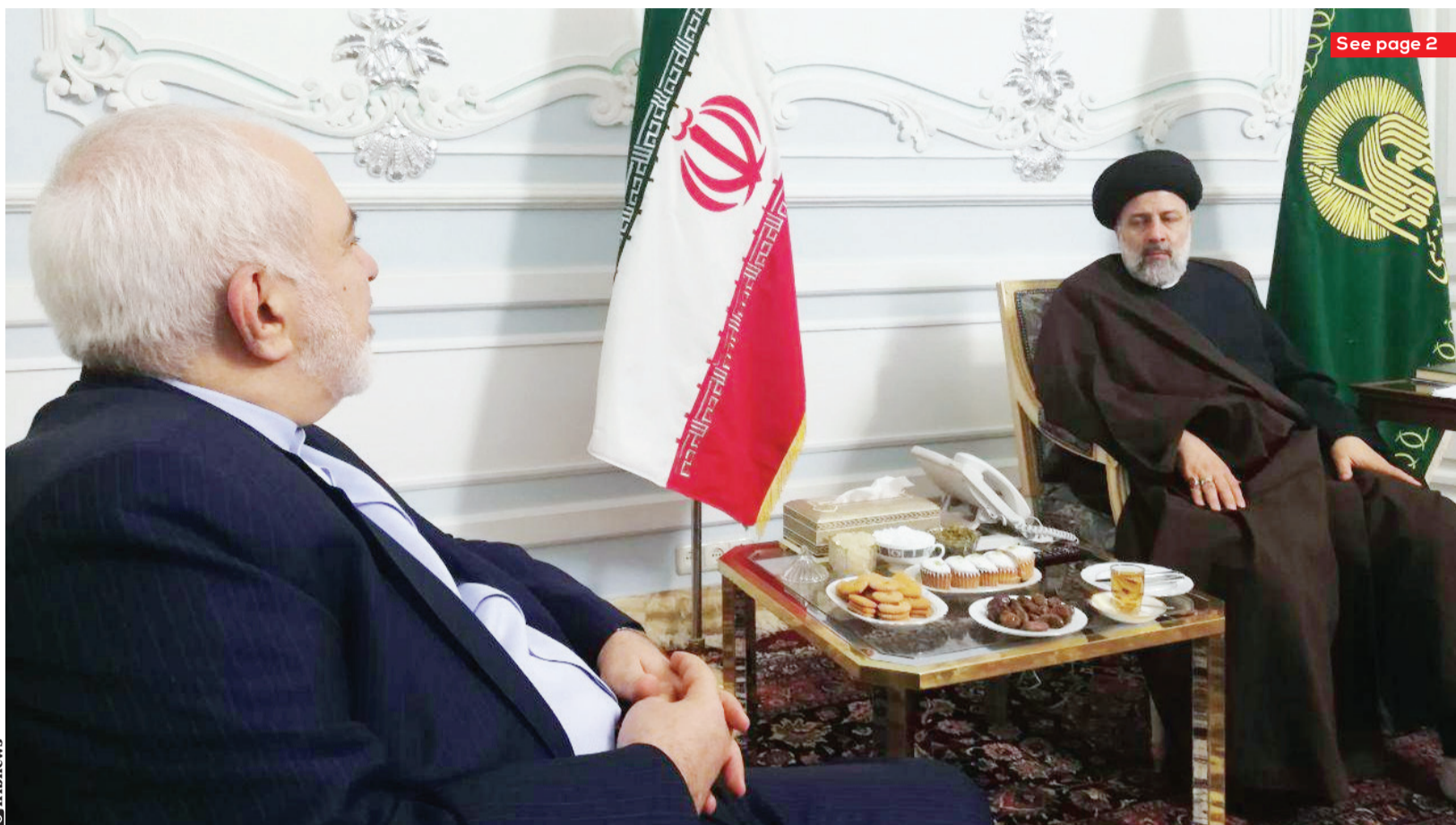


Rahman shortlisted for 'Best Powerlifter of 2018' **15**



Fajr Film Festival unveils official lineup **16**

Zarif: Iran relies on people for security, progress



Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) met with Ebrahim Raisi, custodian of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), in Mashhad on Thursday, January 3, 2019.

Iran in talks with Turkey, Pakistan, Syria for preferential trade

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran is in talks with its neighbors Turkey and Pakistan and also with Syria for conducting preferential trade, IRNA reported quoting Mohammadreza Modoudi, the acting head of Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

Speaking in an event on improving IT and communication exports, the official noted that resolving banking issues is Iran's priority in negotiations with the target countries since without it preferential

trade won't be possible.

He also mentioned bartering as another solution for the trade problems caused by the U.S. sanctions on the country, saying that this option is also being discussed with the mentioned countries.

Modoudi further underlined the 13-percent increase in the country's non-oil trade during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21, 2018) noting, "We will take necessary measures to keep this upward trend on." **→4**

Trump: Iran can do what it wants in Syria

By staff and agency

Following his decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that Iran "can do what they want" in Syria.

Trump made the comment during a conversation with reporters at the end of a cabinet meeting in the White House.

"Iran is pulling people out of Syria, but they can frankly do whatever they want there," Trump said, according to Haaretz.

Administration officials told the New York Times on Monday that after pressure from military officials and politicians Trump has agreed to a gradual withdrawal from Syria. **→2**

Assad will remain in power 'for a while': Jeremy Hunt

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt says Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will remain in office due to Russia's support, amid a decision by the U.S. to withdraw troops and a race among Arab states to normalize ties with the Syrian government.

The senior British diplomat made the remark in an interview with Sky News on Thursday, as Syrian government troops, with the help of Russia's air cover, have so

far managed to restore full control over vast regions of the country once occupied by terrorists and militants.

"The British long-standing position is that we won't have lasting peace in Syria" with Assad in power, Hunt said, but added that "we do think he's going to be around for a while, and that is because of the support that he's had from Russia." **→13**



ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

For Iran as with Syria, a critical mass of unified and determined citizens will defeat aggressors

No one can say whether U.S. President Donald Trump is changing his stripes. But he is sure as the perfection of the Muslim "Jannah" or the beauty of an exquisite Iranian rose or a fine carpet from Shiraz shaking up his usual allies, and not those merely in the U.S., but overseas, too.

It's delightful to watch this happen, but one could be tempted to get too giddy with anticipations of real change when it's possible Trump, as some are claiming, may literally be losing his mind under the pressures inherent in his job and those foisted on him from those who despise him, or he's just being especially impulsive and his big mouth has gotten far too loose.

Some are claiming that before the end of this new year he will resign. Others can readily wonder that he has so angered the U.S. establishment, whether on the conservative or the faux liberal side of the political and social divide, that he may be, Allah forbid it, killed. Many have posited in the past that former President John F. Kennedy died because he wanted to utterly forbid the Zionists from getting hold of nuclear technology from any source and as well did not believe expansion of the nascent war in Vietnam in 1963 was a good idea.

The big-ticket item of controversy currently seems to be Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Syria. He seems to be pushing the honest recognition (finally) that the semi proxy war on Syria and the legitimate and even popular Assad government, despite all the destruction and carnage worse than anything the Mongols (non-Muslim "barbarians" at the time) meted out to the Muslim heartlands in 1258, has been an utter failure.

The goal was, of course, exactly what the Zionists have long wanted: just chaos and little or no organized government east and north of the Jordan River, and lots of dead people. Trump was also quoted as saying that "Iran can do what it wants" in Syria. **→7**

Trump's phobia of his allies

By Hanif Ghaffari

TEHRAN — Trump's fear of his friends and his cabinet is a topic that has been implicitly, and sometimes directly, pointed out in the Western media. This phobia led Trump to remove many of his cabinet members. Trump assume that his allies are making conspiracies against him, and when they disagree with his announced policies in their behavior and speeches, It's part of this conspiracy.

This presumption has made him even suspect of those who are too silent in his government! Mike Pence, the Vice President of the United States, is one of these people. The American sources have long acknowledged that Trump is not confident about Mike Pence and his actions, and that sooner or later, he may dismiss him from his post.

A recently published analysis in the New York Times (about Trump's chaotic state) made the

U.S. President even more pessimistic about those around him, a subject that has long been a challenge to the White House.

Recently, the New York Times referred to the changes made in Trump's government during the past two years as "the calm before the storm", and claimed that in the next two years (2019 and 2020), we will see the raise of crises in the White House, which could affect Trump's political future. In the part of this analysis, we read: **→7**



ARTICLE

Sondoss Al Asaad
Political analyst from Beirut

Ayatollah al-Nimr's resistance and martyrdom

Three years have passed after the martyrdom of Ayatollah Nimr Baqir al-Nimr; who was brutally executed by the autocratic Saudi regime. Under this dictatorship, one is doomed to death once he calls for injustice and freedom. Ayatollah al-Nimr has been a revolutionary faithful leader; known for his peaceful intellectual resistance, shrewd leadership, humbleness and piety.

Martyr Ayatollah al-Nimr has sincerely adopted the methodology of the 7th Century legendary figure of resistance against oppression, falsehood and terrorism, i.e. Imam Hussein (PBUH). In spite of being armless and powerless, his weapon was his firm stance and his power of argument; a figure who spoke in the name of thousands of oppressed and marginalised in the Arabian Peninsula.

He had been weaponed by an outstanding determination and was executed because he had confronted, with a bare chest, the machine of terrorism, because he had spoken in the name of the deprived, because he argued and convinced and because he exposed the face of the bloody Saudi regime, which pays no respect to the innate human rights.

Ayatollah al-Nimr was tortured and executed to be immortalised as a model for all the oppressed and free nations, who might copy his method and shoulder their duty against the tyrant regimes. Victory or martyrdom had long been his dream; the dream of those who contemplate Islam and assign themselves as the nation's service; what every the sacrifices would be.

Sheikh al-Nimr's voice; demanding freedom, rights and justice, is now resonating in the forgotten Yemen, whose people have determined, since day one, to confront the brutality of the Saudi terrorist Takfiri regime. The victory of the Yemenis has proven that those who follow the school of Imam Hussein's revolution would never surrender nor compromise with the enemy. **→7**

هکوپیان
HACOUPIAN

25% OFF

Big Sale of the year

For more information regarding prices of products and buying conditions, please visit our website at:
www.hacoupien.net

The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

For more information contact:
(021)43051450

TENDER INVITATION NO.97/1009

IRAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY (IRALCO), Would like to invite eligible suppliers for the supply of **250 MT.** cryolite on tender basis.

Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offer till **17.Janurery.2019** based on our required instruction to mentioned address in tender documents and receiving more information, please check:
www.new.iralco.ir www.iralco.ir

Public Relations Department of Iran Aluminum Company



TENDER INVITATION NO.97/1010

IRAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY (IRALCO), Would like to invite eligible suppliers for the supply of **600 MT.** crush bath on tender basis.

Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offer till **17.Janurery.2019** based on our required instruction to mentioned address in tender documents and receiving more information, please check:
www.new.iralco.ir www.iralco.ir

Public Relations Department of Iran Aluminum Company



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Mideast has turned into U.S. graveyard due to Iran's resistance: cleric

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hojatoleslam Mohammad Javad Haj Ali Akbari, a new Tehran Friday prayer leader, said on Friday that the Middle East has turned into a graveyard for the United States because of the Iranian nation's resistance.

Addressing worshippers, Haj Ali Akbari said while the Iranian-Islamic civilization is emerging from the East, the American civilization on the other side of the globe is waning, IRIB news reported.

Among the signs of this decline is the withdrawal of American forces from the region, he pointed out.

He also lauded the Iranian nation's resistance against all kinds of wars, seditions and sanctions over the last 40 years.



Tehran says not interfering in Afghan affairs

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi has said talks between Iran and Taliban were held in coordination with the Afghan government, stressing that the Islamic Republic would never interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

"I have never seen a report showing the Afghan government's dissatisfaction with Iran-Taliban talks," ISNA on Friday quoted Vaezi as saying.

"Iran's neighbors are faced with many problems including civil war," he remarked. "Iran attaches great importance to peace and stability in the region, and instability in Afghanistan can spread into Iran."



'U.S. military might, political wisdom in decline'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian nation has dealt so many blows to the U.S. so that not only its military strength, but also its political wisdom have been affected, Hossein Salami, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps second-in-command, said on Friday.

"The U.S. is on the brink of collapse of power," Tasnim quoted Brigadier General Salami as saying at a cultural ceremony in the city of Shiraz.

"Not only have we managed to keep the enemy (U.S.) away from the heart of our country, but we have also caused it to get entangled in various fronts where its power has been sapped," he added.



Production line for advanced electronic equipment launched in Shiraz

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Amir Hatami on Thursday launched the production lines for advanced electronic and defense equipment at an electronics industries company in Shiraz, south-central Iran.

Brigadier General Hatami also unveiled the latest and most advanced equipment and systems related to radar, electronic warfare, air electronics, airport equipment and marine electronics, Mehr reported.

He said the Islamic Republic has all the necessary means for making advances in the defense sector, hailing the Iranian experts and specialists for having succeeded in turning "sanctions" into "opportunities" in the defense sector.



'Iranians stopped Trump, Netanyahu in economic, psychological war'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the parliament speaker, said on Friday that the Iranian government and people have put a stop to the anti-Iran measures taken by U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Powerful #Iran stands strongly with allies in the region, pursues its modern development plan & complex defense measures. Iranian state & people stop #Trump & #Netanyahu in economic & psychological war; astonish the world 'today' not tomorrow by progress in business & employment," Amir Abdollahian said in a post on his Twitter account.



Pompeo: Sanctions aim to improve Iranians' livelihood

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Thursday that Washington's tough sanctions against the Islamic Republic are aimed at giving the Iranian people a chance to have better lives.

"The sanctions on Iran have this ultimate goal: creating an outcome where the Iranian people can have better lives than they have today," Pompeo told Newsmax TV.

Pompeo earlier told the BBC Persian that Iranian officials must listen to Washington "if they want their people to eat."

In reaction to his comments, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Pompeo's open threat to starve the Iranian nation was "a crime against humanity".

Tehran reminds White House who breached UN resolution

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has rejected Washington's allegation that Tehran's missile tests and launch of space rockets are in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

In a post on Twitter on Thursday, Zarif said while Tehran has not breached the resolution which endorses the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it is actually the U.S. which has breached it "in material".

He added Washington is in no position to lecture others on commitment to UN Security Council resolutions.

"Iran's launch of space vehicles— & missile tests—are NOT in violation of Res 2231. The US is in material breach of same, & as such it is in no position to lecture anyone on it," Zarif tweeted.

The chief diplomat added, "Reminder to the US: 1. Res 1929 is dead; 2. threats engender threats, while civility begets civility."

Zarif tweet came in response to his American counterpart's allegations against Iran's plan to launch three Space Launch Vehicles (SLV).



Zarif tells the U.S.: "Threats engender threats, while civility begets civility."

Iran to send naval fleet to western Atlantic

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran will send a naval fleet to the western Atlantic Ocean on a five-month voyage starting in March, Navy Deputy Chief Touraj Hassani-Moqadam announced on Friday.

"Since the Atlantic Ocean is very far, it is likely that the Iranian naval fleet's mission would take up to five months to complete," Rear Admiral Hassani-Moqadam said in an interview with IRNA.

He said Sahand destroyer would be one of the naval fleet's warships.

Sahand, a newly-built destroyer, has a flight deck for helicopters, torpedo launchers, anti-aircraft and anti-ship guns, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, and electronic warfare capabilities.

Hassani-Moqadam emphasized that the presence of Iran's navy in international waters aims to implement the orders of Commander-in-Chief of Iranian Armed Forces Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, protect the interests of the Islamic Republic



in the free waters and counter anti-Iran propaganda.

Conveying the message of peace and friendship is among the goals of the fleet, he added.

It comes several weeks after the Pentagon sent an aircraft carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf.

Tehran has said the presence of the U.S. carrier group was "insignificant" and vowed to prevent the U.S. warships from entering Iranian territorial waters in the Persian Gulf.

Deputy army chief for coordination affairs, Habibollah Sayyari, said in December that the U.S. navy was allowed to sail in international waters near the Islamic Republic — just as the Iranian navy could sail in the Atlantic Ocean near the U.S.

"They do not have the courage or ability to take any measures against us. We have enough capabilities to stand against their actions and we have fully rehearsed for that," Sayyari stressed.

A U.S.-Iranian war of words has escalated since U.S. President Donald Trump took the United States out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran in May, and reimposed sanctions on its banking and energy sectors.

Salehi says Iran should pay the cost to protect its independence

'It is our duty to stand against oppressor'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, vice president and director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Wednesday that it is officials' duty to stand against oppressor.

"Based on our country's constitution, we are duty bound to stand against oppressor and defend the oppressed and this is valuable in essence," he said in opening ceremony of

knowledge-based corporations' exhibition.

However, he said that Iran should pay the cost to protect its independence and freedom.

"If we have faced impediments on the path of the country's growth and progress, it is because of limitations which have been created due to the Islamic Republic's political and international approach," the vice president remarked.

He added, "Despite the limitations that have been imposed on us, we have worked well."

Salehi, a nuclear physicist, noted that human and financial capital and management are essential to progress.

"We have good human and financial capital...We should be thankful for the current situation in the country," noted Salehi who has acted as Iran's ambassador to the United

Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), foreign minister, and representatives to the Jeddah-based Islamic Cooperation Organization (OIC).

Salehi praised support by governmental institutions for knowledge-based corporations.

He also urged the knowledge-based corporations to make more efforts in improving marketing.

'Practical action not expedient as Europeans have not formulated SPV yet'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Abdolreza Farajirad, director general of Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, has said it is not expedient that Iran resort to "practical action" as the Europeans have not yet formulated the special purpose vehicle (SPV) to save the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Abdolreza Farajirad made the remarks in an interview with the ISNA news agency published on Friday.

He did not elaborate what he meant by "practical action", but it can be inferred that it is advisable that Iran avoid taking hasty measures and continue to keep limits on its nuclear activities to see what the European Union will do in future days.

The EU had announced that the SPV would be prepared by the beginning of 2019.

Iran has threatened that if it cannot take benefit from the JCPOA it will remove caps on its nuclear program and end intensive inspection of its nuclear activities.

Under the nuclear agreement, Iran has agreed to put limits on nuclear program in exchange for removal of economic and financial sanctions.

■ **'Europe defends JCPOA'**

Farajirad also said that Europe defends that JCPOA and has stood strong to preserve it.

Certain European corporations have announced readiness to cooperate with Iran, however, the SPV should be implemented if they seek to start their interaction.

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.

■ **'It is better to reach result on CFT'**

Farajirad said it is better to reach a result about the CFT, a legislation to combat financing of terrorism, so that the Europeans will not have any excuse to delay announcing the implementation of the SPV.

On October 7, the Iranian parliament voted



in favor of the CFT. At the time, a total of 143 lawmakers, out of 268 ones present in the parliament, voted in favor of the bill. However, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill by finding 20 faults with it.

In December, parliament made changes to the CFT. The bill was referred to the Expediency Council for further study.

Iranian FM to make official visits to India, Iraq

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif plans to visit India and neighboring Iraq in coming days.

Heading a large economic delegation, Zarif is slated to travel to India at the official invitation of South Asian country's officials.

The top diplomat said representatives of Iran's private sector would have an active presence in the trip.

After visiting India, Zarif is planned to go to Iraq and hold talks with senior officials of the Arab country on issues of mutual interest.

The visits would come against the backdrop of Iran's efforts to boost its foreign trade in the U.S. sanctions era.

Iraq's foreign minister said on Wednesday that his country is "not obliged" to abide by sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Iran and would be pursuing options to continue bilateral trade.

On December 20, the U.S. granted Baghdad a 90-day extension to a waiver on abiding by the sanctions that were re-imposed on the Islamic Republic in November.

Trade between the two neighboring countries is thought to amount to around \$12bn, while Iran provides around 40 percent of Iraq's electricity needs.

Although Iraq faces possible censure by the U.S. if it fails to cease its trading with Iran by the end of the waiver period, Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali al-Hakim said his country could continue relations with Iran.

"These sanctions, the siege, or what is called the embargo, these are unilateral, not international. We are not obliged (to follow) them," he said, speaking to a gathering of journalists on Wednesday.

(Source: Tasnim)

Zarif: Iran relies on people for security, progress

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Thursday that Iran relies on its people to for "security" and "progress" and this is a great achievement.

"Today, it is a great honor for us that no one can say if we were not supported, you would speak Arabic, Russian or English. Our youths who did not see the pre-revolution time should know that this is a great achievement," Zarif said during a ceremony in Mashhad.

He added, "We have nothing but the people and it is essential to respect the society's rights."

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

Pointing to the Astana talks involving Iran, Russia, Turkey, Syria and the opposition groups, Zarif said negotiations have reduced tension in Syria.

The Astana peace talks were launched on Jan. 23-24, 2017 with the aim of putting an end to the Syrian conflict.

■ **Being superpower has no meaning, Zarif says**

Zarif also said that today, being a superpower has no meaning and no one can claim that he can make decision for the rest of the world.

"Today, many developments have occurred in the world and as we can see, one group cannot make decision for others anymore," the foreign minister remarked.

Zarif also met with Ebrahim Raisi, the custodian of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), during his tour of Mashhad.

Trump: Iran can do what it wants in Syria

1 → Trump said Syria is "sand" and "death".

■ **Trump admits ISIS is more likely to attack Iran than U.S.**

Trump went on to say that his administra-

tion was not interested in facing the challenge posed by Syria. "We don't want Syria. Obama gave up Syria years ago when he didn't violate the red line. I did when I shot 59 missiles but that was a long time later. And when President

Obama decided not to violate his statement that never cross the red line and then they did and he didn't do anything about it."

He added, "When we kill ISIS (in Syria), if we don't — oh then everyone says then they'll

come to our country, well that's possibly true of a very small percentage but you know where else they're going? To Iran, who hates ISIS more than we do. They're going to Russia, who hates ISIS more than we do."

UN rights office says Saudi trial in Khashoggi case ‘not sufficient’

The United Nations human rights office said on Friday it could not assess the fairness of a trial taking place in Saudi Arabia related to the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but that in any case it was “not sufficient”.

Spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani, asked about reports that a Saudi prosecutor had sought the death sentence for five suspects linked to the Oct. 2 killing, reiterated the office’s call for an independent investigation “with international involvement”.

The UN rights office always opposed the death penalty, she added.

Earlier, a report reveals that a high-ranking Saudi intelligence official, who was fired over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, made clandestine trips to Israel on behalf of Crown Prince bin Salman over the purchase of an Israeli spy tool that is said to have helped the kingdom track dissidents abroad.

Citing informed sources, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday that Major General Ahmed al-Assiri, the former deputy chief of Saudi intelligence visited Israel on a number of occasions to discuss the purchase of Pegasus, a patch of highly complicated software used for hacking and espionage.

Assiri, an aide to the crown prince, was sacked in October for playing a role in the gruesome assassination of dissident journalist Khashoggi, which is widely believed to have been ordered by bin Salman, known as MbS.

The report said that another of bin Salman’s closest aides, Saud al-Qahtani, who was also sacked over the same case, had been part of the covert Saudi outreach towards Israel.



Sources told the Journal that Qahtani, the crown prince’s media adviser, was working on softening Israel’s image in the Saudi press. He was also involved in Riyadh’s purchase of spyware technology from Israeli firms.

“Qahtani was the key player in all of this,” said one Saudi official. “He wanted the best and he knew that Israeli firms offered the best.”

Neither Qahtani nor al-Assiri provided comment for the story, said the Journal.

Saudi-Israel backchannel takes hit after Khashoggi’s murder

Sources told the Journal that a secretive

US-backed initiative to forge closer ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel faces setbacks after the crown prince, who spearheaded the effort, was implicated in Khashoggi’s killing, which sparked global outrage.

“Things have definitely cooled off right after Khashoggi’s murder,” a senior Saudi government official told the Journal, saying Riyadh does not want to be mired in another scandal.

“The last thing the kingdom wants is for this to come out now and cause another backlash,” the source said.

The paper said that the kingdom was considering investing \$100 million in various Israeli technology companies, but since the Khashoggi killing, the deal has been shelved.

In 2017, NSO Group, an Israeli spyware company, along with Q Cyber Technology, signed a \$55 million deal with Saudi Arabia to buy the Pegasus spyware.

Earlier this month, Omar Abdulaziz, a Saudi activist based on Montreal, Canada, launched a legal action against the NSO after it was revealed that it was the hacking of his phone conversations and chats with Khashoggi that led to his assassination in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October.

Late in November, Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz revealed Riyadh’s behind-the-scene attempts to buy Pegasus 3 technology from Israel’s NSO Group Technologies last year.

The spyware needs only a phone number to ensnare a device. As soon as a phone is breached, the speaker and camera can be used for recording conversations, according to the report. Even encoded apps like WhatsApp can be monitored via the spying software, it added.

Saudi Arabia has expanded secret ties to Israel under bin Salman, the son of King Salman who is viewed by many as the Kingdom’s de facto ruler. The young prince has made it clear that he and the Israelis stand on the same front to counter Iran and its growing influence in the Middle East.

(Source: agencies)

Pompeo set to visit the Middle East next week

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will seek an update to Saudi Arabia’s investigation into the October killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi when he visits Riyadh during a trip to the Middle East next week, the State Department said on Friday.

Pompeo will also visit Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait as part of his Jan. 8 to Jan. 15 trip, the department said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg reported Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton plan to crisscross the Middle East to reassure nervous U.S. allies after President Donald Trump’s surprise withdrawal from Syria and Jim Mattis’s resignation as defense secretary.

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton plan to crisscross the Middle East to reassure nervous U.S. allies after President Donald Trump’s surprise withdrawal from Syria and Jim Mattis’s resignation as defense secretary.

Bolton will depart Washington Friday for stops in Israel and Turkey, he said on Twitter. Pompeo will visit the region next week, according to an administration official.

The two men face allies worried that Trump is ceding influence in the Middle East to Iran after his announcement that he’d remove U.S. military forces from Syria -- apparently a snap decision made during a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The move prompted Mattis’s resignation, and was followed by reports Trump had also decided to halve the American military footprint in Afghanistan, though the White House has said no such decision has been made. Vice President Mike Pence, in an interview with Fox News on Thursday night, said “the president’s looking at ways in Syria and perhaps even in Afghanistan where we can have less of a military commitment.”

Bolton must shore up his own credibility in the Middle East, after declaring in September that the U.S. wouldn’t leave Syria as long as adversaries including Iran, Russia and Islamic State remained in the country, which has been devastated by a civil war that began in 2011.

Worries are growing within Israel and in Arab governments that Trump is losing patience over the region’s long-standing conflicts, said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Trump’s decision to abruptly withdraw troops from Syria raised concern in Israel that the U.S. is effectively ceding the country to Iran, which is fighting alongside the Lebanese Hezbollah and Russia to prop up Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Israel has long warned that Iran is seeking to turn Syria into a launching pad for future attacks against the Jewish state.

Bolton will visit leaders in Israel and then Turkey, where he’ll be joined by General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and James Jeffrey, the U.S. special representative for Syria engagement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has long lobbied Trump not to hastily withdraw from Syria, reiterated the request to phase out a withdrawal in a meeting with Pompeo in Brazil this week, according to an Israeli official.

The U.S. “is acting against Iran at the economic level and we here in Israel are acting against Iran at the military level,” Netanyahu said on Thursday during an address to Israeli army cadets, seeking to downplay any disagreement between his country and the U.S. on the need to confront Iran.

While many Israelis cheered Trump’s decision to abandon the Iran nuclear deal, officials worry that by pulling out of Syria the U.S. is giving up any leverage it had to shape the



final outcome once the civil war finally comes to an end. Trump’s comments earlier this week that Iran “can do what they want there, frankly” further fed Israeli concerns.

In Turkey, Erdogan wants reassurance that the U.S. intends to pressure its armed Kurdish allies to withdraw from Syrian cities including Manbij and, more broadly, from the Turkish border. Turkey also wants the U.S. to collect American weapons supplied to the Kurds, who Turkish officials view as terrorists, though it’s not clear Bolton would make such a commitment.

One country not yet on either Bolton or Pompeo’s itinerary: Afghanistan. The government there was incensed by comments Trump made Wednesday appearing to call the U.S.-backed Mujahadeen, who fought against the Soviet Union’s 1979 invasion, “terrorists.” Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s office said the government is seeking a “clarification” from the U.S. on Trump’s comments.

(Source: agencies)

Saudis face revolt in occupied parts of Yemen

Saudi Arabia is facing mounting opposition in areas it occupies in Yemen, leading U.S. daily the Wall Street Journal has reported.

Many view Saudi presence and its alleged development projects as a pretext for the kingdom to entrench its control in the country by controlling Yemen’s highly vulnerable infrastructure, the paper said.

“We are under Saudi occupation. We don’t need the Saudis,” it quoted former deputy governor of al-Mahra Ali bin Salem al-Huraizy, who has helped organize protests against the Saudi presence in the past.

Saudi Arabia has taken control over the province’s seaports and airports, using them to deploy hundreds of troops in the region.

“There are illegitimate troops in these areas. Are there forces that belong to the Houthis to be fought by the coalition here? The answer is a big ‘no,’” al-Mahra and Socotra People’s General Council member Abdullah bin Issa al-Aafr said.

A senior Yemeni official close to the country’s Saudi-backed former president Abd

Rabbuh Mansour Hadi explained that even Saudi-allied Yemeni officials had no control over the kingdom’s expansion in the region.

“We are allied with the Saudi-led coalition, but we don’t accept any violation of our sovereignty,” he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity in fear of Saudi retribution.

Many demonstrations have been organized against the Saudi “invaders” since April. In November, Saudi-backed soldiers killed at least two people during a demonstration.

Saudi-backed governor of al-Mahra province Rajeh Saidbakrit claimed those killed were terrorists who had attacked a checkpoint. Huraizy, however, rejected the statement saying they were ordinary protesters.

Saudi Arabia and its allies unleashed the deadly military aggression against Yemen in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall the country’s former Riyadh-allied regime.

The efforts have gone down the drain, forcing the kingdom to push for peace with Yemen’s Houthis and their allies in the Yemeni army.



UN envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths plans to visit the Yemeni capital of Sana’a on Saturday.

The trip will be part of a new round of talks to follow up on progress made in Stockholm in December where both sides agreed to a prisoner exchange and a truce in Yemen’s port city of Hudaydah.

Speaking to Yemen’s Saba news agency on Tuesday, chairman of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee of Yemen Mo-

ammed Ali al-Houthi criticized the UN’s World Food Program (WFP) for sending “quantities of rotten food” to the country.

Houthi explained that the food was not allowed into the country for violating “standards and regulations and is not suitable for human consumption.”

He also accused UN organizations of being biased in their work.

“The work of these organisations is mostly politicized, and their position... confirms their work has shifted from independent to subordinate” to the United States and Britain, he said.

Yemen’s Houthi movement, which runs state affairs in Sana’a in the absence of an effective government, has been defending the nation against the Saudi aggression.

The Saudi-led offensive has destroyed Yemen’s infrastructure and led to famine in the import-dependent state.

(Source: Press TV)

Syrian Kurds aim to secure political deal with Assad govt regardless of U.S. pull-out

Syrian Kurdish leaders aim to secure a Russian-mediated political deal with President Bashar Assad’s government regardless of U.S. plans to withdraw from their region, a senior Kurdish official told Reuters.

The Kurdish-led administration that runs much of northern Syria presented a road map for an agreement with Assad during recent meetings in Russia and is awaiting Moscow’s response, Badran Jia Kurd, who attended, said.

Meanwhile, Syria says hundreds of U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters have withdrawn from the city of Manbij near the bor-

der with Turkey to take position to the east of the Euphrates.

The Syrian Defense Ministry announced that “approximately 400 Kurdish fighters” had left the border town, days after Kurdish groups appealed to the government of President Bashar al-Assad to support them against a possible Turkish offensive.

Their departure was in line with an agreement “for the return of normal life to the area of northern Syria,” the ministry said in a statement.

The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) had con-

firmed earlier that they were evacuating the town, which they seized from the Daesh terrorist group in 2016.

An online video published by the Syrian ministry showed dozens of vehicles carrying armed fighters, some of whom waved flags of the YPG and its female counterpart, the YPJ.

It was not clear how many fighters would remain in Manbij. Last week, the YPG asked Damascus to deploy troops to the key city following U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to pull American forces out of Syria.

(Source: Daily Star)

German politicians’ data published online, Merkel unaffected

Personal data and documents from hundreds of German politicians and public figures have been published online, the government said Friday, adding that no sensitive material from Chancellor Angela Merkel’s office was released.

An Interior Ministry spokesman declined to confirm that the data breach, which triggered an emergency meeting of the national cyber defense body, was the result of a hack.

German media earlier reported that hackers had posted data including credit card details and mobile phone numbers, with politicians from all major parties affected apart from the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD).

“Personal data and documents belonging to hundreds of politicians and public figures have been published online,” government spokeswoman Martina Fietz told a news conference.

Judging by an initial review, no sensitive information from the chancellery had been published, “and this includes [from] the chancellor,” she said.

Public broadcaster ARD, which broke the story, said its journalists had as yet detected no incriminating content.

A Defense Ministry spokesman said the armed forces were not affected either.

Cyber defense body BSI met early Friday to coordinate the response of federal government agencies including the domestic and foreign intelligence agencies, a spokesman said.

If the data release does stem from a hack, it would be the latest in a number of hi-tech assaults on Germany’s political institutions and key individuals.

“This data breach of hundreds of German politicians is alarming, but at the same time it’s not surprising,” said Mike Hart at commercial cyber security firm FireEye, citing previous hacks.

“...It highlights the need for the government to take cyber security very seriously.”

Politicians from the far-left Linke party were among those affected, including Dietmar Bartsch, leader of its group in the lower parliamentary house, a spokesman said.

ARD reported earlier that the data, from hundreds of politicians and published on a Twitter account, included addresses, personal letters and copies of identity cards, citing affiliate rbb.

The identity of the hackers and their motive were not known, the report said.

“Whoever is responsible, wants to intimidate politicians. That will not succeed,” said Lars Klingbeil, secretary general of the center-left Social Democrats, Merkel’s coalition partner.

Bild newspaper said the secure internal network of Germany’s government was not hit by the hackers, citing sources inside the BSI. (Source: Daily Star)

Turkey, Iraq will deepen cooperation against terrorism in region: Erdogan

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Turkey and neighboring Iraq will deepen their cooperation against terrorism in the region, after tensions between Ankara and Baghdad over Turkey’s airstrikes against purported positions of Kurdish militants in northern Iraq.

The Turkish leader made the comment during a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Barham Saleh in the Turkish capital Ankara on Thursday.

“We know the importance of working together to be successful in our fight against terror. God willing, in the future we will deepen our cooperation in this area,” Erdogan said at the presser, adding that an Iraq standing on its “two feet” was of crucial importance to regional security and stability.

He also stressed that there were threats to both countries from “terrorist organizations” such as Daesh, Kurdish militants and a group blamed by Ankara for a failed coup in Turkey in 2016.

Ankara alleges that the U.S.-based opposition cleric Fethullah Gulen has masterminded and orchestrated the mid-2016 short-lived botched putsch against Erdogan and has branded his movement as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO). Ankara has arrested tens of thousands of people on charges of having links to the group.

The Turkish president also said that Iraq had triumphed against Daesh with a heavy cost as thousands of Iraqi people, civilians and troops lost their lives during over three years of intense fight against terrorists. Furthermore, the terror group inflicted significant damage on the Arab country’s infrastructure and cultural heritage, he added.

“Turkey gave firm support to Iraq for that tough fight. We are ready to contribute to infrastructure and development projects in Iraq - reconstruction of places harmed by conflicts being the priority,” Erdogan stressed.

The Iraqi president, for his part, said his country “wants real cooperation and strategic partnership with Turkey,” adding that this cooperation would “serve not just the two countries but the whole region.”

“I am visiting brotherly country Turkey with the aim of cooperation in every field” as Iraq is about to “enter a new phase,” Saleh said, adding that Baghdad expected Ankara’s help in reconstructing militancy-infested regions of the Arab country.

He also stressed that relations with Turkey would be “shoulder to shoulder, in full solidarity.”

Former Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi declared the end of military operations against Daesh on December 9, 2017. On July 10 that year, he had formally declared victory over the terror group in Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city and the de facto capital of Daesh for some three years.

Last month, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry summoned Turkey’s ambassador to Baghdad after Turkish warplanes launched airstrikes against the purported positions of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in the Zap, Hakurk and Haftanin regions of northern Iraq.

Turkey, along with the European Union and the United States, has declared the PKK a terrorist group and banned it. The militant group has been seeking an autonomous Kurdish region since 1984.

Over the past few months, Turkish ground and air forces have also been carrying out operations against PKK positions in the country as well as in northern Iraq and neighboring Syria.

Baghdad says Turkey’s cross-border operations into northern parts of Iraq are being conducted without the official consent of the Iraqi government and has time and again expressed its strong protest.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	160898.9
IFX	1875.49

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,274 rials
GBP	53,635 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$48.67/b
Brent	\$57.76/b
OPEC Basket	\$52.17/b
Gold	\$1,283.45 /oz
Silver	\$15.74/oz
Platinum	\$818.60/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran capable of supplying Syria with various food types

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — “Iran is able to supply Syria with all types of foodstuff,” the Secretary of the Federation of Iranian Food Association Kaveh Zargaran told Tasnim news agency on Friday.
“Despite the warm economic and political relations between the two countries, the value of Iran’s exports of agricultural and food products to Syria does not stand at a satisfactory level,” he lamented.

German jobless total falls more than expected in December

Germany’s jobless total fell by more than expected in December, data showed on Friday, keeping the unemployment rate at a record low.
The figures underline the strength of a labor market that has been supporting a consumption-led growth cycle. The solid labor market is expected to help Europe’s largest economy offset headwinds from trade frictions.
The Federal Labor Office said the seasonally adjusted jobless total fell by 14,000 to 2.261 million. That was more than the forecast drop of 11,000.
The unemployment rate remained at 5 percent, the lowest since German reunification in 1990.

(Source: Reuters)

China-U.S. trade talks a tonic to battered markets

World stock markets rallied on Friday after Beijing announced a new round of trade talks with Washington, though recession fears still had markets betting the next move in U.S. interest rates might be down.
News that the United States and China would hold vice-ministerial level talks on Monday and Tuesday to resolve a trade dispute bought some respite to battered markets, with MSCI’s world stock index up a third of a percent and U.S. stock futures around 1 percent firmer ESc1 NQc1.



“We’re not expecting a major breakthrough on Jan. 7-8,” said Edward Park, deputy chief investment officer at Brooks Macdonald.
“That said, where equity markets are in terms of valuations, if you look at the two core risks - U.S./China trade and the Fed – there’s room for markets to be positively surprised in both of those areas.”
Global markets have had a rough start to 2019, hurt by a shock revenue warning from iPhone maker Apple (AAPL.O) and concerns about slowing global economic growth.
But on Friday, European markets tracked a cautious move higher in Asian stocks. Europe’s STOXX 600 index rose 0.8 percent while Germany’s DAX jumped 1 percent.
In Asia, Shanghai blue chips .CSI300 rose 2.4 percent, while South Korean shares .KS11 bounced 0.8 percent.
But Japan’s Nikkei .N225 skidded over 2 percent on its first trading day of the year, weighed by growth worries and the strength of the yen.
The yen edged back from its recent surge on Friday on hopes U.S.-China trade talks would make some progress, but the Japanese currency remains well bid by investors fretting about a global economic slowdown.
The yen JPY= fell as much as 0.6 percent against the dollar to 108.31 before recovering some of those losses to trade at 107.94.
The euro EUR= held above \$1.14. The single currency traded up 0.1 percent at \$1.1410 while the dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of rivals, was 0.1 percent lower at 96.189 .DXY.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran in talks with Turkey, Pakistan, Syria for preferential trade

1 → ■ **Mega projects to double non-oil exports**
Modoudi further announced that in a bid for doubling the country’s current \$50-billion non-oil export revenues to \$100 billion, TPO is preparing mega export projects in a three-year program.
Based on the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the country exported 75.27 million tons of non-oil products worth \$31.491 billion during the eight-month period.
IRICA data put Iran’s imports of non-oil

goods at 21.498 million tons valued at \$29.549 billion in the mentioned time span, showing 12.5 percent and 14 percent fall in terms of weight and value, respectively.
■ **Incentives for exporters**
Elsewhere in his remarks, Modoudi noted that 7 trillion rials (about \$166 million) is due to be allocated for offering incentives to exporters during the next calendar year (which begins on March 21, 2019).
The government will also provide foreign currency at low exchange rate for those importers who import basic goods and phar-



maceuticals.
“Six commodity categories have been prioritized based on the country’s needs, which includes raw materials, equipment and machinery requirements, pharmaceuticals and other essential items.”
He also mentioned the removal of a ban on imports of 47 commodity items, saying that these commodities were reconsidered to be needed in the country so were removed from the ban list but some new items have been banned.

Negotiations underway with domestic companies on developing South Pars oil layer

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The managing director d e s k of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing Iran’s South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, said that this company is in talks with a number of Iranian companies on development of the oil layer of the field, ISNA reported.
Making the remarks in a recent press conference, Mohammad Meshkinfam said the negotiations are confidential.
Iran started pumping oil from the oil layer in March 2017 with the initial production of 5,000 barrels per day (bpd) which currently stands at 25,000 bpd according to Meshkinfam.
Iran’s development of South Pars oil layer is still at the pilot phase, but the country sees positive prospects for 150,000



bpd of recovery in the currently producing reservoir.
Officials have said the development of the layer is a complex process requiring integrated development.
“We are looking for a competent contractor who can make a commitment on production. Iranian companies are interested in getting money and digging wells. We are looking for cumulative production,” former deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Gholamreza Manouchehri has said.
NIOC was in talks with Denmark’s Maersk Group for the second phase development of the South Pars oil layer, then negotiations with the Danish company was stopped after Maersk sold its oil and gas division to French oil major Total in August 2017.

TEDPIX gains 2,455 points in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran d e s k Stock Exchange (TSE)’s main index (TEDPIX) increased 2,455 points or two percent to 160,899 during the five dealing days (Saturday-Wednesday) of the past Iranian week ended on Friday, Tasnim news agency reported.
As reported, some 16.022 billion securities worth 37.056 trillion rials (about \$882.2 million) were traded through 838,000 deals in TSE, indicating 43 percent and 9 percent rise in the number and value of traded securities, respectively, and 30 percent increase in the number of deals.
The first market’s index rose 2,151 points



to 118,695 and second market’s index added 3,241 points to 319,763 showing two percent and one percent growth, respectively, in the mentioned week.

‘Banking system reformations on agenda’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — “The d e s k Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has neither overlooked nor postponed reformation of banking system during the past recent months,” the central bank’s governor Abdolnasser Hemmati announced underscoring that the bank has always had modification of banking system on its agenda.
“During the past three months [since the appointment of Hemmati as CBI governor], all the required programs to amend banking system have been planned relying on ratifications of the Supreme Council for Economic

Coordination and formation of Liquidity and Money Market Committee consisting of economy, monetary and banking experts besides central bank officials,” he announced.
Despite what some critics believe, CBI’s efforts to curb the rampant foreign exchange market during the past months, has not prevented it from focusing on its other responsibilities, he added.
“Tackling the old accumulated problems in banking system is a time-consuming procedure that requires high precision,” he underlined.

Brexit worries slow UK economy to near standstill

Growth in Britain’s economy slowed to a crawl at the end of 2018, according to a survey that, three months before Brexit, showed optimism among services companies have sunk to levels typical of the global financial crisis.
Friday’s IHS Markit/CIPS UK Services Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) rose slightly more than forecast by economists polled by Reuters, to 51.2 in December from 50.4 in November.
But the increase was one of the slowest since the Brexit referendum in 2016 and firms were increasingly anxious about the year ahead.
Britain’s economy looks on track for quarterly growth of around 0.1 percent during the fourth quarter, data company IHS Markit said, a far cry from the post-financial crisis average of 0.5 percent.
November and December marked the weakest two months for morale among services firms since March 2009, around the low point of Britain’s last recession, the PMI showed.
Brexit uncertainty was by far the most



widely cited factor by companies for the decline in expectations, which dipped to 60.2 from 60.6 in November, IHS Markit said.
Britain is due to leave the European Union on March 29 but what will actually happen on that day remains far from clear.
The future of Prime Minister Theresa May’s

deal struck with the EU hangs in the balance before it is put to a parliamentary vote, and calls for a second referendum -- which she has consistently rejected -- are growing.
“(Clarity) on Brexit is needed urgently in order to prevent the economy sliding into contraction,” IHS Markit’s chief economist

Chris Williamson said.
Employment among services firms -- a strong point of Britain’s economy over the last five years -- increased in December at the weakest rate since just after the referendum, the PMI showed.
IHS Markit said an easing of cost pressures, after a fall in the price of crude oil, was one of the few plus points for British services companies in late 2018.
Services account for about 80 percent of British economic output.
The composite PMI for December, combining the manufacturing, construction and service sectors, rose to 51.6 from 51.0 in November, with some of the rise reflecting a rush by factories to stockpile ahead of Brexit. [GB/PMIM]
Another major business survey from the British Chambers of Commerce on Thursday painted a similarly subdued picture.
Gross domestic product figures for November are due on Jan. 11.

(Source: Euronews)

Italian problems show banking union is long overdue, not premature

By Pierre Briançon

Happy New Year, Italy.
The European Central Bank’s first act of 2019 was to take over a deeply troubled Italian bank, Banca Carige, and name a small team of managers and directors to engineer a long-delayed cash call. That move, according to the ECB, was the only way to sidestep a “resolution” procedure that would have crippled the bank’s shareholders and bondholders – the junior ones at least.
Whether or not Carige is ultimately wound down, the central bank’s decision will at least go some way to bringing a long-running banking debacle to a close. Last year, the new Eurosceptic Italian government helped throw a crude light on the country’s banking sector: markets did not react well to the budget showdown with Brussels and sent Italian bond yields soaring, incapacitating an already fragile banking industry saddled with government bonds.
But not all Italian banks, like Carige, were involved in an accounting scandal. Not all of them had their chairman sentenced to jail for money laundering. And not all Italian banks sit, as Carige does, at the centre of a regional economy hit by the collapse of the Genoa bridge in August last year.
Additionally, not all Italian banks are being pulled apart by a dispute between management, the central bank and the controlling shareholder – in this case the Malacalza family, who opposed the €400m capital hike the central bank required to allow Carige to continue operating a few days before Christmas.
The latest development in the Carige story will no doubt



be seized upon by the choir of European governments that have in recent months cited the poor state of the Italian banking sector as a reason to oppose further eurozone reform.
But far from providing fodder for eurozone reform refuseniks, the Carige case, and indeed the country’s banking sector, demonstrates why a true banking union is long overdue. And why precious time continues to be wasted as governments remain unable to overcome their divisions on the matter.
The eurozone at least has a resolution mechanism designed to spare taxpayers when it comes to bank failures. The costs of winding down a bank will now be shouldered by an industry-financed pool, soon to be backstopped by the eurozone bailout fund. It took years for eurozone governments

to agree to that small, incremental step, which finally came in December.
The next step forward would be the creation of a eurozone-wide deposit guarantee scheme. Proposed by the European Commission and supported by ECB officials from president Mario Draghi down, the reform has failed due to the opposition of the “northern” countries – Germany, the Netherlands and their allies – who want a preliminary and thorough cleanup of European banks. These governments think they would find it difficult to explain to their taxpayers why their money should be used to compensate, say, Italian or Greek depositors.
But maybe they haven’t tried explaining hard enough. The point of a deposit guarantee is not just financial. Its purpose is to also act as a confidence booster, reassuring account holders that their money is safe. That includes guaranteeing deposits in a country that has a weak banking system with funds from countries with stronger economies. It is a stability mechanism that helps prevent bank runs and shores up the common currency.
The argument that European banks should clean up their balance sheets from non-performing loans, and reduce holdings of their own governments’ debt is a powerful one. Both goals should be pursued regardless of whether a banking union is on the horizon. But confidence – investors’, depositors’, even politicians’ – is central to the eurozone’s existential fears.
Whenever the next financial crisis hits, it will be easier to deal with if there is a true banking union in place.

(Source: The Financial Times)

Oil rises toward \$57 on China-U.S. trade talks, OPEC cuts

Oil rose toward \$57 a barrel on Friday after China said it would hold talks with the United States to look for solutions to a trade dispute, while signs of lower crude supply also supported prices.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries cut crude output in December, a Reuters survey showed, and the American Petroleum Institute (API) reported a drop in U.S. crude inventories.

Brent crude, the global benchmark, rose 84 cents to \$56.79 a barrel by 0932 GMT. U.S. crude oil was up 81 cents at \$47.90.

"Jitters over the health of the global economy look set to endure but are being lost on the oil market, at least for the time being," said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM. "That said, whether this bout of price strength can be sustained is far from certain."

Oil gained further support from the latest supply report from the API industry group, which said on Thursday that U.S. crude stocks fell by 4.5 million barrels last week.

Both benchmarks are on track for solid gains in the first week of 2019 trading despite rising concerns that the China-U.S. trade war



will lead to a global economic slowdown. But in comments that helped oil to rally, China's commerce ministry said it would

hold vice-ministerial trade talks with U.S. counterparts in Beijing on Jan. 7-8.

The two nations have been locked in a trade

war for much of the past year, disrupting the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars worth of goods, raising concern of slowing growth and roiling financial markets.

A survey from the Institute for Supply Management on Thursday showed U.S. factory activity slowed more than expected in December, and leading economies in Asia and Europe have reported a fall in manufacturing activity.

Despite the demand-side concerns, oil has received some support as supply cuts announced by the global coalition of producers known as OPEC+ kick in.

OPEC, Russia and other non-members agreed in December to reduce supply by 1.2 million barrels per day in 2019. OPEC's share of that cut is 800,000 bpd.

The Reuters survey on Thursday found OPEC supply fell by 460,000 bpd in December, following assessments by Bloomberg and JBC Energy also showing a sizeable decline.

The focus now will be on whether producers deliver further curbs in January to implement the deal fully.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraq's oil exports hit record high above 4m bpd in December



Iraq's oil exports jumped to a record 4.14 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, a month before OPEC's number-two producer was due to curb its production under the group's output deal to clear a rising oil glut.

Oil exports from Iraq's southern Persian Gulf ports bounced back from a weather-induced slump the previous month, oil ministry data showed.

At the same time, export flows of federally-controlled oil ramped up via Turkey to the north, following the resolution of a deadlock over oil contracts and export revenues with Iraqi Kurdistan.

Exports from Persian Gulf terminals rose to 3.63 million bpd from 3.38 million bpd in November, while loadings of Kirkuk crude transported through the Kurdistan-Turkey pipeline rose to 99,000 bpd from 9,000 bpd. Meanwhile, oil exports from semi-au-

tonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq averaged 420,000 bpd last month, little changed from November, according to loading reports from Turkey's Ceyhan oil terminal.

The combined average of 4.14 million bpd in December was the highest Iraq export rate on record and 95,000 bpd above the previous record of 4.05 million bpd in December 2016.

Iraq's oil exports are likely to slip back, however, as the country has promised to trim crude production from January 1 under OPEC's latest oil supply deal.

Last month, OPEC and its producer allies agreed new output quotas under the new supply deal where Iraq committed to cut 141,000 bpd from its October production levels to reach an output level of 4.512 million bpd.

(Source: Platts)

OPEC oil exports to the U.S. fall to five-year low



The United States received in December the lowest volume of OPEC-derived crude oil in five years, according to market intelligence firm Kpler and data from Refinitiv Eikon, cited by Reuters on Thursday.

1.63 million bpd of oil from OPEC member countries made its way to U.S. shores in December, down from 1.80 million bpd in November and 1.78 million bpd in October. Saudi Arabia shipped 534,000 barrels per day to the United States in December, a near 100,000 bpd drop from November. Algeria's shipments were also down almost 100,000 bpd, and Nigeria's shipments to the U.S. dipped by almost 50,000 bpd.

Iraq, on the other hand, increased crude oil shipments to the United States by 140,000 bpd, and for somewhat of a shock, Venezuela shipped 22,738 barrels per day more to the U.S. in December, although the long-term trend here shows a steady decline in Venezuela's

oil exports to the U.S., which were around 912,000 bpd in 2012, falling to 618,000 bpd by 2017, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Saudi Arabia's crude oil exports to the U.S. have also been falling steadily in recent years, from 1.361 million bpd in 2012 to 1.052 million bpd in 2015, and then to 949,000 bpd by 2017.

The United States has been imported less crude oil altogether—not just less OPEC crude. With the rise of U.S. shale, the United States has cut its thirst for foreign crude oil from 262.8 million barrels per month in January 2017 to 226.6 million in October 2018—the last month for which there is data, according to the EIA.

Canada's exports to the United States, according to the EIA, are holding fast between 3.3 million bpd and 3.5 million bpd for most of 2017 and 2018. (Source: oilprice.com)

China Sinochem's online energy platform slashes jobs after poor reception

A technology platform launched by China's state-run Sinochem Group last year to help create value ahead of a now-shelved share offering is slashing jobs after poor reception from the market, sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Sinochem Energy Technology Co Ltd, an internet-based subsidiary, was created to promote the "integration of traditional petroleum and chemical industry with emerging technologies such as cloud computing, big data, block chains, artificial intelligence, and the internet of things," Sinochem says on its website.

But more than 300 out of about 1,000 jobs at the unit were cut at end-November, and there are plans to slash another 200 or

so positions over the next few months, three sources said.

A Sinochem spokeswoman declined to comment on last year's layoffs but said for now there is no plan for further cuts.

The job cuts came as Sinochem shelved its plan for a Hong Kong initial public offering (IPO) of about \$2 billion for its energy business that included the technology division, after receiving unsatisfactory investor valuations during pre-marketing, Refinitiv's IFR reported.

Under Sinochem chairman Frank Ning, who took his post in early 2016, the state group has experimented with new ways of expansion and asset management, such as creating digital platforms for energy trad-

ing and logistics services, to add value to its traditional oil and chemicals operations.

"Sinochem created the tech firm in the hope of aiding the IPO of the traditional energy business," said a company official.

"But as it was exploring an unknown territory, the company expanded too fast too early without a very coherent strategy," said the official, who declined to be named as he was not authorized to speak to the press.

Investors were not impressed by the way the Sinochem unit grew and spent with little prospect for immediate revenue boost, said a second Beijing-based source who was briefed by the group's management about the scale-back.

Most of the job cuts were related to op-

erations, marketing and customer services, while the core divisions such as data analysis and product development have been retained, said the company official.

Sinochem announced its foray into internet-based energy services in August 2017, and at the beginning of 2018 launched the new company in a tech park in Beijing, with a registered capital of 1 billion yuan (\$145 million).

"The digital platforms cover the supply chain from oil trading, refinery optimization, oil and chemicals marketing, gas station chain management ... in a push for digital revolution in petroleum and chemical industry," Sinochem said on its website.

(Source: Reuters)

Record LNG capacity to get green light in 2019 amid strong demand

A record amount of liquefied natural gas (LNG) production is expected to get the green light in 2019 amid strong global demand, especially from China, analysts said.

A final investment decision (FID) could be taken on more than 60 million tons per annum of LNG capacity this year, well above the previous record of about 45 million tons in 2005 and triple last year's 21 million tons, Wood Mackenzie's research director for global gas and LNG, Giles Farrer, said.

The new capacity would bulk out the pipeline of gas set to come on stream in coming years, adding to the more than 320 million tons of LNG shipped globally in 2018, according to shipping data in Refinitiv's Eikon.

"If you have seen the potential demand for LNG, you have seen costs where they are now... that is motivating companies to push projects forward and motivating buyers to come forward to support some of these projects," Farrer said.

Frontrunners this year include the \$27 billion Arctic LNG 2 project by Russia's Novatek, at least one project in Mozambique and three in the United States, Woodmac said in a report to its clients.

The three potential U.S. projects are Qatar Petroleum's Golden Pass joint-venture with Exxon Mobil Corp and ConocoPhillips, Venture Global LNG's Calcasieu Pass project, and Cheniere Energy's Sabine Pass train 6, the consultancy said.

Canada's Woodfibre LNG project, developed by Singapore-based Pacific Oil and Gas, may also get the go-ahead in 2019, WoodMac said.



New projects typically take several years to develop, with many of those under consideration likely to be ready to ship gas in the early 2020s if approved.

A final investment decision on Golden Pass is expected by this month, while a decision on Sabine Pass 6 is expected in the first quarter and one on Calcasieu Pass is expected in the first half.

Amid a plethora of potential new production from Russia, Australia, East Africa and the United States, top 2018-LNG exporter Qatar is also expanding.

"Qatar is recognizing that it needs to capture demand for its LNG now, so it's bringing forward its projects," Farrer said. "Now is a good time to invest. If you look at industry costs,

they have really come off a cliff from 2 to 3 years ago. So if you're investing now, you're investing in the bottom of the cost cycle," said Farrer.

Other projects awaiting FID include train 7 of Nigeria LNG, and a three-train expansion in Papua New Guinea, although some projects are widely expected to be pushed into the 2020s.

Huge increases in China's demand growth as part of a program to shift households and factories from coal to gas, increased LNG import dependency in Europe, and a backlash against dirtier coal is driving optimism in the industry.

Supply to hit record

LNG supply will already grow by an estimated record 40 million tons, or 13 percent, this year, potentially putting pressure on Asian LNG prices LNG-AS, currently around \$9 per million British thermal units.

Most of this year's new supply will come from the United States with new trains at Cameron LNG, Corpus Christi LNG, Elba Island LNG and the Freeport LNG start-up, said Edmund Siau, analyst at FGE.

In terms of demand, China continues to post strong growth while Europe could also see increases after years of stagnation, growing by about 20 million tons and playing a key role in absorbing new American supply, Siau said.

But risks loom, especially from the U.S.-China trade war which threatens global growth which, in turn, could pull down oil and gas prices and delay or cancel FIDs, analysts said.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC oil output posts biggest drop since 2017 on Saudi move

OPEC oil supply fell in December by the largest amount in almost two years, a Reuters survey found, as top exporter Saudi Arabia made an early start to a supply-limiting accord while Iran and Libya posted involuntary declines.

The 15-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries pumped 32.68 million barrels per day last month, the survey on Thursday found, down 460,000 bpd from November and the largest month-on-month drop since January 2017.



The survey suggests Saudi Arabia and some of its allies acted unilaterally to bolster the market as crude prices slid on the possibility of a new glut. A formal accord by OPEC and its allies to cut supply in 2019 took effect only on Tuesday.

Oil has slid to \$56 a barrel from a four-year high of \$86 in October on signs of excess supply.

While OPEC has not ruled out further action, officials hope prices will be supported by further output declines in January as producers implement the new deal.

"Naturally, it will adjust from now on," said an OPEC delegate, referring to the downward trend in production. "I hope the market will recover soon."

OPEC, Russia and other non-members, an alliance known as OPEC+, agreed in December to reduce supply by 1.2 million bpd in 2019. OPEC's share of that cut is 800,000 bpd.

The deal came just months after an accord to pump more oil, which in turn partially unwound a supply cut that took effect in 2017.

The drop in OPEC output in December is the largest month-on-month decline since January 2017, the first month of the earlier supply-cutting deal, according to Reuters surveys.

Saudi cut

The biggest drop in OPEC supply last month came from Saudi Arabia and amounted to 400,000 bpd, the survey showed.

Saudi supply in November had hit a record 11 million bpd, after U.S. President Donald Trump demanded more oil be pumped to curb rising prices and make up for losses from Iran.

The kingdom has said it plans to go even further in January by delivering a larger cut than required under the OPEC+ deal.

The second-biggest drop occurred in the United Arab Emirates, which like Saudi voluntarily scaled back supply, the survey found.

The third largest was an involuntary cut by Libya, where unrest led to the shutdown of the country's biggest oilfield.

Output from Iran declined further as U.S. sanctions discouraged companies from buying its oil. According to industry sources, however, Iran maintained its exports, helped by sanctions waivers granted to eight buyers as well as dogged Iranian efforts to keep selling crude.

Among the countries boosting output, the biggest increase was in Iraq due to the restart of Kirkuk crude exports and a rebound in shipments from the country's southern terminals.

Output also rose in Kuwait and Nigeria.

An OPEC list of output targets seen by Reuters and other news organizations will provide a basis to calculate compliance with the new supply deal in the January survey. As of 2019, OPEC has 14 members following Qatar's departure.

The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consulting firms.

(Source: Reuters)

Renewables, led by wind, provided more power than coal in Germany in 2018

According to the Fraunhofer Institute, Germany's renewable power sector produced more electricity than coal in 2018 for the first time ever, with renewables providing 40 percent of the year's produced electricity and coal providing 38 percent.

Of course, "renewables" include an aggregate of different sources—solar, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass—while coal is just a single fuel source (renewable energy has not yet displaced all fossil fuel use in Germany, you'll note). But coal has long been a staple of the country's energy mix, and Germany looks poised to reduce the amount of coal-fired power on its grid significantly, even shutting down its last coal mine in November. From now on, coal for the approximately 120 coal-fired power plants that still power the German grid will be imported from the US, Russia, or Colombia, according to Bloomberg.

The massive year for renewables was led by continued expansion in the wind energy sector. German wind power output was up 5.4 percent year over year, and output is expected to increase again in 2019. Alone, wind contributed to covering 19 percent of Germany's 2018 electricity demand, the largest source second only to lignite coal.

Reuters notes that critics are claiming favorable weather patterns, rather than sustainable growth, helped the country produce more renewable energy this year than last year. Indeed, a prolonged sunny summer increased solar output, but the hot year also reduced hydroelectric output considerably. Germany added 3.2 gigawatts (GW) of solar to an existing 45.5 GW last year.

The remainder of Germany's 2018 electricity production came from gas plants and nuclear plants. The country is hoping to phase out nuclear energy by 2022.

Germany has made considerable strides to add renewable energy to its electricity sector, but as in most countries, heating and transportation are the most difficult sectors of the economy to decarbonize. Germany introduced the world's first hydrogen-powered train earlier this year, but electric vehicles still only make up a small percentage of the country's vehicles. November, however, saw electric vehicle registrations account for nearly 2 percent of all registrations.

Germany is Europe's largest economy, but it's not the only country showing healthy renewable numbers. Early last year, Portugal was able to produce more renewable electricity than total electricity demanded for the whole month of March, and the country had several near-three-day stretches when electricity demand was only met by renewable electricity. In addition, the UK has had coal-free days since 2017 and is reducing its coal reliance significantly.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

Why is Daesh's threat in Libya is not taken seriously?

By Mustafa Fetouri



Between May and December last year Daesh attacked three sensitive government sites in the Libyan capital Tripoli causing deaths, injuries and extensive damages. All three sites symbolize state sovereignty and government control.

On 2 May last year, Daesh destroyed much of the county's High Election Commission in Gout Shaal, west of Tripoli, in abroad day light. On 10 September, the terror group struck again this time targeting Libya's National Oil Corporation in the heart of Tripoli and on 26 December it targeted the country's foreign ministry building on the sea front not far from the city center. In all three attacks, it seems, the terrorists had little or no resistance. They appear, in each case, to have simply walked completely unchecked, into their target building during working hours. How could that happen in a country where such attacks should be expected? Someone in the appropriate security apparatus must have had some idea that Daesh is not going to give up that easy. Not in Libya unfortunately!

In the aftermath of each attack it was Daesh who claimed responsibility for the strike but never offered any proof substantiating its claims. The ministry of interior, and other relevant security agencies, have all blamed Daesh without any evidence either. After each attack, officials including the interior ministry, say they are investigating but they have, so far, failed to produce any results.

Over eight months has passed since the May attack and no conclusive findings has been made public. It has been three months since the attack on the oil cooperation in September and still nothing is said about how the investigation is progressing. It is very likely the same will happen with the latest atrocity which took place at the foreign ministry in late December.

This silence makes ordinary Libyans feel less secure and highly suspicious of who really controls the security apparatus and why investigations never conclude in a satisfactory manner. After the attack on the foreign ministry, for example, some social media users accused the government of a cover up. Rumors are rife because people are never really told what is going on in the aftermath of such horrific attacks.

Notably though, and right after the foreign ministry was hit, the newly appointed Minister of Interior Fathi Bashaga, was very critical of the government including the performance of his own ministry. He described the security situation in the capital as "chaotic". He also said that his ministry's resources, including finances and equipment, are "zero" as he put it despite the fact that his ministry always received the biggest share of any government budget.

What the minister was implying is that the militia dominated capital have the upper hand not only in money allocated to them but also in managing security in the capital. Furthermore, he seems to say that he, as minister of interior, does not have any control over the militias despite these militias claiming loyalty to the government.

This means that any ongoing, and previous terror related investigations, will lead to nowhere in terms of finding out how the terror group planned and executed its plans inside the capital.

Partially, this might explain, why after each atrocity the government never called on the public to help its investigations and why it always awaits Daesh to claim responsibility despite a lack of proof.

Such situations can only mean that the government is not taking the threat of Daesh in Libya seriously enough or it's unable to do so even if it wishes to.

This year is expected to be an eventful year for the country. In 2019 Libyans are supposed to vote on a new constitution, new legislative and municipal councils and possibly a new president. At least this is the plan laid out by Ghassan Salame, head of the United Nations Mission in the country. It is not only Daesh and Al-Qaeda that threaten Libya's security. A lack of effective control over the huge territory, with big chunks of sparsely populated desert areas and open southern borders are another problem. Armed militias from neighboring countries can enter Libya whenever they like. On 28 December a Chadian rebel group attacked a military camp controlled by forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in Tragenh, a small town 900 kilometers south of Tripoli.

Last month, MEMO ran an article describing the increasing presence of the Chadian rebels, opposing President Idriss Deby, in southern Libya due to the authorities' lack of control over the region. Since the Gaddafi regime was toppled in 2011, southern Libya – in particular – has become a safe haven for all kinds of illegal trans-border activities including human trafficking, arms and narcotic smuggling and above all open space for Daesh and Al-Qaeda. This is in addition to the different tribal and other armed militias which dominate southern Libya where they occasionally fight each other over influence and dominance.

The international community, including the United States, seems to believe that Daesh in Libya is no longer a threat since it was expelled from its strong hold in Sirte, on the Libyan coast in 2016. This will prove to be a very serious error of judgment.

Indeed, Sirte is a Daesh free city now but remnants of the terror group are still roaming in the southern Libyan desert. They are still active in kidnapping for ransom, extortion and smuggling anything of value.

The 26 December attack on the foreign ministry in Tripoli is a troubling reminder that the terror group can strike at random whenever it wishes. If anything this is a painful reminder that parts of the country are at risk of falling under Daesh's control again.

Despite the fact that the United States is leading an international coalition against Daesh, Libya does not seem to be included in this effort apart from the occasional air raids conducted by the U.S. targeting individuals suspected of being terrorists. The recent U.S. declaration that Daesh has been defeated in Syria can only mean that countries like Libya will have to continue their fight on their own. This will only leave Libya under threat while the world watches its possible disintegration.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

Ex-Bush and Whitman adviser: Trump won't be impeached, but he will leave the presidency in 2019

President Trump will leverage the Oval Office to avoid any likely charges levied against him and his family. Will a President Pence pardon him after he resigns from office?

By Alan J. Steinberg

The major issue for political pundits regarding 2019 is whether Donald Trump's presidency will survive the year leading into the 2020 elections. Their focus is on the likelihood as to whether Trump will be impeached by the House of Representatives and then removed by the U.S. Senate.

Trump will not be removed from office by the Constitutional impeachment and removal process.

Instead, the self-professed supreme deal-maker will use his presidency as a bargaining chip with federal and state authorities in 2019, agreeing to leave office in exchange for the relevant authorities not pursuing criminal charges against him, his children or the Trump Organization.

Trump will be impeached by the House of Representatives for high crimes and misdemeanors, specifically his involvement in directing his former attorney and fixer Michael Cohen to commit a felony by making illegal in-kind contributions to the Trump campaign and concealing them. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York has already obtained Cohen's guilty plea to this conduct. Democrats now control the House of Representatives, and the votes will be there for the needed impeachment majority.

In order for the Senate to remove Trump from office, however, there must be a vote of at least two thirds of the senators affirming the House-passed Articles of Impeachment. That would require a defection against Trump of at least 20 Republican senators.

That is highly unlikely, regardless of how compelling the impeachment case may be. All but five of the 53 GOP senators represent solid Republican Red states. Their incumbency will not be threatened by their vote against removal of the president. Each such senator runs a serious risk, however, of a pro-



Aside from all the legal nightmares facing Trump and his presidency, it appears virtually impossible for Trump to be reelected in 2020.

Trump primary election challenge if he or she supports the removal of Trump from office.

The legal danger to Trump is developing more in the office of the attorney general of New York State, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and in the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. In response to a lawsuit from the attorney general of New York State, Donald Trump agreed to shut down the Trump Foundation. The lawsuit alleged "a shocking pattern of illegality involving the Trump Foundation — including unlawful coordination with the Trump presidential campaign, repeated and

willful self-dealing, and much more."

The lawsuit implicates all three Trump children as well, seeking to bar them, as well as their father, from serving on the boards of other New York nonprofits.

It is now clear that the investigations of Donald Trump are now focused on possible criminal conduct of the Trump children, as well. Donald Trump Jr. has reportedly told confidants that he expects to be indicted by Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III for actions taken by him during the campaign as well.

Having succeeded in obtaining Cohen's guilty plea, the U.S. Attorney's Office for

Shuffling the deck chairs in Saudi Arabia

By Tamara Cofman Wittes & Bruce Riedel

The Saudi government announced on Dec. 27, 2018 a series of royal decrees that appointed a new foreign minister in place of the well-known Adel al-Jubeir, moved other officials into new positions, and established two new policymaking bodies, both headed inevitably by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). The changes are intended to address the crisis that has erupted in its ties both to Washington and to international investors over the past few months. While insisting that there is no crisis, these moves are an admission by MBS of just how bad things have gotten. The depth of the problem is evident in the flight of foreign investors, the onslaught of bad press, the unprecedented Senate action rebuking the crown prince for his role in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and the promise by Senator Lindsey Graham to prevent any new weapons transfers as long as Mohammed bin Salman remains in charge.

But these changes to process and personnel alone will not provide the intended reassurance — to signal a real change in direction, the kingdom must demonstrate that its policy is shifting away from the aggressive overreach that led to the present dire straits.

Personnel changes

From almost the moment of Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as defense minister in 2015, Persian Gulf observers and elder statesmen expressed concerns that he was too young and inexperienced for the role, and that he would benefit from the advice and support of more seasoned (and older) advisers. This was not the path MBS took, however. He relied heavily on his ties to Mohammed bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, and closed the Royal Court to all but a handful of close personal advisers like the now-notorious Saud al-Qahtani. (Qahtani reportedly helped organize Khashoggi's murder, and has also been implicated in the reported torture in detention of female driving activists.)

Perhaps the most interesting and potentially important appointment is the new minister for National Guard, the commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG), which is the monarchy's preeminent protector. The SANG provides internal security for the kingdom. For over a half century it was the sinecure of former King Abdullah, who staffed it with his loyalists. He finally turned over control to his eldest son Prince Miteb. Miteb was ousted late last year in the Ritz-Carlton shakedown, when the crown prince detained without charge several hundred prominent Saudis and forced them to pay for their freedom.

King Salman appointed Prince Khalid bin Abdul Aziz al Muqrin to the job in late 2017. Khalid was a SANG veteran of 10 years and his family had a long association with the guard. But now he is out after barely a year. The new commander is Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz. He was made



While insisting that there is no crisis, cabinet reshuffle is an admission by MBS of just how bad things have gotten.

deputy governor of Mecca province in April 2017. Like the crown prince, he is a graduate of King Saud University and has no military training or experience. He is a carbon copy, in many ways, of the crown prince.

The turnover in the SANG suggests trouble in the Praetorian Guard. Three commanders in just over one year is not a sign of stability. The appointment of an untrained and untested prince is a sign that personal loyalty, not experience or expertise, is still the crucial determinant of getting ahead. It also raises questions about the capability of the SANG to protect the country from domestic and foreign enemies.

One very important open post was not filled in the cabinet shuffle: deputy crown prince. The number-three slot has been vacant since Mohammad bin Salman moved up from deputy crown prince in 2017, sending Mohammad bin Nayef into house arrest. Clearly the crown prince does not want his small inner circle to include his successor.

That aside, this closed circle has been somewhat opened, and some old hands are in evidence. In addition to the appointment of a new National Guard commander, as well as longtime Saudi official Musaed al Aiban as "national security adviser," the decrees also established a new "Council on Political and Security Affairs." This new body will supposedly operate like an interagency advisory council for the crown prince, enabling diverse viewpoints and considerations to inform his national security policy.

The impact

Will it matter? Only if the new structure produces meaningful adjustments to Saudi policies that address international concerns and advance regional stability. Will the Saudi government now reverse some of its overreach, for example by releasing the dozens of peaceful civil society figures detained over the past two years, including the women driving activists arrested this spring and summer? Will this new process reduce the abuses of power that produced the Ritz-Carlton shakedown (of which the new foreign minister was briefly a victim), the kidnapping and forced resignation of the Lebanese prime minister, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and the climate of intimidation that now pervades Saudi society?

And then there's the fate of the much-touted Saudi reform plan, Vision 2030. Even before Khashoggi's murder put a spotlight on Saudi policy failures, foreign investors were skittish and foreign observers were warning of the plan's stalled implementation. The new foreign minister, Ibrahim al Assaf, is a U.S.-trained economist who spent many years as the Saudi representative to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as well as two decades as the kingdom's finance minister (through 2016); he therefore has extensive time in Washington (as did Adel al-Jubeir, whom he replaces and who will now be a minister of state for foreign affairs).

Assaf was a proponent of state-led development during the kingdom's boom times, and so longtime international investors reliant on steady government spending — like those in oil, gas, and construction — are likely to be pleased by his elevation to the lead player in foreign policy. His role may also auger an even stronger role for the Saudi government's Public Investment Fund in driving domestic economic development — and thus more bad news for market liberalization, as well as for Saudi entrepreneurs and existing private businesses already feeling squeezed by the government's economic dominance and the new value-added tax.

It was always the case that Vision 2030 faced opposition from Saudi elites threatened by disruptions to the old, top-down patronage networks that had connected prominent families and royals to the government's economic activity and enriched them all. It may be that these forces capitalized on the crisis produced by the crown prince's errors with respect to domestic dissent and foreign policy to try and pull back on market liberalization. The future of Saudi economic reform may now be slower, but it might also be based upon greater consensus.

Mohammed bin Salman is still the decider in Saudi policy. The changes are worth watching, but the jury is still out on whether the crown prince has decided that his my-way-or-the-highway approach should be set aside in favor of one that, over time, may produce more stable and reliable outcomes for the kingdom and the region.

(Source: Bookings)

Democrats search for the anti-Trump candidate

They must find the right balance of ideology, identity and experience. With due respect to elections in Canada and the European Parliament, the west's most important democratic event of 2019 will be a saga of intra-party jostling with no actual votes taken until the following year. Prepare for the U.S. Democrats to choose a presidential candidate. In the coming year, state governors will begin to give speeches of national sweep. Senators from California and New York will develop a mysterious

interest in Iowa (whose caucus happens to begin the formal nomination race). Books of excruciating earnestness, blending "visions" for America with mawkish self-disclosure, will cascade from the various candidates. Donors will be turned upside down and shaken until their pockets are bare. What defines this contest is not just the high stakes but the unpredictability. Some 20 or more hopefuls are expected to run for the right to take on Donald Trump in 2020.

However the Democrats resolve these cross-cutting axes of ideology, identity and political experience, the world should watch. The old consensus in U.S. foreign policy sometimes limited the importance of presidential elections to other nations. Now the stakes extend to China, where the U.S. posture has changed more in two years than in the previous two decades, to Syria, from where Trump is withdrawing troops, and beyond. Nor should the world count on personal scandal or

economic troubles finishing off Trump, regardless of his opponent. He is adept at fostering a siege mentality. American politics can be tawdry and money-ridden. A whole year of campaigning, fundraising and media scrutiny beckons those who fancy themselves the eventual slayer of Trump. And this is before a single caucus or primary takes place. Whoever leads the pack this time next year will have proven their stamina, if nothing else.

(Source: FT)

Pars Diplomatic Real Estate

Apartment

Apt in Zafaraniyeh
2nd floor, 220 sq.m, 4 Bdrs.
furn, equipped kitchen, spj
parking spot, **\$1800**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Qeytarieh
3rd floor, 230 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
fully furn, equipped kitchen fire
place, elevator, storage parking
spot, **\$2200**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Penthouse in Zafaraniyeh
tripex, 835 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
2 suits unfurn, equipped kitchen,
spj, elevator, huge terrace, 5
parking spots
panoramic view
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Darous
2nd floor, 220 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
fully furn, equipped kitchen
outdoor swimming pool
beautiful yard, parking spot
\$2000 negotiable
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Jordan
6th floor, 220 sq.m, 4 Bdrs.
new furn, equipped kitchen
elevator, renovated
parking spot
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Luxury Apt in Fereshteh
250 sq.m, 3 Bdrs., unfurn
spj, green yard, parking spots
\$4000
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Villa

Super Luxury Villa
in Shahrak Qarb
brand new, 800 sq.m land
700 sq.m built up, 4master
bedrooms, super luxury furn
spj, massage room, beautiful roof
garden, play ground for kids, city
view, parking spot
Price negotiable
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Triplex Villa in Velenjak
1000 sq.m land, 700 sq.m built up,
5 Bdrs., unfurn, very clean sauna,
outdoor swimming pool
servant quarter, fire place
renovated, green yard
storage, parking spot
\$12000
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Duplex Villa in Fereshteh
800 sq.m land, 600 sq.m built up, 4
Bdrs., unfurn, renovated
parking spot, yard
\$5500
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Duplex Villa in Zafaraniyeh
700 sq.m, 5 Bdrs., unfurn balcony,
renovated, fire place sauna
Jacuzzi, storage
parking spot, **\$6000**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Duplex Villa in Farmanieh
400 sq.m, 4 Bdrs., fully furn green
& nice garden
fully renovated
\$4500
Ms.Diba: 09128103206



Holder of
ISO 9001:2008
ISO 10004:2012
ISO 10002:2014

From Oxford Cert Universal

**Best Consultation
Best Services, Best Result**

Intl. Department Manager "Tina 09128103205"

Tel: 22662452-8, Fax: 22667173

Hot Line: 28141
info@parsdiplomatic.com
www.parsdiplomatic.com

Building & Office

Whole Building in Zafaraniyeh
3 apts, 568 sq.m land, 1220 sq.m
built up totally, 17 Bdrs.
unfurn, elevator, storage
lots parking spots
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Whole building in Jordan
administrative office license
5 floors, 1700 sq.m totally
almost new, elevator
43 parking spots
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Office in Valiasr
administrative office license
3 apts, 102 sq.m, elevator
lots parking spots
near Niayesh highway
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Office in Saadat Abad
administrative office license
2 apts, 110 sq.m, parking spots
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Whole Building
in Argentina Square
brand new, 6 floors, 6 apts
each floor 250 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.
elevator, parking spots
Price negotiable
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Mahmoodieh Whole Building in
5 floors, 2600 sq.m totally
30 Bdrs., 1 penthouse
40 parking spots, nice lobby
spj., gym, rooftop
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Ideal Offers

Apt in Jordan
1st floor 88 sq.m, 1 Bdr., furn
elevator, renovated, **\$800**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Farmanieh
1st floor, 75 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.
fully furn, parking spot, **\$900**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Pasdaran
5th floor, 76 sq.m, 2 Bdrs
fully furn, elevator
parking spot, **\$800**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Niavaran
1st floor, 250 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
unfurn, sauna & swimming pool,
parking spot, **\$1800**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Elahieh
3rd floor, 280 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
fully furn, terrace, spj, gym
parking spot, **\$2000**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Qolhak
1st floor, 90 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.
fully furn, equipped kitchen
parking spot, **\$900**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Evin
90 sq.m, 2 Bdrs., nice & clean furn,
equipped kitchen
parking spot
\$900
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

مالکین محترم

ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان،
ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت

مالکین محترم املاک مبله و غیر مبله، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات
شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

ویلاهای شما را جهت اجاره به منزل سفیر و مدیران
شرکت های بین المللی در مناطق شمالی تهران
نیازمندیم.

SHANON
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
+989121907875
Tel : 88510081

Farmanieh Apt 200sq.m, 3bdrs (\$1800) F.F	Velenjak (\$2500) 250sq.m, 3bdrs S/p, S, J, & F.F	Shariati Villa 1000sq.m, 5bdrs yard (\$3500)
Jordan (\$1200) 120sq.m, 2bdrs S/p, S, J, F.F	Elahieh (\$2000) 200sq.m, 3bdrs balcony, & F.F	Vanak Office (\$20 per sq.m) 200sq.m, pkgs

Don't Waste Your Time

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

www.DeltaHOME.ir

The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

HOME
Real Estate

Member of DELTA Real Estate Group
(021) 88888865

maharaja
Indian Restaurant

**FIRST INDIAN RESTAURANT
IN IRAN**

PRIVATE PARKING LOT

Jahan Hotel (Exelsior) – Rahimzade Alley – Taleqani
Crossroads – Valiasr St. Tel: **66476855**

TEHRAN TIMES

Iran's Leading
International Daily

Advertising Dept

Tel:
021 - 430 51 450

www.DELTA HOME.ir

TEL:88 88 88 65 FAX: 88 88 93 35

HOME
Real Estate

Fereshteh 120 sqm, 2 bdrs, FF, SP, parking \$1600 USD Davood: (+98) 9123488513	Zafaraniyeh, Villa, Best location 500sqm land, 1200 sqm building, duplex, 5bdrs, indoor pool, Luxury Price negotiable Davood: (+98) 9123488513	Elahiyeh 200sqm, 3 bdrs, nicely FF, best tower Nice view, Lobby, balcony \$2500 USD Davood: (+98) 9123488513
Elahiyeh 240 Sqm, 3 bdrs, 3 baths, brand new Full facilities (spa, gym, coffee room,...) 24hrs lobbyman & seprate guard, mountain view € 4300 USD Adrian: (+98) 921 71 76 740	Zaferaniyeh, Velenjak 350 Sqm, 3 Master bdrs, 7th floor, brand new Full facilities (spa, gym, roof garden,...) Green view, balcony \$ 7000 USD Adrian: (+98) 921 71 76 740	Niavaran 250 Sqm, 3 bdrs, 2.5 baths, brand new Full facilities (spa, gym, roof garden, small private cinema,...) \$ 3600 USD Adrian: (+98) 921 71 76 740
Elahiyeh 260sqm, 7th floor, 3 bdrs, SPJ, lobby, ,Guard Garden, amazing view \$3500 USD Linda: (+98) 9351721171	Elahiyeh 205sqm, 3 bdrs, 4th floor, SPJ, sauna Gym, coffee shop, roof garden, Lobby \$ 3000 USD Linda: (+98) 9351721171	Farmaniyeh, villa 900sqm, 2500 sqm yard, 5 bdrs \$ 8000 USD Kaveh: (+98) 9128944169
Jordan, Office 1100 sqm, Flat, \$ 10000 USD Kaveh: (+98) 9128944169	Argantin, Guest house A whole building of 4 floors, totally 16 rooms plus one small suit, F.F Price negotiable Farshid: (+98) 9125540877	Must to see Elahiyeh 290sqm, 3 bdrs, 3 baths ,gym, brand new, green view Furn or unfurn Farshid: (+98) 9125540877
Guest House 1- Jordan, 5 fl, 5 Units, 14 bdrs ,FF 2- Gandi, 5 fl, 19 Units, 38 bdrs, FF 3- Jordan, 5 fl, 20 Units, 55 bdrs, FF Farshid: (+98) 9125540877	Elahiyeh, Velenjak, Penthouse ,Super Luxury, 450 sqm, 550 sqm Full facilities, Negotiable Hojati: (+98) 9309701169	Zaferaniyeh Office, 350 sqm, Negotiable Hojati: (+98) 9309701169
Shahrak-e- Gharb, Villa 600sqm building, 800 sqm land, 5bdrs, SPJ Negotiable Hojati: (+98) 9309701169	Jordan 275sqm, 4 bdrs, full facilities \$ 2000 USD Erik: (+98) 9372371391	Argantin 115sqm, 2 bdrs \$ 1000 USD Erik: (+98) 9372371391

Iranian knowledge-based company produces oral iron chelator

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — An Iranian knowledge-based company succeed in manufacturing oral iron chelator and deferasirox, domestically, Mehr news agency reported.

Deferasirox is an oral iron chelator. Its main use is to reduce chronic iron overload, also known as transfusional iron overload, in patients who are receiving long-term blood transfusions for conditions such as beta-thalassemia and other chronic anemia.

The CEO of the Iranian knowledge-based company, has explained that this is the first time the medication is being produced in the country saying that so far the drug was imported to Iran which resulted in massive outflow of currency.

The costs of the home-grown medicine will be covered by insurance companies, Behzad Taqipour highlighted.

While deferasirox should be normally taken on an empty stomach the domestically produced tablets can be taken on full stomach as well, Taqipour stated, adding that moreover, there is no need to dissolve the



medicine in water or juice the homegrown tablets can be taken like other medicine.

The bioavailability of deferasirox was increased to a variable extent when taken

along with food. The tablets must therefore be taken on an empty stomach at least 30 minutes before food, preferably at the same time each day.

According to the U.S National Library of Medicine beta thalassemia is a blood disorder that reduces the production of hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is the iron-containing protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to cells throughout the body.

In people with beta thalassemia, low levels of hemoglobin lead to a lack of oxygen in many parts of the body. Affected individuals also have a shortage of red blood cells (anemia), which can cause pale skin, weakness, fatigue, and more serious complications. People with beta thalassemia are at an increased risk of developing abnormal blood clots.

Beta thalassemia is classified into two types depending on the severity of symptoms: thalassemia major (also known as Cooley's anemia) and thalassemia intermedia. Of the two types, thalassemia major is more severe.

No evidence swapping sugar for artificial sweeteners helps weight loss, major review warns

Replacing sugar with artificial sweeteners used in Diet Coke and other soft drinks has no effect on weight loss and their long-term health effects are still poorly understood, a major scientific review has said.

In the largest analysis of the health effects of non-sugar sweeteners to date, German researchers found little robust evidence to support claimed health benefits or to rule out increased harm from long term use.

A small number of studies showed slowed weight gain when sugar was replaced by sweeteners. However, from the 56 studies in the review, this effect was of "low or very low certainty" and there was no evidence that swapping to sweeteners could help obese patients lose weight.

Other studies raised fears that increased artificial sweetener consumption could increase cancer risk, but there was no such link found in the review.

The study, led by University of Freiburg, was published in The BMJ and also highlighted a stark lack research on the long-term health effects of sweeteners when taken over years or decades – in part due to the difficulty of enlisting people to take part in such a study.

A mounting obesity crisis in the UK and other developed nations has driven the proliferation of diet alternatives which use artificial sweeteners like aspartame, to replace more calorific sugar.

However the lack of long-term studies has meant fears of health risks have also risen, with one 2017 study warning daily diet drink consumption was linked to increased rates of stroke or dementia.

"Evidence for health effects due to use of [sweeteners] is conflicting," said Dr Joerg Meerpohl in the paper.

"While some studies report an association between sweetener use and reduced obesity and risk of type 2 diabetes (thus suggesting a benefit for general health and the management of diabetes), other studies suggest that sweetener use could increase the risk of weight gain, diabetes and cancer."

But after completing the review, the authors concluded: "No evidence was seen for health benefits from sweeteners and potential harms could not be excluded."

In the UK the switch to sugar alternatives has been driven by a government levy on added sugar in soft drinks, which caused many manufacturers to cut out sugar, or raise the prices of their products.

Before Christmas, England's most senior medic Dame Sally Davies said the government should extend the tax to sweets and crisps as the industry has failed to cut sugar levels voluntarily.

Meanwhile, figures released on Wednesday show that by the age of 10 children in England are consuming as much sugar as the maximum recommended for an adult.

UK academics commenting on the BMJ findings said that they still believed sweeteners to be better than sugar, adding that the largest and most well conducted trials in the study showed a more reliable benefit for reducing weight gain.

(Source: The Independent)

Antibiotic resistance: Old Irish 'soil cure' tackles major superbugs

Traditional folk medicine could help solve the growing threat that antibiotic resistance poses to public health.

Scientists at Swansea University Medical School in the United Kingdom drew this conclusion after studying samples of Irish soil with a long healing tradition.

They found that the soil contained a previously unknown strain of Streptomyces bacteria that has remarkable medicinal properties.

Tests revealed that the strain was able to stop the growth of MRSA and three other superbugs that can spread in hospitals.

The journal Frontiers in Microbiology has published a study paper on the findings.

"This new strain of bacteria," says co-author Paul Dyson, who is a professor of medicine at the university, "is effective against four of the top six pathogens that are resistant to antibiotics, including MRSA."

He and his colleagues named the new species Streptomyces sp. myrophorea.

Old healing wisdom and antibiotic resistance

The soil samples in the study came from alkaline grassland in the Boho Highlands of Fermanagh, Northern Ireland.

There is evidence that Neolithic people lived in the area some 4,000 years ago, and that the site was also home to Druids about 1,500 years ago.

"Ancient healers" used soil from the site to treat ailments ranging from a toothache to throat infections.

They would take a small sample of soil and wrap it in cotton cloth. The healer would then place it "next to the infection or underneath the users' pillow for 9 days," the authors write.

Antibiotic resistance is "one of the most urgent threats" to public health.

Bacterial infections that once succumbed easily to treatment with antibiotics have become highly resistant. In some cases, infections with a superbug can lead to severe disability and death.

Some superbugs have developed multi-drug resistance. First-line treatments are no longer effective against them. There is no longer a guarantee that "treatments of last resort" will work against them.

In response to this global threat, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently published a "priority list" of multi-drug resistant pathogens that urgently require new antibiotics.

New strain tackles four ESKAPE pathogens

The recent study investigated the ability of the new Streptomyces strain to combat highly resistant pathogens, or superbugs, that are "responsible for the top six healthcare-associated infections."

These superbugs include the bacteria species: Enterococcus faecium, Staphylococcus aureus, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Acinetobacter baumannii, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, and species belonging to the Enterobacter genus.

They are also known as ESKAPE pathogens, a term compiled from the first letters of their names.

The researchers found that the newly identified Streptomyces strain was able to halt the growth of four of the resistant ESKAPE pathogens:

- Vancomycin-resistant E. faecium (VRE)
- Methicillin-resistant S. aureus (MRSA)
- Klebsiella pneumonia
- Carbapenem-resistant A. baumannii

In addition, the new strain was equally effective against both gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria.

The team is now carrying out further investigations to find out which components of Streptomyces halt the growth of the superbugs.

The researchers suggest that their investigative work in folk medicine, which is part of a growing drug research field called ethnopharmacology, will yield fruitful results in the quest for new antibiotics.

"Our discovery is an important step forward in the fight against antibiotic resistance."

(Source: Medical News Today)

TASHRIFAT INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE AGENCY

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

APARTMENT

Jordan

4 Bdrs,fully
furn,260sq.m,spj,\$3000

Elahiyeh Chenaran

Fantastic 4 Bdrs,500 Sq.m, for
those seeking the best

Darous

2Bdrs,fully furn,3rd fl.,brand
new,100 sqm,lobby
1600

Zaferaniyeh-Yekta,

Apartment-villa
French-style
3Bdrs,fully furn 360 sq.m.sp,
EURO 5000

Valiasre-Bagheferdos

3 Bdrs,fully furn,brand
new,5th fl., 150 sq.m ,indoor
spj,\$1900

Mirdamad-Naft

3 Bdrs,fully furn,5th fl.,200
sq.m, \$ 2000

Close to Paladium Shopping
center

3Bdrs,180 sq.m,fully
furn,lobby,sp,garden,\$2000

VILLA

Elahiyeh

Triplex-800 sq.m built up,1000
sq.m land,Semi-furn,7

Bdrs,spj,\$9000

Zaferaniyeh

Duplex, 4 Bdrs,unfurn,350
sq.m,spj,\$8000

Niavaran

2000 sq.m land,green
garden,500 sq.m built up
area,indoor spj,4Bdrs,fully
furn,triplex,\$15000

Darous

1000 sq.m land,400 sq.m built
up area, flat.4 Bdrs,spj.\$7000

Jordan

850 sq.m land,500 sq.m
built up,5 Bdrs,spj,furn/
unfurn,duplex,\$7000



Mr. Shahin

Nobody does it better

09121081212

Since: 1987

مالکین محترم املاک مسکونی و اداری شما را

جهت اجاره به خارجی نیازمندیم

Tel: 22723121

tehranfirstchoice@gmail.com

**Happy
New Year**

2019

OFFICE

From 50 to 8000 sq.m available

With all facilities in different
areas

Jordan

100 sq.m,3
rooms,parking,brand new
3rd fl.,\$1700

Valiasre

150 sq.m brand new, all
facilities,5th fl.,\$2300

Vozara

250 sq.m,all facilities
8th fl.,\$4000

Mirdamad-Naft

120 sq.m,6th fl., \$1700

vanak

shariati

pasdaran

shahrak gharb

saadatabad

4000-3000-5000-4000-1000
sq.m,full,reasonable price

FOR: EMBASSY/COMPANY

Farmaniyeh,

4-storey building,1000 sq.m,
all facilities,\$10000

Zaferaniyeh

Triplex villa,800 sq.m,built
up,1000 sq.m land,12
rooms,\$8500

Niavaran

Triplex villa,2000 sq.m
land,600 sq.m built up ,spj,all
facilities,\$15000

Darous

Duplex villa,600 sq.m built
up,1000 sq.m land ,all
facilities,\$8000

Other areas:

Farmaniyeh

Aghdasiyeh

Shahrak Gharb

Shariati-Pasdaran

Valiasre

Tajrish

Jordan

Vanak

Arjantin

Zafar...

nice cases ready to move in.

Iran to launch astronomical observatories network

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Space Agency (ISA) is planning to set up a network to connect nine astronomical observatories in the country, the ISA director Morteza Barari has said, Mehr reported on Thursday.

“There are 50 observatories in Iran, of which nine are allocated to astronomical activities,” he said.

By launching the network, the observatories share their scientific achievements as well as discovering and tracking celestial bodies, space technological services and applications, he said.



“We aim to provide infrastructures to improve services for Iranian astronomers and to increase efficiency in using astronomical instruments,” he explained.

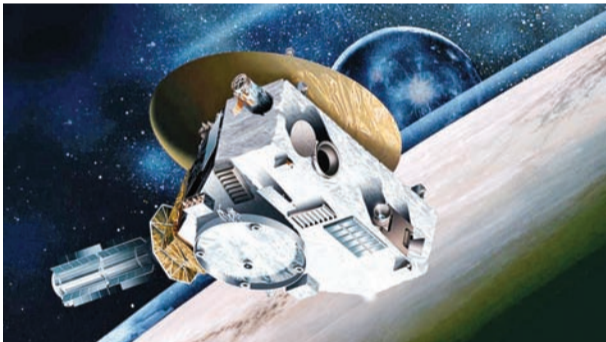
The ISA has developed a comprehensive plan for investment in the field of astronomy and satellite technology with the help of the private sector, he added.

Barari said that by manufacturing a radio telescope, a specialized antenna is used to receive radio waves from astronomical radio sources in the sky.

He named synergy and web-based networking among the astronomical observatories as crucial factors in supporting of the academic society and development of this sector.



NASA spacecraft ‘phones home’ after historic journey to distant world Ultima Thule



The vessel New Horizons has flown past the distant icy world of Ultima Thule, which lies one billion miles beyond Pluto.

An unmanned NASA spacecraft has sent a signal back to Earth after making a successful fly-by past the most distant world ever studied by mankind.

Around 10 hours after reaching the icy world of Ultima Thule, which lies one billion miles beyond Pluto, in the early part of New Year’s Day, the New Horizons vessel got in touch with scientists back home. The “phone home” signal took far longer to reach its destination than your average WhatsApp message because of just how far it had to travel, with Ultima Thule lying four billion miles from Earth.

It is roughly 20 miles long and shaped like a giant peanut. According to missions operations manager Alice Bowman, data from the world provided by New Horizons will help NASA to “understand the origins of our solar system” - and clear images are expected later on Wednesday.

Before it sent back its first signal to confirm everything was in working order, its fly-by had sparked scenes of jubilation at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland.

Lead scientist Alan Stern summed up just why his team were so excited by the mission.

“Ultima Thule is in such a deep freeze that it is perfectly preserved from its original formation,” he explained.

“Everything we are going to learn about Ultima - from its composition to its geology to how it was originally assembled, whether it has satellites and an atmosphere and those kinds of things - are going to teach us about the original formation conditions of objects in the solar system.”

The milestone came hours after a different NASA spacecraft broke records by successfully going into orbit around an ancient asteroid. The Osiris-Rex spacecraft is now orbiting Benu - a tiny asteroid that is just 500m (1,600ft) long and found 70 million miles from Earth.

Benu - one of the oldest asteroids known to NASA - is the smallest celestial body to ever be orbited by a spacecraft, and the laps being taken by Osiris-Rex are barely one mile above the surface. Its objective is to grab samples of gravel from the asteroid in 2020 and return them to Earth by 2023 - a maneuver described as a “gentle high-five”.

The \$800m (£630m) unmanned spaceship launched two years ago from Cape Canaveral in Florida and only arrived at its destination on December 3.

After several weeks of study, Osiris-Rex fired its thrusters to bring it into orbit around the tiny asteroid at 7.43pm UK time on New Year’s Eve. NASA has described the achievement as a “leap for humankind” because no spacecraft has ever “circled so close to such a small space object - one with barely enough gravity to keep a vehicle in a stable orbit”.

Benu has a gravity force just five-millionths as strong as Earth’s and from now until mid-February, Osiris-Rex will use five scientific instruments to map it in high resolution, enabling scientists to decide where to take the sample.

After that, a reverse vacuum and a circular device similar to a car filter will be used to collect about 60g of material.

Benu is regarded as potentially dangerous, as there is a one in 2,700 chance of it colliding with Earth in 2135.

(Source: news.sky.com)

Digital economy development park to open in Mashhad

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The digital economy development park will be established in the city of Mashhad, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister said, ICT website reported on Friday.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said that the park will be established in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in early February.

He made the remarks during the opening ceremony of a smart city exhibition.

“In a smart city, managers should benefit from smart citizens,” he said.

He called Mashhad as an important city, which attracts several thousand tourists from different parts of world and can be regarded

as the symbol of Iran in their minds.

Making a city smart is a way to create jobs and to boost entrepreneurship in a city, he said.

Mashhad houses to several powerful startups and a great human resource capacity for being a smart city in Iran, he explained.

Azari Jahromi urged Mashhad Municipality should take measures for urban smart management of Mashhad.

The smart city principles encourage transparency and is against economic favoritism and monopoly in performing urban projects, he said.

Mashhad Municipality should also facilitate the emergence of startups for urban management in future, he concluded.

Mashhad houses to several powerful startups and a great human resource capacity for being a smart city in Iran

Iranian researchers invent nano-mulch to cope with dust storms



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Researchers at the School of Marine Science and Ocean of Khorramshahr, southwestern Iran, have invented nano-mulch to deal with dust storms.

The environment-friendly product is based on sugarcane extract and is biodegradable. Nano-mulch improves soil resistance to erosion and increases its fertility, IRIB reported on January 1.

The dust storms descend on Iran from

the deserts and dried-up ponds of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Many ponds which were once located in the arid and desert regions stretching from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to Iran have gone dry over the years. This ongoing desertification process has greatly increased the number of dust storms in the region and every year heavy dust storms envelope more than half of the country.

Who will lead in the age of Artificial Intelligence?

Accelerating trends in artificial intelligence (AI) point to significant geopolitical disruption in the years ahead. Much as mass electrification enabled the rise of the United States and other advanced economies, so AI is poised to reshape the global order. Forecasts suggest that AI will add a massive \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030.

Prospects for sustaining global competitiveness are now directly tied to the industrialization of AI. AI and machine learning are predicted to reshape manufacturing, energy management, urban transportation, agricultural production, labor markets, and financial management. Governments that can successfully cultivate a culture of disruptive innovation will be strategically positioned to lead in the twenty-first century. By contrast, governments that resist AI will find themselves facing a daunting future.

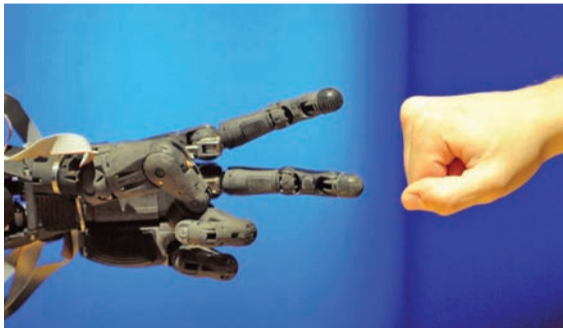
■ Battle of the Titans

At the research level, the United States remains highly invested in AI and other disruptive technologies. The National Science Foundation (NSF) currently invests over \$100 million each year in AI research. DARPA recently announced a \$2 billion investment in an initiative called AI Next whose goal is advancing contextual and adaptive reasoning. Meanwhile, the U.S. military has created a new Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC) to oversee service and defense agency AI efforts.

But where the U.S. has established a strong lead in AI discovery, it is increasingly likely that China may dominate the industrialization of AI. Alongside China’s expertise in factory machinery, electronics, infrastructure, and renewable energy, the country’s government is increasingly focusing on AI leadership.

According to former Google head Kai-Fu Lee, China’s innovation system is nurturing a kind of global economic duopoly that will inevitably force countries around the world to choose sides. Lee would know. After completing his PhD in speech recognition at Carnegie Mellon he went on to lead AI research at Apple, Microsoft Research, and Google China and now oversees venture capital investing in Beijing.

As Lee points out, the strength of China’s economy is a productive synergy between government policies and mar-



ket forces. Not only does China have advanced commercial capabilities in AI but more importantly it has a coherent national strategy. Unlike the U.S., China’s government has become highly invested in leveraging AI to drive its enormous economy. China’s state-led strategy builds on the country’s national champions Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent (BAT) in a long-term effort to restructure the global technology market.

■ The Chinese century?

China’s government correctly recognizes that AI is critical to its future growth. Where China has commoditized computers, electronics, smartphones, infrastructure, telecommunications technologies, and supercomputers, Beijing has now set its sights on system-wide AI. This includes autonomous vehicles (AVs), advanced medical equipment, robotics, and financial technologies.

Until very recently, most of the AI-driven innovation deployed by Chinese industries has been “incremental” rather than “disruptive”. But this is changing. China’s technology sector is reaching a critical mass of expertise, talent and capital that is realigning the commanding heights of global power. In fact, the Chinese government plans to lead the world in AI by 2030, announcing more than \$110bn worth of technology merger and acquisition deals since 2015.

China expects to widen its lead in the industrialization of AI by leveraging massively abundant data and rapid prototyping. The country’s growing internet economy generates



Fund plans to provide knowledge-based companies with grants



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Innovation and Prosperity Fund plans to provide knowledge-based companies with grants for participation in international events, ISNA reported on Thursday.

Experience indicates that some knowledge-based companies have faced with residential problems while participating in foreign exhibitions, the head of the fund Ali Vahdat said.

The private sector can invest in this field and establish firms to facilitate this for the participants, he said.

The fund can also support the knowledge-based companies for obtaining technical certificates for participation in international events, he said.

Expansion of the market and promotion of exports are some of the measures which will be taken by the fund in the near future, he concluded.

vastly more data than any other country, leveraging speed, execution, and product quality, particularly through its fintech companies. With instantaneous mobile payments, for example, China’s mobile infrastructure is providing a tsunami of data for training AI algorithms.

■ Dominating industrial AI

One very real question today is which economic system will be more successful in the era of industrial AI? Free Market America or Socialist China? After two centuries of Western dominance in technology and innovation, the tables are now turning. China’s highly efficient planning model has become a force to be reckoned with. Even as the big five U.S. technology giants—Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple and Google—redefine Western capitalism, China is inventing a kind of “technonationalism”.

While the U.S. retains a significant technology dominance in AI, resources are fragmented and national leadership is weak. Even as the Congress has recently passed legislation introducing a national security commission on AI, the U.S. still lacks a coherent vision for coordinating AI. Perhaps an even more challenging problem is the deep divide between the public and private sectors. In the wake of the Edward Snowden revelations, technology professionals now repudiate government, wary of colluding with an opaque military-industrial complex.

The main problem facing the U.S. and other advanced economies is a kind of market fundamentalism that devalues government-led moon-shots. After a half century of U.S.-led neoclassical economic theory, China’s technology is proving to be more strategically effective at delivering the goods. Where the U.S. thinks in electoral cycles, China is reshaping the playing field, accelerating the decline of the Western-led world order.

What is obvious is that Western countries are in need of new leadership at multiple levels. Just as a post-war generation built a liberal global order, so today aging democracies are in need of a new and compelling vision for a high tech global society. A new generation of leaders is urgently needed— younger, smarter and most importantly, technology literate. (Source: forbes.com)

Sydney motorists using mobile phones will be snapped in camera trial

Motorists using the M4 motorway in Sydney’s west and Anzac Parade in the city’s east who illegally use mobile phones while driving will from January be identified using new high-tech camera systems.

Roads Minister Melinda Pavey announced on Sunday an Australian company had been selected to install the systems. The selection of the company, Acusensus, follows an earlier trial in October in which more than 11,000 drivers a day were detected illegally using their phone.

Motorists captured using their mobile phones while at the wheel will not, initially,

be fined. But that will change provided the trial is successful.

“If at the end of the trial, the technology proves to be foolproof, the community will be made aware of its permanent use,” Mrs Pavey said.

The Roads Minister said 74 per cent of NSW residents supported the use of cameras to enforce mobile phone use.

“I strongly believe this technology will change driver behaviour and save lives,” Mrs Pavey said.

The managing director of Acusensus, Alex Jannink, said he wanted to pursue mobile

phone use detection schemes after his friend was killed.

“Since my friend James was killed by an impaired and phone distracted driver five years ago, I have had a strong desire to develop this technology to save lives,” Mr Jannink said.

Acusensus’ system can operate in all weather conditions. It uses both high-definition cameras and artificial intelligence to capture offending drivers.

Earlier trials of related technology have documented numerous examples of dangerous and sometimes outrageous behaviour

by NSW drivers.

“One driver was pictured with two hands on his phone while his passenger steered the car travelling at 80 km/h, putting everyone on the road at risk,” Mrs Pavey said.

Surveillance by a company called One Task this year estimated that between 5 and 7 per cent of drivers use mobiles while driving at high speeds.

In the five years to 2017, 184 crashes in NSW involved illegal mobile phone use. These resulted in seven deaths and 105 injuries.

(Source: smh.com.au)

Genetically modified ‘shortcut’ boosts plant growth by 40%

Scientists in the U.S. have engineered tobacco plants that can grow up to 40% larger than normal in field trials.

The researchers say they have found a way of overcoming natural restrictions in the process of photosynthesis that limit crop productivity.

They believe the method could be used to significantly boost yields from important crops including rice and wheat.

The study has been published in the journal Science.

Researchers are growing increasingly concerned about the ability of the world to feed a growing population in a time of serious climate change.

It's expected that agricultural demand will increase globally by 60-120% by the middle of this century compared to 2005.

Increases in crop yields however are rising by less than 2% per annum, so there's likely to be a significant shortfall by 2050.

While the use of fertilizers, pesticides and mechanization have boosted yields over the past few decades, their potential for future growth is limited.

■ Process of photosynthesis

Instead, scientists are increasingly looking to improving the process of photosynthesis as a way of increasing food productivity.

While plants use the energy from sunlight to turn carbon dioxide and water into sugars that fuel the plant's growth, the chemical steps involved produce some toxic compounds



that actually limit the potential of the crop.

These toxins are then recycled by the plant in a process called photorespiration - but this costs the plant precious energy that could have been used to increase yield.

In this study, researchers set out to devel-

oped a way around the photosynthesis glitch.

"It's been estimated that in plants like soybeans, rice and fruit and vegetables, it can be a significant drag on yield by as much as 36%. We've tried to engineer this shortcut to make them more energy efficient - and in

field trials this translated into a 40% increase in plant biomass."

■ Drought conditions

One important aspect of the problem is that it becomes more prevalent at higher temperatures and under drought conditions.

"Our goal is to build better plants that can take the heat today and in the future, to help equip farmers with the technology they need to feed the world," said co-author Amanda Cavanagh, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Illinois.

The researchers chose tobacco plants because they are easy and quick to modify. They also form a fully closed canopy in the field similar to many food crops.

The team is now hoping to use these findings to boost the yields of soybean, rice, potato and tomato plants.

"We are really hoping that this is a technology that provides a tool that further optimizes agriculture so that we are not using outside inputs as much and we are growing more food on less land."

The "research that's necessary to prove that it has low environmental impact and is safe for consumption takes a minimum of ten years and many more dollars in research funds to make sure that this is a good and safe food product," said Dr. South.

The technology is being developed for royalty-free distribution to smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southeast Asia.

(Source: BBC)

While plants use the energy from sunlight to turn carbon dioxide and water into sugars that fuel the plant's growth, the chemical steps involved produce some toxic compounds that actually limit the potential of the crop.

'Great collision' could wake up the supermassive black hole, study says

A "great collision" between the Milky Way and another nearby galaxy could result in the awakening of a supermassive black hole, causing it to swell up to eight times its current mass, devouring surrounding gas and throwing out huge amounts of high-energy radiation.

Galaxies are not stagnant. They are moving around space all the time and often collide and merge. It is thought that in around eight billion years, the Milky Way will collide with Andromeda, our closest neighboring galaxy.

However, about six billion years before this, there could be another cosmic car crash, when our home galaxy is hit by the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC), a satellite galaxy that is around 14,000 light years in diameter and orbits the Milky Way.

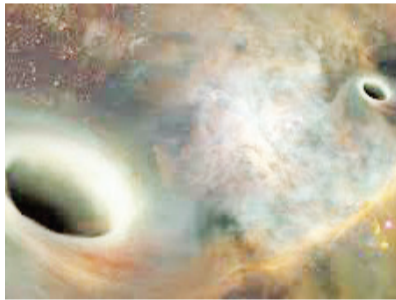
In a study published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, scientists from the UK's Durham University have said the collision could take place in two million years and that if and when this happens, it could wake up the supermassive black hole that sits at the center of the Milky Way.

■ The Milky Way

The LMC is around 163,000 light years from the Milky Way and while it could continue to orbit our home galaxy, it may be caught by the gravitation pull and come hurtling towards us. Measurements currently suggest that its mass is bigger than initially thought, placing the second scenario as the more likely of the two.

If the collision takes place, models suggest the dormant supermassive black hole Sagittarius A* could wake up and swell by a factor of around eight. Its mass would increase as it starts feeding on the surrounding gas.

"While two billion years is an extremely long time compared to a human lifetime, it is a very short time on cosmic times-



cales," Marius Cautun, a postdoctoral fellow in Durham University, said in a statement: "While two billion years is an extremely long time compared to a human lifetime, it is a very short time on cosmic timescales. The destruction of the Large Magellanic Cloud, as it is devoured by the Milky Way, will wreak havoc with our galaxy, waking up the black hole that lives at its center and turning our galaxy into an 'active galactic nucleus' or quasar."

■ Should the collision increase

Should the collision increase the mass of Sagittarius A* as predicted, it would make the Milky Way more typical of similar sized galaxies astronomers observe — simply put, our supermassive black hole is too small. "We have a not so massive black hole that seems to be very quiet at the center of our galaxy, and odd chemical composition issues with stars surrounding our Galaxy," he told Newsweek.

This collision is not expected to affect our own solar system in any way, although Cautun notes there is a "small chance" it could be knocked out of the Milky Way and interstellar space. Should mankind still exist in two million years, the collision would produce a "spectacular display of cosmic fireworks," study co-author Carlos Frenk added.

(Source: Newsweek)

Juno mission captures images of volcanic plumes on Jupiter's moon Io

The Juno spacecraft captured new images of a volcanic plume on Jupiter's moon Io during a December 21 flyby. JunoCam, the Stellar Reference Unit (SRU), the Jovian Infrared Auroral Mapper (JIRAM), and the Ultraviolet Imaging Spectrograph (UVS) observed Io for over an hour, providing a glimpse of the moon's polar regions as well as evidence of an active eruption.

Juno's Radiation Monitoring Investigation collected this image of Jupiter's moon Io with Juno's Stellar Reference Unit (SRU) star camera shortly after Io was eclipsed by Jupiter at 12:40:29 (UTC) Dec. 21, 2018. Io is softly illuminated by moonlight from another of Jupiter's moons, Europa. The brightest feature on Io is suspected to be a penetrating radiation signature. The glow of activity from several of Io's volcanoes is seen, including a plume circled in the image.

A team of space scientists has captured new images of a volcanic plume on Jupiter's moon Io during the Juno mission's 17th flyby of the gas giant. On Dec. 21, during winter solstice, four of Juno's cameras captured images of the Jovian moon Io, the most volcanic body in our Solar System.

■ Active eruption

JunoCam, the Stellar Reference Unit (SRU), the Jovian Infrared Auroral Mapper (JIRAM) and the Ultraviolet Imaging Spectrograph (UVS) observed Io for over an hour, providing a glimpse of the moon's polar regions as well as evidence of an active eruption.

"We knew we were breaking new ground with a multi-spectral campaign to view Io's polar region, but no one expected we would get so lucky as to see an active volcanic plume shooting material off the moon's surface," said Scott Bolton, principal investigator of the Juno mission and an associate vice president of Southwest Research Institute's Space Science and Engineering Division. "This is quite a New



Year's present showing us that Juno has the ability to clearly see plumes."

JunoCam acquired the first images on Dec. 21 at 12:00, 12:15 and 12:20 co-ordinated universal time (UTC) before Io entered Jupiter's shadow. The Images show the moon half-illuminated with a bright spot seen just beyond the terminator, the day-night boundary.

■ Reflecting sunlights

The "ground is already in shadow, but the height of the plume allows it to reflect sunlight, much like the way mountaintops or clouds on the Earth continue to be lit after the sun has set," explained Candice Hansen-Koharcheck, the JunoCam lead from the Planetary Science Institute.

At 12:40 UTC, after Io had passed into the darkness of total eclipse behind Jupiter, sunlight reflecting off nearby moon Europa helped to illuminate Io and its plume. SRU images released by SwRI depict Io softly illuminated by moonlight from Europa.

The brightest feature on Io in the image is thought to be a penetrating radiation signature, a reminder of this satellite's role in feeding Jupiter's radiation belts, while other features show the glow of activity from several volcanoes. "As a low-light camera designed to track the stars, the SRU can only observe Io under very dimly lit conditions."

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

'One giant leap for the Chinese nation': Chinese rover makes tracks on 'dark' side of moon

The director of the University of Houston's space architecture center hailed the Chinese space program's landing of a probe on the mis-named "dark side" of the moon as an achievement for humanity, not just China.

The Jade Rabbit 2 rover drove off its lander's ramp and onto the soft, snow-like surface at 10:22 P.M. Thursday, about 12 hours after a Chinese spacecraft made the first-ever landing on the moon's far side. A photo posted online by China's space agency showed tracks the rover left as headed away from the spacecraft.

"It's a small step for the rover, but one giant leap for the Chinese nation," Wu Weiren, the chief designer of the Lunar Exploration Project, told state broadcaster CCTV. "This giant leap is a decisive move for our exploration of space and the conquering of the universe."

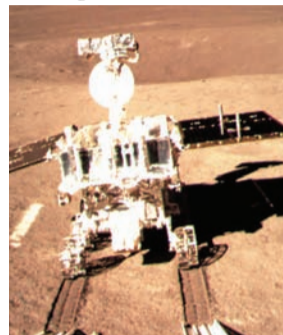
Exploring the cosmos from the far side of the moon could eventually help scientists learn more about the early days of the Solar System and even the birth of the universe's first stars. The far side can't be seen from Earth and is popularly called the "dark side" because it is relatively unknown, not because it lacks sunlight.

Three nations — the United States, the former Soviet Union and more recently China — have sent spacecraft to the near side of the moon, but the latest landing is the first on the far side. That side has been observed many times from lunar orbit, but never up close.

The mission highlights China's growing ambitions to rival the U.S., Russia and Europe in space, and more broadly, to cement its position as a regional and global power.

The Jade Rabbit 2 rover has six wheels that all have power, so it can continue to operate even if one wheel fails. It can climb a 20-degree hill or an obstacle up to 20 centimeters (8 inches) tall. Its maximum speed is 200 meters (220 yards) per hour.

(Source: USA Today)



Fungi cause brain infection and impair memory in mice, research finds

Fungal infections are emerging as a major medical challenge, and a team led by researchers at Baylor College of Medicine has developed a mouse model to study the short-term consequences of fungal infection in the brain.

The researchers report in the journal Nature Communications the unexpected finding that the common yeast *Candida albicans*, a type of fungus, can cross the blood-brain barrier and trigger an inflammatory response that results in the formation of granuloma-type structures and temporary mild memory impairments in mice. Interestingly, the granulomas share features with plaques found in Alzheimer's disease, supporting future studies on the long-term neurological consequences of sustained *C. albicans* infection.

An "increasing number of clinical observations by us and other groups indicates that fungi are becoming a more common cause of upper airway allergic diseases such as asthma, as well as other conditions such as sepsis, a potentially life-threatening disease caused by the body's response to an infection," said corresponding author Dr. David B. Corry, professor of medicine-immunology, allergy and rheumatology and Fulbright Endowed Chair in Pathology at Baylor College of Medicine.

"These observations led us to investigate the possibility that fungus might produce a brain infection and, if so, the consequences of having that kind of infection," said Corry, who also is a member of the Dan L. Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center. The researchers began their investigation by developing a mouse model of a low-grade fungus infection with the common yeast *C. albicans* that would not cause severe disease, but might carry implications for brain function. They tested several doses and finally settled on one dose of 25,000 yeasts.

The mice cleared the yeast infection in about 10 days; however, the microglia remained active and the FIGGs persisted well past this point, out to at least day 21. Intriguingly, as the FIGGs formed, amyloid precursor proteins accumulated within the periphery and amyloid beta molecules built up around yeast cells captured at the center of FIGGs.

(Source: phys.org)

Battery-powered, full-body exoskeleton lets users lift 200 pounds

Imagine a future construction site where a worker can swiftly pick up and move hundreds of pounds of materials thanks to hi-tech exoskeleton suits. Sarcos Robotics is speeding us towards that promising future, now taking pre-orders for the Guardian XO Max — the world's first battery-powered, full-body industrial exoskeleton — with delivery slated for early 2020.

One of the bigger engineering challenges Sarcos faced in creating a functional industrial exoskeleton was developing a way to efficiently power the system off a small battery unit. For the exoskeleton to be commercially viable and practical, it needed to operate for a substantial amount of time on battery power, untethered from any power cables.

After years of work Sarcos has now produced what appears to be a practical untethered system in the form of the Guardian XO Max. This unit that can operate for up to eight hours on a single battery charge and is also designed to have its batteries easily "hot swapped," meaning empty batteries can be replaced with new ones while the unit is still operational in the field.

"With our innovations in optimizing power utilization, Sarcos has been able to do what no other robotics company in the world has been able to do with powered exoskeletons or humanoid robots — power a human-scale robot doing meaningful work for up to eight hours on a single charge," explains Sarcos Robotics CEO, Ben Wolff.

The Guardian XO Max is claimed to offer wearers a 20 to 1 strength amplification, meaning around 100 pounds (45 kg) should feel as light as 5 pounds (2.2 kg). It is also claimed there is virtually no latency between human movement and exoskeleton response. So the suit should easily function intuitively, in real-time, to any worker's individual movement or reflex.

(Source: newatlas.com)

NUS study finds that severe air pollution affects the productivity of workers

Economists from the National University of Singapore (NUS) have completed an extensive study which reveals that exposure to air pollution over several weeks is not just unhealthy, it can also reduce employee productivity.

Associate Professor Alberto Salvo from the Department of Economics at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and an author of the study, explained, "Most of us are familiar with the negative impact air pollution can have on health, but as economists, we wanted to look for other socioeconomic outcomes. Our aim with this research was to broaden the understanding of air pollution in ways that have not been explored. We typically think that firms benefit from lax pollution regulations, by saving on emission control equipment and the like; here we document an adverse effect on the productivity of their work force."

The NUS team, including Associate Professor Haoming Liu and Dr. Jiaxiu He, spent over a year gathering information from factories in China. This involved interviewing managers at one dozen firms in four separate provinces, before obtaining access to data for two factories, one in Henan and the other in Jiangsu.



■ Records of productivities

The factories were textile mills, and workers were paid according to each piece of fabric they made. This meant that daily records of productivity for specific workers on particular shifts could be examined. Hence, the researchers compared how many pieces each worker produced each day to measures of the concentration of particulate matter that the worker was exposed to over time.

A standard way of determining the severity of pollution is to measure how many

fine particles less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter (PM2.5) are in the air. The majority of people living in developing countries are exposed to particle concentrations that health authorities deem harmful.

Interestingly, unlike previous literature, the team found that daily fluctuations in pollution did not immediately affect the productivity of workers. However, when they measured for more prolonged exposures of up to 30 days, a definite drop in output can be seen. The study was careful to control for confounding factors such as regional

economic activity.

■ Harming firms and workers

"We found that an increase in PM2.5, by 10 micrograms per cubic meter sustained over 25 days, reduces daily output by 1 per cent, harming firms and workers," says Associate Professor Liu.

The researchers remain agnostic about the reasons that explain why productivity goes down when pollution goes up. "High levels of particles are visible and might affect an individual's well-being in a multitude of ways," explained Assoc Prof Liu. "Besides entering via the lungs and into the bloodstream, there could also be a psychological element. Working in a highly polluted setting for long periods of time could affect your mood or disposition to work."

That study's estimate appears large for a developing country. "Laborers in China can be working under far worse daily conditions while maintaining levels of productivity that look comparable to clean air days. If the effect were this pronounced and this immediate, we think that factory and office managers would take more notice of pollution than transpired in our field interviews."

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

Snow storm hit 17 Iranian provinces

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Seventeen provinces of Iran have been stricken by heavy snow storm over the past 24 hours, Rescue and Relief Organization head Morteza Salimi has said.

Snow swept across 17 provinces namely West Azarbajjan, Ardebil, Isfahan, Alborz, Tehran, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari,



North Khorasan, Fars, Semnan, Zanjan, Qazvin, Qom, Kordestan, Gilan, Lorestan, Mazandaran, and Markazi, Tasnim news agency quoted Salimi as saying on Friday.

Some 90 rescue teams comprising 320 rescue workers offered relief and rescue service, Salimi highlighted.

Meanwhile, some 4,100 who were stranded in the snow storm received relief services and 656 cars stuck in snow were released, he added.

Moreover, five provinces including Tehran, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, Semnan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad were also inundated by flood, he added.

He went on to regret that an emergency medical technician has gone missing in Khuzestan province due to the flood.

Iran's Emergency Medical Services director Pir Hossein Kulivand said that the body of the 22-year old emergency medical technician is found.

LEARN ENGLISH

Marketing Plan

A: Okay everyone, let's begin. I called you here today to evaluate our marketing strategy during this **recession**. I wanted to re-emphasize our **corporate mission** of aiming to give our customers the best coffee and service in a clean and welcoming atmosphere.

B: Several other shops have reduced the prices for their coffees and are drawing in more customers. Why aren't we doing the same thing?

A: I know that recent sales have been slow, but we are not going to reduce our prices to the level of our competitors. We offer a superior product and our focus is on long-term growth rather than short-term sales. If we lower our prices, we run the risk of **devaluing** our product.

B: Customers don't care about the coffee anymore. They only care about the price.

A: I disagree. Highly **discerning** customers know that our coffee is far better than the coffee you buy at the other places. Our coffee bean are **artisan** roasted and we use **state-of-the-art** equipment to **brew** our coffees. When you compare the coffees side-by-side our coffee wins the taste test every time. We have never sought to appeal to the mass market with cheap coffee drinks, and we will not do so now.

C: That's true. We've certainly achieved top of mind **awareness** when it comes to the best tasting brews and it's important to distinguish ourselves from our competitors. I think the main question is how we can show our appreciation to our customers.

A: That's the main question I would like to discuss today. B: Money is **tight** for everyone these days so even our most loyal customers may be reconsidering the money they pay for their morning coffee. Since the **superiority** of our coffee beans is one of our core competencies why don't we sell the beans for people to brew coffee at home.

C: That could definitely be a way we could expand our company, but would we be **undermining** the essence of the company that way?

A: Let's **brainstorm** some more ideas, and do some research. The customer always comes first, and what the customer wants, the customer gets. Maybe it's time we started selling coffee beans.

■ **Key vocabulary**
recession: a difficult time when there is less trade, business activity etc. in a country than usual
corporate mission: a sentence describing a company's function, markets, and competitive advantages
devalue: reduce in value

discerning: showing insight and understanding
artisan: artisan coffees are created when the grower is willing to take extra steps to ensure quality results and the roaster is willing to pat the premium price necessary to support quality state-of-the-art: the latest and most advanced in technology
brew: to make a drink of tea or coffee
awareness: showing realization and perception
tight: if money is tight, you do not have enough of it
superiority: the quality of being better, more skilful, more powerful etc. than other people or things
undermine: to gradually make someone or something less strong or effective

brainstorm: when a group of people meet in order to try to develop ideas and think of ways of solving problems
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
product placement: also called "embedded marketing", where a company's products are placed in strategic places in film, television, or other forms of media
downturn: a recession, when things are not going very well
value proposition: an analysis of the total cost and benefits of a product that a company can deliver its customers
R&D: research and development
excel: to be very good at doing something, to do something better than anyone else

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Farwell to university entrance exam ‘Konkur’: minister

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — In a recent tweet, the Iranian education minister has heralded the end to Konkur, Iran's cut-throat university entrance exam.

“On Wednesday morning over a session the final decision for [eliminating] Konkur was held. [It was decided that] students can gain admission to 85 percent of the fields of studies at universities without needing to take part in the difficult exam and undergo intense stress, solely based on their educational backgrounds; farewell to Konkur,” minister Mohammad Bat'haei wrote on his twitter account in Persian.

The Iranian university entrance exam, is a standardized multiple choice test used as a means to gain admission to higher education in Iran. Students in the three main groups of mathematical sciences, experimental sciences, and human sciences and two other groups of arts and foreign languages will compete in an attempt to seek a place in one of the public universities after finishing the 12-year compulsory education.

As the number of seats at top public universities are limited the competition is usually cut-throat and the exam content is rigorous.

He further extended his gratitude to the Ministry of Science for their cooperation.

Abdolrasoul Emadi, an official with Education Ministry, also told ISNA news agency that as per a statute passed by the Ministry five years ago it was approved that 85 percent of the universities' admission capacity should be filled based on students' educa-



Students’ educational background plays the key role in gaining admission to the universities, so that after checking their backgrounds universities will either accept or reject students’ applications.

tional background since the year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019).

Capacity of institutions refer to the maximum number of students that an institution can absorb and sustain for quality education

available based on human and material resources.

Emadi went on to explain that this year is the first year that the law in being implemented.

Rouhani accepts health minister’s resignation, picks caretaker



SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — On Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani accepted Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi's resignation and named Saeed Namaki, deputy director of Budget and Planning Organization for scientific, cultural and social affairs, as the caretaker minister, IRNA news agency reported.

Qazizadeh-Hashemi who submitted his resignation to the cabinet last week formally bid farewell to his deputies and colleagues on December 31, 2018.

MP Elyas Hazrati tweeted on December 30 that Qazizadeh-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).

One of the main achievements of Qazizadeh-Hashemi was implementation of the healthcare reform plan.

The healthcare reform plan, aiming at decreasing the out-of-pocket expenses for the patients, promoting natural birth, and supporting underprivileged patients suffering from rare or incurable diseases, was launched in the country in May 2014.

The plan has since faced a barrage of harsh criticism for being futile and inefficient with regard to the resources diverted into implementing it.

However, in an interview with Persian language Sharq newspaper published in July 2017 Qazizadeh-Hashemi highlighted that healthcare reform plan's success justifies the expenses arising from its implementation.

Moreover, in the Iranian calendar month of Azar (November 22-December 12) he announced that 25 percent increase in the number of hospital beds compared to the years before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is result of healthcare reform plan enforcement.

Since 2014 some 27,000 beds are added to the hospitals, he added.

Moreover, deputy health minister Qasem Janbabaie said in August 2018 that in order to promote natural childbirth all the expenses for this kind of delivery is now covered by the ministry at state-run hospitals.

Namaki, the new caretaker minister, also said on Tuesday that he would also support healthcare reform plan, however, he noted that the budget proposed for the ministry for the next year is tight, ISNA news agency reported.

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.

UK shoppers get £30k using reverse vending machines for plastic bottles



Shoppers have earned the equivalent of more than £30,000 by recycling plastic bottles in the first supermarket trial using reverse vending machines to cut down on littering.

The scheme, introduced by the Iceland supermarket chain, rewards people with a voucher worth 10p for every deposit of a plastic bottle bought at the shop.

The trial involved the installation of a machine in four stores - in Wolverhampton, Mold, Fulham and Musselburgh - as well as Iceland's head office, in Deeside.

New figures show that 311,500 plastic bottles have been recycled since the scheme was rolled out in June.

The supermarket said children were “particularly engaged” with the bottle recycling scheme, and even taught and encouraged their parents to use the machines.

Richard Walker, Iceland's managing director, said: “Iceland has continually led the way in the fight against the scourge of plastic since making our announcement to eliminate plastic from our own-label product packaging. The launch of reverse vending machine trials in our stores is one sign of this.

“We’ve gained hugely valuable insights

Students will be informed about different fields of study they can major in without needing to participate in Konkur at different universities prior to the end of the current education year by referring to universities website and signing up for their desired major.

Sanjesh Organization (an institution in charge of coordinating and administrating Konkur) will soon announce the details of the new scheme and the aforesaid statute will be applied to all universities including the state run ones as well as the public ones, he added.

Students' educational background plays the key role in gaining admission to the universities, so that after checking their backgrounds universities will either accept or reject students' applications, Emadi highlighted.

The related guidelines for implementing the scheme have been already approved and will be soon announced to the public, he concluded.

The Iranian science minister, Mansour Gholami, announced in mid-December 2018 that Konkur, will be eliminated by the next three years.

He went on to say that the universities were required to come up with their own specific plans and guidelines for admission policies.

It is generally believed that private institutes which offer additional educational materials as well as extracurricular activities are the main obstacles to eliminate the exam as Konkur has become a highly profitable market for them.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

Iranian incubator manufactures amblyopia therapy device

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

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

تولید دستگاه درمان سریع تنبلی چشم در کشور

به گزارش روز شنبه خبرگزاری ایرنا دستگاه درمان سریع تنبلی چشم در یکی از مجموعه های مراکز رشد دانشگاه علوم پزشکی ایران ساخته شد.

مهدی زارع بیدکی روز مجری طرح دستگاه درمان سریع تنبلی چشم گفت: این دستگاه که به طور محدود در اختیار همکاران اپتومتریست قرار گرفته است باعث کاهش دوره درمان بیماری تنبلی چشم خواهد شد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“vita-”

■ **Meaning**: life or indispensable

■ **For example**: With few exceptions the body cannot manufacture **vitamins**.

PHRASAL VERB

Grind on

■ **Meaning**: to continue for an unpleasantly long time

■ **For example**: As the negotiations grind on, time is passing towards the deadline.

IDIOM

Nip something in the bud

■ **Explanation**: to prevent something from becoming a problem by stopping it as soon as it starts

Meaning: Try to nip this kind of bad behavior in the bud.

Assad will remain in power ‘for a while’: Jeremy Hunt

➡ This is the first time a British minister has spoken so frankly about the reality on the ground in the Arab country. President Assad’s seven-year term in office will end in 2021.

The Arab country has been infected by foreign-backed militancy since 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups wreaking havoc in the country.

In a bid to eliminate terrorists and liberate the militant-held areas, Russian warplanes have been carrying out air raids against targets belonging to Daesh and those of other terror outfits inside Syria at the Damascus government’s formal request since September 2015. The airstrikes have significantly helped Syrian forces advance against anti-Damascus militants.

The UK, just like some other Western countries, including the US, has in the past demanded that Assad step down, alleging that the Syrian leader has no legitimacy to rule after launching alleged attacks, including with chemical weapons. London’s allegations, however, have been strongly rejected by Damascus and Moscow.

The Syrian government has stressed on numerous occasions that it has not used and will not use chemical weapons against



its own people.

Elsewhere in his remarks during a three-day trip to Asia, Hunt said that Russia “gained a responsibility” in Syria in restoring peace “If you’re going to be involved in Syria then you need to make sure that there really is peace in Syria,” he said.

He also said that Russia was responsible to prevent any use of chemical weapons by

the Syrian government.

Western governments and their allies have never stopped pointing the finger at Damascus whenever an apparent chemical attack takes place.

Syria surrendered its entire chemical stockpile in 2013 to a mission led by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations.

Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump announced his unexpected decision to pull all 2,000 American troops out of the war-ravaged Arab country, adding that the withdrawal would be slow and gradual, without providing a timetable.

A U.S.-led military coalition of Washington’s allies, including the UK, has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus or a UN mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying Daesh.

The restoration of peace in much of Syria has prompted the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to reopen their diplomatic missions in the Arab country after several years of closure, marking a diplomatic boost for Assad from a U.S.-allied Arab state that once supported armed groups fighting him.

Last month, 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.

(Source: Press TV)

Abe says he plans to push for peace treaty with Russia

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday he intends to push forward towards a World War II peace treaty with Russia, which has been stymied for decades by a territorial row, during a summit in Russia later this month.

Abe, who has signalled he is keen to clinch a deal, will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in their 25th summit for discussions aimed at ending the disagreement over a group of windswept islands seized by Soviet troops in the final days of the war.

“I’ll visit Russia later this month and intend to push forward with discussions towards a peace treaty,” he told a news conference in the western city of Ise.

There had been “absolutely no progress” on the issue for more than 70 years, he said.

Abe said that, while there were no guarantees of an agreement, the two nations had been cooperating over issues concerning the islands, as well as economically, over the past two years “as never before”.

Putin caught Abe off guard in September when, on stage with the Japanese leader at a conference in Vladivostok, he suggested signing a peace treaty by year-end “without any pre-conditions”.

Abe later rejected the proposal, repeating Japan’s stance that the question of sovereignty must be settled first.

He told reporters after the two met again in Singapore in November they had agreed to speed up negotiations based on a 1956 joint statement in which Moscow agreed to transfer the two smaller islands to Japan after a peace treaty was concluded.

“We both do not want this to drag out into another generation,” Abe said on Friday.

Putin may be open to a deal now, expecting that better ties will act as a counter-balance to China and attract more Japanese investment and technology, some experts say.

Others doubt Putin really wants any agreement, partly because a majority of the Russian public is opposed to re-



turning any of the islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories and in Russia as the Southern Kurils.

(Source: Daily Star)

U.S. issues China travel advisory amid increased tensions

The U.S. State Department renewed its warning for U.S. citizens traveling in China to exercise increased caution due to “arbitrary enforcement of local laws” amid heightened diplomatic tensions over the arrest in Canada of a Chinese technology company executive.

The updated travel advisory maintains the warning at “Level 2” but also warns about extra security checks and increased police presence in the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions.

The advisory follows the detentions by Chinese authorities in December of Canadians Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat

and an adviser with the International Crisis Group (ICG) think-tank, and businessman Michael Spavor. China says both men were suspected of endangering state security.

Tensions with China increased after Canadian police arrested Huawei Technologies Co Ltd’s chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, on Dec. 1 in Vancouver at the request of the United States.

U.S. prosecutors have accused her of misleading banks about transactions, putting the banks at risk of violating U.S. sanctions.

Earlier on Thursday, China’s top prosecutor said the two Canadians had “without

a doubt” violated the law.

In its previous travel advisory for China issued on Jan. 22 last year, the State Department urged Americans to “exercise increased caution” in the country because of “the arbitrary enforcement of local laws and special restrictions on dual U.S.-Chinese nationals.”

The latest advisory repeats that warning but adds: “Extra security measures, such as security checks and increased levels of police presence, are common in the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions. Authorities may impose curfews and travel restrictions

on short notice.”

The advisory also warns about China’s use of “exit bans” that would prohibit U.S. citizens from leaving the country, sometimes keeping them in China for years.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang told a regular news briefing in Beijing on Friday that China always welcomes foreigners, including Americans, but expects them to respect and abide by Chinese law.

“The U.S. side’s issuance of this travel advisory frankly does not hold water,” Lu said.

(Source: Reuters)

British navy joins patrol for Channel migrant dinghies

A British navy ship was patrolling the Channel Friday in response to a wave of mostly Iranian asylum seekers risking the crossing from France in dinghies.

HMS Mersey is filling the gap until two Border Force cutters return from the European Union’s Mediterranean migrant crossings mission.

Her Majesty’s Ship Mersey, an offshore patrol vessel with a crew of around 45, left the Channel port of Portsmouth Thursday.

Attempts to get to Britain by crossing the world’s busiest shipping lane in tiny craft have surged in the last three months, with numbers spiking over the Christmas holidays.

“HMS Mersey will deploy to the Dover Straits to assist the U.K. Border Force and French authorities with their response to migrant crossings,” said Britain’s Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson.

“The crew have been able to immediately divert from routine operations to help prevent migrants from making the dangerous journey across the Channel.”



The navy ship will help “keep the UK border secure and prevent loss of life”, the Home Office interior ministry said. Two coastal patrol vessels and two Border Force cutters are already deployed in the Channel.

May’s party opposes her Brexit deal as economy slows

British Prime Minister Theresa May’s bid to push her Brexit plans through parliament was dealt another blow on Friday when a survey showed most of her own party’s members oppose the agreement and would prefer to leave the EU without a deal.

If lawmakers do not approve the deal, the world’s fifth largest economy is on course to leave the European Union on March 29 without one, a nightmare scenario for many big businesses who fear disruption to trade.

May needs 318 votes to get the deal she struck with Brussels in November through parliament, yet 117 of her Conservative Party’s 317 lawmakers voted against her in a confidence vote on Dec. 12.

That means that, unless she gains the support of some of the 257 lawmakers in the opposition Labour Party - which has said it will not back the deal - she will need to win over swathes of her own party.

Friday’s YouGov survey offered a snapshot

of the challenge she faces.

Of 1,215 of the Conservative Party’s rank-and-file members questioned by the pollster, 59 percent opposed May’s deal and 76 percent said warnings over the risks of disruption in the event of a no-deal were “exaggerated or invented”. The British economy is showing clear signs of slowing with house prices taking a hit, services companies reporting crisis-like pessimism and lending to British consumers grew at its slowest pace in nearly four years.

The pound, which sank to its lowest since April 2017 on Thursday, rose against the dollar to \$1.2670.

Just 38 percent of those polled by YouGov said they supported May’s deal.

“Grassroots Tories (Conservatives) are even less impressed than Tory Members of Parliament (MPs),” said Tim Bale, Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University of London, who helps run a study of British political party membership which commis-

sioned the survey.

■ No deal BREXIT?

Facing defeat in parliament last month, May postponed a vote on the deal and pledged to seek further legal and political assurances from the other 27 members of the EU, which has signaled it could try to allay rebel’s fears but will not reopen negotiations.

The parliamentary vote is now due to take place the week of Jan. 14 and if May’s bid to push her deal fails, the United Kingdom will either leave without a deal or have to delay Brexit.

Pro-Europeans fear Britain’s exit will weaken the West as it grapples with Donald Trump’s unpredictable U.S. presidency and growing assertiveness from Russia and China. It weakens Europe’s economy and removes one of its only two nuclear powers.

Brexit supporters say while there may be some short-term disruption, in the long-term the UK will thrive outside what they cast as a doomed experiment in German-dominated unity and

excessive debt-funded welfare spending.

May is seeking assurances from the EU over the Irish ‘backstop’, an insurance policy to avoid a hard border between the British province and EU-member Ireland, which remains the main obstacle to securing the backing of parliament.

The DUP, the Northern Irish party that props up May’s government, said on Friday that it would not support her Brexit deal but that businesses should be relaxed about leaving the EU without an agreement.

With the future path of Brexit still uncertain two and a half years after the 2016 referendum, the British economy was slowing.

Growth slowed to a crawl at the end of 2018, according to a IHS Markit/CIPS UK Services Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI), showing optimism among services companies has sunk to levels typical of the global financial crisis.

(Source: Reuters)

Israeli flag trampling spreads in Jordan; Sisi faces fallout

Jordan’s Professional Unions Association has decided to place the Israeli flag in the entrances to all its buildings, following Tel Aviv’s protest at photos of a Jordanian minister stepping on the regime’s flag.



A man leaving a trade union complex in the Jordanian capital Amman steps on the image of an Israeli flag on December 30, 2018. (Photo by AFP)

Jordan’s Professional Unions Association will place the Israeli flag at the entrance to its offices throughout the Kingdom so that those entering will have to step on it, media reports in Jordan said.

The Unions Association chief Ibrahim Tarawneh ratified the decision. The London-based Rai al-Youm newspaper said the decision was reached following public discourse on the issue.

It was made in condemnation of Israel’s continued occupation of the Palestinian territories and in response to a complaint Israel submitted to Jordan’s Foreign Ministry on the matter, it said.

On Sunday, the Israeli regime said it had filed a strong condemnation with the Jordanian government over the photo of Jordanian Information Minister Jumana Ghunaimat stepping on the Israeli flag in the engineers’ union building in Amman, which it described as an “act of disrespect.”

Jordan said in response to Israel’s complaint that the building was privately owned and that the government could not intervene in the matter.

Jordan’s Professional Unions Association is known for opposing peace accords with Israel and is an important leader in public opinion.

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

Relations have often been frosty amid differences over Israeli policies in Jerusalem al-Quds, where Jordan is custodian over Muslim sites, and toward the Palestinians.

Egypt’s ‘closest’ military ties with Israel

With the fresh controversy brewing between Amman and Tel Aviv, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi told CBS News that military cooperation with Israel has reached unprecedented levels.

Sisi made the controversial remarks in an interview due to be broadcast Sunday, but the US news outlet said the Egyptian government has demanded that CBS not air it.

Asked whether cooperation between the regimes could be described as the “closest ever,” Sisi said: “That is correct.”

“We have a wide range of cooperation with the Israelis,” he added.

CBS said on Thursday that it had rejected Egypt’s demands and will air the interview on 6 January.

“The 60 Minutes team was contacted by the Egyptian ambassador shortly after [the interview] and told the interview could not be aired,” CBS said on its website, where it shared a short excerpt of the interview.

The news outlet described it as “the interview Egypt’s government doesn’t want you to see”.

Sisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have reportedly been working to persuade other Arab leaders to establish close trade ties with Israel.

Last year, Israel signed a multi-billion-dollar deal with Egypt to supply natural gas to the northeast African country over a span of ten years.

Relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv have improved since Sisi toppled Egypt’s first democratically-elected president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

Cairo has also been accused of acting as Israel’s proxy in maintaining Tel Aviv’s years-long blockade on the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip.

(Source: Press TV)

Knifeman goes on Sydney bumper car rampage before killing himself

An Australian man rammed his four-wheel drive into a Sydney police car, hijacked a supermarket delivery truck and taxi, rammed other cars and stabbed and wounded a passerby before killing himself in front of police Friday.

The dramatic chain of events, which police said was not terror-related, began when police tried to pull over the four-wheel drive for not displaying license plates.

The driver rammed the police car, dumped the four-wheel drive and hijacked a supermarket delivery truck about 7 km away, then continued across town for another 20 km to a suburb near the airport, hitting several cars along the way.

The driver, 24, tried to steal another car, stabbing a passerby who tried to stop him, before stealing a taxi. Police finally stopped the attacker in the taxi and tried to Taser him, but the man stabbed himself in the chest and died at the scene.

“The offender wasn’t trying to intentionally harm people,” Acting Assistant Commissioner Mick Fitzgerald told reporters in Sydney.

“It was a man who was attempting to do everything he could to avoid arrest. His actions, in particular the actions when he stabbed the innocent person, [are] the actions of a person who we believe had mental health problems.”

Police did not identify the attacker or give further details. Fitzgerald said the man was known to police and did not have a significant criminal history.

Footage circulated on social media showed a man in a beige shirt and cap gesturing for a taxi driver to get out of his car, then getting in and driving the red taxi away.

The Australian Associated Press quoted a tradesman who witnessed the first stabbing, Chris Burton, as saying the attacker looked “crazy and frazzled”.

(Source: Reuters)

Sharapova suffers injury blow ahead of Australian Open

Former world number one Maria Sharapova's Australian Open preparations suffered a blow after a thigh injury forced her to retire from the Shenzhen Open quarter-final clash against Aryna Sabalenka on Friday.

Sharapova struggled to move on court and conceded the opening set 6-1, with coach Thomas Hogstedt urging the Russian to take her game to the next level or call for a medical timeout.

"If you feel more like you did on the first point, then you just stop. Or you take a medical now," he said. "But the shots are there... you have to get it up to another gear."

After receiving treatment off-court between sets, Sharapova sprinted out of the blocks to record a service hold and then pushed Sabalenka in the next game, creating three break point opportunities. Sabalenka, however, turned things around to move 4-2 ahead before her Russian opponent found herself unable to continue and retired from the match.

Sharapova, who won the Australian Open in 2008, tasted Tianjin Open success in 2017 after a 15-month doping suspension but has endured a difficult run at the Grand Slams.

A quarter-final appearance at the French Open last year gave reasons for optimism but early exits at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open showed her game lacked the sharpness to compete at the highest level.

World number 13 Sabalenka will face the winner between Romanian qualifier Monica Niculescu and China's Wang Yafan for a spot in the Shenzhen final.

The Australian Open begins in Melbourne on Jan. 14. *(Source: Reuters)*

Tottenham extend Alderweireld's contract until 2020

Tottenham Hotspur have extended defender Toby Alderweireld's contract until 2020, the Premier League club said on Friday.

The Belgium international's deal was set to expire at the end of the current season after which the 29-year-old centre back would have been able to leave the club for free in the close season.

"The club can confirm that we have activated the option to extend Toby Alderweireld's contract until 2020," Tottenham said in a statement. Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino had confirmed in December that the club was looking to activate the one-year extension in his contract.

Alderweireld has made 135 appearances for Tottenham across all competitions since signing from Spanish side Atletico Madrid in 2015 for a reported fee of 11.4 million pounds.

He had been linked with a move away from the club prior to the 2018-19 season when British media had reported that Manchester United were interested in securing his services.

A hamstring injury had limited Alderweireld to only 14 Premier League starts last season but he has featured more prominently this season, making 19 starts so far.

(Source: Mirror)

Bale 'nowhere near' being Madrid's leader, says Mijatovic

Former Real Madrid striker Predrag Mijatovic criticised Gareth Bale for lacking leadership qualities and hit out at coach Santiago Solari after the club's La Liga title ambitions were dented by Thursday's 2-2 draw at Villarreal.

Real's record signing Bale had to be substituted at halftime after a knock when his side were 2-1 up and Solari later took off playmaker Luka Modric, who had been ill with flu in the build-up to the game. Veteran midfielder Santi Cazorla then scored for the second time in the game by heading in an equaliser with eight minutes remaining, leaving Madrid in fourth place in the standings and seven points adrift of leaders Barcelona.

"What keeps happening with Bale is a real shame. I like him a lot as a player but he is nowhere near being the leader of the team after Cristiano Ronaldo left," Mijatovic told Spanish radio station Cadena Ser.

"It's worrying that he gets injured so often."

Bale, who has scored only four goals in the league this season, has been injured over 20 times since his 105 million euro signing from Tottenham Hotspur in 2013.

Although he has not suffered any serious injuries this campaign, he has been substituted 15 times in all competitions, sparking concerns about his ability to last 90 minutes.

Mijatovic, scorer of the goal which won the 1998 Champions League final for Madrid over Juventus, also criticised Real coach Solari for removing Modric and said he has not enjoyed watching his former side this season. "If a player starts a game and feels good and doesn't ask to be substituted, I can't understand why you would take him off. He made a big mistake by taking off Modric," he said.

(Source: Eurosport)

Pochettino: Spurs would sack me for only winning cups

Mauricio Pochettino believes he would have been sacked by now if he had delivered domestic cups at Tottenham instead of top-four finishes -- and he says his ambition is to win the Premier League and Champions League with the club.

Spurs have not won silverware since 2008. But, as they prepare to begin their FA Cup campaign at Tranmere on Friday, Pochettino feels their status in the top flight and Europe outweighs the emptiness of the trophy cabinet, and that they should be targeting the top prizes.

"If it's only the objective to win the Carabao Cup and be in the middle of the table in the Premier League, I think today we're not talking how we're talking here," Pochettino said. "I think I [would have been] sacked a few years ago, for sure, with two or three Carabao Cups or FA Cups.

"If you don't finish how we've finished in the last three seasons [but win] the FA Cup, I don't know if Daniel [Levy, the chairman] would have too much patience with me or is very nice and says, 'OK you're 10th in the Premier League, I keep you and even give you a new contract.' I don't believe that.

(Source: Soccernet)

Why history is with Liverpool in thrilling English Premier League title race

The English Premier League title race caught fire Thursday after Manchester City beat Liverpool 2-1 to reduce the Reds' lead at the top of the table to four points.

Victory for Jurgen Klopp's men would have put the league leaders 10 points ahead of the defending champions and hot favorites to clinch the club's first league title for 29 years.

But though the finishing line will now feel a long way off for Liverpool's players, and fans, there are plenty of reasons, specifically statistics, to suggest that this is the season the Merseyside club will win a first EPL title.

■ Stats and more stats

First, to the most startling statistic of all. To over a century of convention.

Only once has an English club reached the new year unbeaten and not won the top division -- Sheffield United in the 1899-1900 season -- and no team in Premier League history has been seven points clear on New Year's Day (as Liverpool was) and failed to win the title.

For Liverpool fans starting to feel hot under the collar after their team's first league loss of the season, there's more.

Liverpool's haul of 54 points is the club's best return at the turn of the year in any season -- and the third-best by any side in top-flight history. Indeed, Liverpool is the first team to win all seven EPL games in December, a congested month in English football.

The stars are aligned, it seems. Or are they?

In eight of the past 10 EPL seasons, the leader on December 25 has gone on to win the title. The exceptions being, yes, you guessed



it, Liverpool in 2008-09 and 2013-14.

But Klopp's side is different to the coruscating team of 2013-14 which was led by the brilliant Luis Suarez. The Reds have already kept more clean sheets this season than they did in the entire campaign under Brendan Rodgers four years ago, when City ripped the crown from their grasp.

Indeed, in that swashbuckling 2013-14 season Liverpool had conceded 50 goals --

just 10 goals have been shipped so far in this more measured campaign.

On paper, Liverpool has a favorable fixture list in January -- Brighton, Crystal Palace and Leicester -- but the Reds have lost 10 of 25 matches in all competitions under Klopp in the first month of the year which, according to Opta, makes up 29% of the German's defeats as Liverpool boss. Ominous?

Statistics aren't everything, however.

Stephen Curry : 'You don't lose at home' with 20-pt. lead



After blowing a 20-point second-half lead and watching James Harden hit an "impossible" game-winning 3-pointer, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson felt the Golden State Warriors gave away a 135-134 overtime loss to the Houston Rockets on Thursday.

"For sure," Curry said. "You have a lead like that, you don't lose at home."

"Slow rotations or just a little laziness with that lead," Curry added. "But you have a lead like that, it's a tough way to go out."

The problem for the Warriors is they now have lost three straight games at home, with the past two coming on extremely difficult game-winning 3-pointers in overtime to follow a blowout loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Christmas Day.

A week ago, the Portland Trail Blazers' Damian Lillard made a 26-foot 3-pointer before falling down along the right side to lift his team to a 110-109 overtime win at Oracle Arena. This time, the Warriors watched Harden drill a 29-foot 3-pointer -- which Warriors coach Steve Kerr described as an "impossible shot" -- over Thompson and Draymond Green with 2.7 seconds left.

Harden's shot capped a scintillating performance that saw the reigning MVP

finish with 44 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds. Kevin Durant (26 points) missed a 3-pointer at the end.

"I do feel we did," Thompson said when asked whether the Warriors gave this latest home loss away. "I don't think we played with that killer instinct in that second half. I think we relaxed being up."

Golden State (25-14) led 73-53 with 11:14 remaining in the third quarter. The Warriors looked like their old selves in the first half, when they made 63.6 percent of their shots, including 7 of 15 3-pointers, to carry a 70-53 lead into intermission.

But that 17-point halftime cushion would end up being the largest halftime lead the Warriors would blow since Jan. 20, 2007, as Harden scored 13 points in the third quarter. For the Warriors, this continues their head-scratching uneven play the past two months. Since an 11-2 start, the Warriors are 14-12 after injuries to Curry and Green and drama between Green and Durant.

"I'm not sure, but we'll stay the course and get back to doing what we do," Thompson said of why the Warriors have not been able to play a complete game.

(Source: ESPN)

Man City welcome Liverpool chase, says Bernardo Silva



Bernardo Silva says Manchester City will welcome the pressure of chasing down Liverpool after beating their rivals to revive the Premier League title race.

Champions City moved within four points of the Premier League leaders with a tense 2-1 win over the Reds in a frantic clash they could not afford to lose on Thursday.

Liverpool had arrived at the Etihad Stadium unbeaten and on a run of nine successive league wins but City are now firmly back in the picture and Silva is relishing the challenge.

"We knew that if we lost it would almost be over because 10 points is a lot," said the Portuguese.

"Now four points we believe it is possible, knowing the Premier League is a very tough competition. The pressure was a little bit more onto us. We are happy with that, it is good. We are used to that kind of pressure.

"Happily the performance from everyone was good and we got three very important points against a fantastic team."

The pace of the game was unrelenting but City prevailed thanks to superbly tak-

en goals from Sergio Aguero and Leroy Sane either side of a Roberto Firmino equaliser.

"I think it was very good game," said Silva. "Both teams were very intense, wanted to try to play football and win the game. Happily we won it."

City now appear to be back on track after three defeats in four league games in December but the title race now takes a back seat to domestic knockout football.

City host Rotherham in the third round of the FA Cup on Sunday before Burton visit the Etihad for the first leg of their League Cup semi-final on Wednesday.

City are next in Premier League action when they host Wolves on January 14.

"Obviously when you win against the team that is top of the league it means a lot, for the confidence it is always good to beat them," Silva said.

"But it is just a game. If we lose the next one this doesn't mean anything. On to the next one and try to keep playing the same way as we have the last two games and try to not let happen what happened to us a few weeks back."

(Source: CNN)

Solskjaer says no talks yet on long-term Man Utd future

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has not yet spoken to Manchester United bosses about extending his stay at Old Trafford beyond the end of the season despite a perfect start to his reign.

The Norwegian former striker has won his first four Premier League matches as United manager -- a record that only former boss Matt Busby can match.

He made clear after the victory at Newcastle this week that he would love to stay in the job beyond the summer, when his loan from Norwegian club Molde is set to expire, but said on Friday that he had not spoken to executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward about that.

"It's early days," said Solskjaer. "When I came in they were open and honest. They have a process to look for the next manager but the more you're here the more you enjoy it."

"It's one game at a time, though, and the day they announce the next manager, if it's me or someone else, then good luck to them."

Solskjaer added that, because of his interim status, he would have only a limited say in United's January transfer activity.

He said he was happy with the squad as it stands and that there was no urgent need to add to it.

"The club's probably had a plan," he said. "You don't just plan the next day and next month. This transfer window has



probably been planned since the summer and the year before.

"The structure here is phenomenal, I'm sure they've got their targets. I'm here to voice my opinion on that and I'm sure we'll sit down, me and Ed, if we've got anything in the pipeline.

"I'm here to work with the ones I've got. They've all performed and as long as they perform, they should get a chance.

But that's my job, to improve players and individuals."

Solskjaer is focusing on FA Cup progress against Reading, who are second from bottom of the Championship.

The Norwegian won the trophy in 1999 and 2004 as a player with United, and is keen to succeed in the competition as a manager.

Paul Pogba is likely to miss the third-round home tie on Saturday with a minor injury.

The France midfielder suffered a knock during Wednesday's 2-0 Premier League victory at Newcastle, having been on the receiving end of a robust challenge by Jonjo Shelvey.

Romelu Lukaku, a scoring substitute in United's past two matches, is likely to be given his first start since Solskjaer replaced Jose Mourinho last month and Alexis Sanchez is also set for his first start since November 7.

"I'm not sure if Paul's going to be ready," said Solskjaer. "He got a knock against Newcastle. If (Marouane) Fellaini gets through the session today, it's more or less a full squad.

"Definitely, there'll be a few changes and they'll get a chance. Some of them are itching now to play of course. It's a chance to get Lukaku and Sanchez a start. That's important for them because they need more game time."

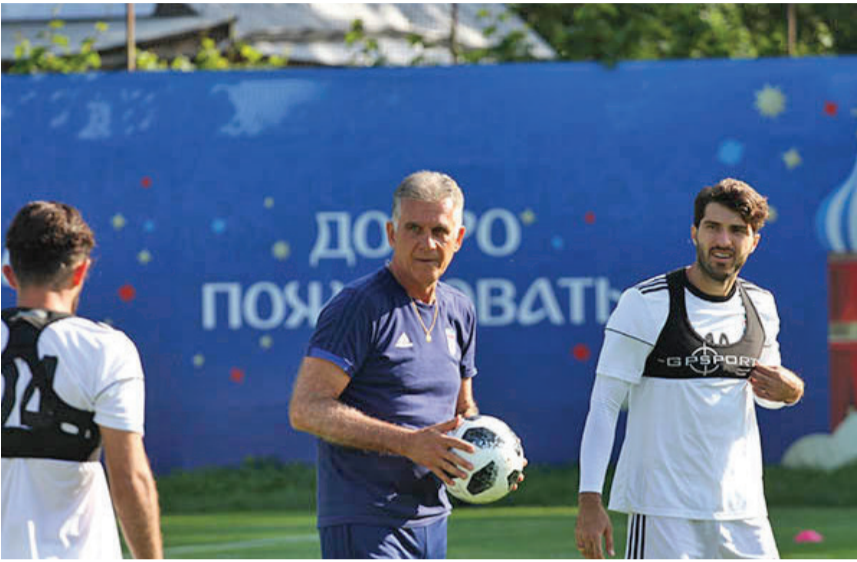
(Source: France 24)

Blasts from the past - the Asian Cup's veteran coaches

S P O R T S Ahead of the Asian Cup's opening game on Saturday, here are five well-travelled coaches looking to add to their list of honors:

■ **Hector Cuper, Uzbekistan**
Cuper is now in the 15th job of a coaching career that has spanned 25 years. The Argentine's long CV includes spells as boss of Valencia (1999-2001) and Inter Milan (2001-2003), although trophy-wise he has only two Spanish Super Cups -- with Valencia and Mallorca -- to show for it. Cuper inspired Egypt to the final of the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations but his reputation took a hit after his side lost all three of their group games at the World Cup in Russia. In mitigation, star forward Mohamed Salah was never fully fit. Now 63, Cuper subsequently left the Egypt post and has had an unremarkable start in charge of Uzbekistan, winning two matches, losing two and drawing two.

■ **Sven-Goran Eriksson, Philippines**
Much-travelled, often maligned but always affable, the globe-trotting 70-year-old Swede's latest outpost is a tropical archipelago that came calling after former England captain Terry Butcher walked out.
Eriksson's storied career has seen him manage some of Europe's top clubs including Benfica, Roma, Lazio and Manchester City, as well as the national teams of Mexico, Ivory Coast and England -- guiding the Three Lions to two World Cup quarter-finals in 2002 and 2006. Eriksson began his reign with the Azkals by reaching the semi-finals of the AFF



Suzuki Cup, where they were edged 2-1 by Vietnam. He will face a much tougher task just to emerge from Group C in the UAE, where the Philippines will tackle favourites South Korea, China and Kyrgyzstan.

■ **Marcello Lippi, China**
The celebrated Italian led his country to World Cup glory in 2006, but he will need a miracle to lift the Asian Cup with China. The 70-year-old, reportedly one of the best-paid coaches in world football, looks set to leave his post after the tournament. Lippi has a mixed record since taking over

the Chinese national side in October 2016. The team enjoyed an initial bounce, but their hopes of reaching last year's World Cup were already all but over. It has been a difficult past 12 months, with China failing to score regularly under Lippi and winning just once in their last seven matches. In their final warm-up games, held in Qatar last month, China lost to Iraq and were held by Jordan.

■ **Carlos Queiroz, Iran**
The 65-year-old Portuguese is perhaps best known for being Alex Ferguson's assistant in

two stints at Manchester United. His work in his first spell at Old Trafford grabbed the attention of Real Madrid in 2003, but Queiroz lasted only one season at the Bernabeu when he won the Spanish Super Cup with a squad of "galacticos". He took charge of Portugal for a second time in 2008-2010, guiding them to the last 16 of the World Cup in South Africa before being knocked out by eventual winners Spain. Queiroz took over Iran -- one of the favourites to win the Asian Cup -- in 2011. His team won plaudits at the World Cup last summer in Russia, but narrowly failed to make the knockout stages after being drawn in a tough group containing Spain and Portugal.

■ **Alberto Zaccheroni, UAE**
The Italian can boast a league title in his home country after triumphing in 1999 with an AC Milan side containing Paolo Maldini, George Weah, Leonardo and Oliver Bierhoff. The 65-year-old also knows how to win the Asian Cup -- he took Japan to their fourth title in 2011. But a repeat with hosts UAE, who have never won it, would be a greater feat. Zaccheroni, who has also coached Juventus, Inter Milan and Lazio, has failed to convince for the UAE and as recently as September his position was reportedly under severe threat because of poor results and claims of dressing-room disquiet. He clung on, but the UAE's results remain a real concern for home fans, with a shock 2-0 loss to 158th-ranked Kuwait in their final warm-up.

(Source: AFP)



Persepolis, Bayern Munich, PSG to hold camp in Aspire Academy

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team of Iran will hold a winter training camp at the Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) in Doha, Qatar.

AZF is gearing up to host comprehensive football training camps for a number of world-class teams during the northern hemisphere's winter.

During this year's training camp season, AZF has announced that it will host 10 international football teams, all of whom are eager to benefit from its world class training, accommodation and entertainment facilities.

Persepolis are scheduled to hold training camp from January 9-19, Bayern Munich from January 4-10, Holland's Eindhoven from January 4-12, Belgium's Club Brugge from

January 5-12, Kas Eupen from January 8-13 and Paris Saint-Germain from January 13 -- 17.

Another Iranian football team Esteghlal will hold a training camp at the Al-Sadd Sports Club from January 6 to 20.

Commenting on the training camps this year, Ibrahim Hilal, Head of Federation and Teams Affairs at AZF, said: "AZF's unique trio of Aspire Academy, Aspetar and Aspire Logistics offer world-class outdoor and indoor facilities combined with sports science and sports medicine expertise. This convenient structure ensures everything is readily available for visiting athletes, who return to Aspire Zone Foundation's training camps year after year."

Qatari Asian Cup organizer arrives in UAE after flight hiatus

DOHA (Reuters) — A Qatari official who helped organize football's Asian Cup arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Friday, after sources said he was earlier stopped from flying there to attend the tournament.

Saoud Al-Mohannadi chaired the organizing committee for the competition, which starts on Saturday, and is vice president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

A Qatari official told Reuters that Mohannadi was on Thursday stopped from boarding an Oman Air flight to Abu Dhabi from Muscat. He was told by the airline that his name was not on a list held at Abu Dhabi airport, another source said.

An AFC spokesman said Mohannadi had arrived in Abu Dhabi on Friday. It was not immediately clear which route he had taken.

Other than in special circumstances, Qataris have been prevented from entering United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt since the four countries launched a diplomatic and trade boycott of Qatar in June 2017.

They accuse Qatar of supporting terrorism, a charge that Doha denies.

Qatar will host the 2022 World Cup, which football's global governing body FIFA hopes

to expand to 48 teams from 32, suggesting the country could share hosting duties with neighboring Gulf states.

Qatar has said it will only decide on any expansion of the World Cup after seeing a FIFA feasibility study expected by March.

The AFC is one of six continental football confederations that make up FIFA.

The Asian Cup is held every four years and the 2019 edition runs until Feb. 1.

Son Heung-min named best footballer in Asia, Beiranvand comes third

Tottenham and Korea Republic star Son Heung-min has been named the Best Footballer in Asia 2018 by Titan Sports and Fox Sports Asia.

Son ended the year as one of the best performers in the world's most popular league, winning the goal of the month in November with a sumptuous strike against Chelsea.

The year ended in England and also the UEFA Champions League as is started for the Korean: with Son playing well and simply reinforcing his status as a very, very good player.

In second place is one of the most experienced names in Asian football history.

Makoto Hasebe has been one of the most consistent performers that the continent has ever produced whether it be for club or country.

Iran and Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand came third in the list. He has had what could almost



be described as a perfect year. The Persepolis No. 1 has been a colossus and was between the sticks as the Tehran titans powered their way to the final of the AFC Champions League.

He proved his worth with a string of fine performances though in the end, Kashima Antlers were just a little too good and took the trophy.

But it was at the World Cup where he really made headlines and not just for a fascinating backstory and a long throw of legendary proportions.

The 26-year-old impressed in Russia as Iran came so close to getting out of perhaps the toughest group in the tournament and pushed Spain and Portugal all the way.

Such performances on the continental and global stages have been recognized by a succession of jurors based in various Asian nations.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Preview: Zaccheroni confident of UAE's chances

Head coach Alberto Zaccheroni has declared that the United Arab Emirates are primed and ready to go ahead of the host nation's opening AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 game against Bahrain on Saturday.

Four years on from a third-place finish in Australia, Zaccheroni's charges prepare to face their regional rivals looking to repeat the country's famous run to the 1996 final when they narrowly lost on penalties to Saudi Arabia.

With excitement building ahead of the tournament's first fixture, the Italian tactician believes the absence of influential midfielder Omar Abdulrahman and an injury doubt over defender Ismail Ahmed will not prove decisive as the Emiratis look to underline their current title ambitions and secure an immediate advantage in an intriguing Group A that also includes India and Thailand.

"We have been waiting for this competition to come along and we will undoubtedly strive to put in an outstanding performance," said Zaccheroni who oversaw Japan's Asian Cup triumph in 2011.



"The UAE team has prepared very well. We have trained both inside and outside the UAE, and we have received all the support that we needed in the build-up to the competition.

"There have been some injuries, but we firmly believe that these issues will not be an obstacle during the competition and we are aiming to make a good start against Bahrain."

Although confident of his side's chances at the Continental extravaganza, Zaccheroni is adamant that there will be a fine line between success and failure at an expanded tournament which will feature 24 teams for the first time.

"Ever since the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and indeed since the 2011 AFC Asian Cup,

we have seen a distinct improvement in both the fitness and the tactics of sides throughout Asia," he said.

"The national teams in Asia have improved, and as a result I think here in the UAE we will see a distinct balance in the quality of the teams.

"I believe the AFC Asian Cup winners will emerge victorious because of small details."

Zaccheroni's belief that there will little or no room for mistakes given the quality sure to be on show in the UAE, was endorsed by captain Ismail Matar who is set to participate in his fourth AFC Asian Cup.

"All the teams at this Asian Cup have exactly the same chance to win the title as they are equally strong sides," explained the 35-year-old Al Wahda forward.

"In football we have learned that all sides have the same chance, but we hope we can play well and do even better than we did the last time we hosted the tournament in 1996. We are absolutely prepared for the Bahrain game."

(Source: the-afc)

Rahman shortlisted for 'Best Powerlifter of 2018'



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian two-time Paralympic gold medalist Siamand Rahman has been shortlisted for the 'Best Powerlifter of 2018' following the four Regional Championships.

The public can now vote for their winner on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram of World Para Powerlifting.

The powerlifter with the most combined votes across all social media pages will be the winner.

Rahman was named the "Best Asian-Oceanian Powerlifter" after comfortably winning the men's over 107kg with a 285kg lift at Kitakyushu 2018.

He will vie with Jhon Castaneda (Colombia), Mariana Shevchuk (Ukraine) and Sherif Osman (Egypt).

Individuals can vote until 12:00 (CEST) on January 9 for the powerlifter they want to be the 'Best of 2018.'

Japan international Gen Shoji signs for Toulouse

French Ligue 1 club Toulouse said Friday they had signed Japan international Gen Shoji for an undisclosed sum until June 2022.

The central defender who helped Japan reach the knock-out stages of the 2018 World Cup joins the French club from Japanese champions Kashima Antlers.

Sources close to the deal said the transfer fee was around three million euros for the 26-year-old who was part of the Kashima side that won the Asian Champions League for the first time in November.

"He has an impressive record, with the Japanese treble (league, cup and super cup in 2016) and he also helped his country reach the last 16 of the World Cup," Toulouse said on its website.

Farhad Majidi added to Esteghlal coaching staff

TEHRAN — Iran's Esteghlal legendary striker Farhad Majidi has been added to the club's coaching staff on Friday.

Majidi has already worked with Esteghlal current coach Winfried Schaefer in Al Ahli of the UAE.

Majidi will accompany Esteghlal in its training camp in Qatar which will start from January 6.

"I selected Farhad, a man I know for a long time. We won a title in the UAE and I believe we'll work successfully in Esteghlal too. The president and I are still try to attract new players. I hope soon I'll be able to share more positive news," Schaefer posted on his Instagram account.

Esteghlal's two-week training camp will likely be held at the Al-Sadd Sports Club.

The Blues will start the IPL season second half with a match against Paykan on February 3.

Minister: Team Melli can win Asian Cup

IRNA — Minister of Sports and Youth says given the all-out support provided by the federation of football and the Ministry of Sports for the national team, Iran can become champion of Asia after 42 years.

Pointing out that for Iran's sport 2018 was a successful year in the wake of many events, Masoud Soltanifar said the year started with the Russian 2018 World Cup, and the national team was able to get historical results from the hard group.

Many at that time thought that the national team could not stand against the world champion, the European champion and African champion, but players retained the reputation and dignity of the country.

The Minister of Sport and Youth then pointed to the situation of the national football team on the eve of the Asian Cup and stated, "Of course, at this point, our national team is in good condition in Asia, and with the good players and technical staff who are present in the team and considering the all-out support from the federation and the sports ministry, we can again win the trophy after 42 years."

Haddadi continuing to shine in China Basketball League

IRNA — The Iranian star of the Chinese Xinjiang Basketball team is approaching to his best days and shines in every match for its team helping it to win.

Xinjiang basketball team continues to beat its opponents with Iranian star Hamed Haddadi's sparkle. The team went on to face with Guangzhou in the Chinese league, defeating 100 to 89.

Hamed Haddadi, like previous matches, still sparkled for his team. He played for 30 minutes in the game, recording 12 points, 16 rebounds, 1 pass, one pass leading to goals and played a big part in his team's win. Haddadi was also the best rebounding player in the match and managed to show his abilities to the opponents.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
» www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who adopts cupidity as motto in life will be disliked by people, and he who reveals his distress, abases himself before all, and he who is ruled by his tongue has no worth in his own eyes and those of others.

Imam Ali (AS)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Hassan Ruholamin is underway at the Niavaran Cultural Center. The exhibit named "The Truth Is with Ali" will run until January 10 at the center located on Pasdaran Ave. in the Niavaran neighborhood.

■ Paintings by Ali Nedai are currently on display in an exhibition at Atbin Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Myth in the Mist" runs until January 15 at the gallery located at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vall-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.

■ Yaqub Emdadian, Reza Emadi, Hossein Hassanizadeh, Arman Yaqubpur and several other artists are displaying their latest paintings in an exhibition at Shalman Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Darisan" will run until January 9 at the gallery located at 27 Kavusi Alley, West Rudbar St., off Mirdamad Blvd.

■ A collection of paintings by Arezu Honarvar is on display in an exhibition at Atashzad Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Dance of Colors" will be running until January 8 at the gallery located at 3 North Abbaspur (Tavanir) St. near Vanak Sq.

■ Emkan Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Ali Golestaneh.

Entitled "Thirteen Landscapes", the exhibit will be running until January 14 at the gallery that can be found at No. 3, Second Alley, Mirza Shirazi St.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Alireza Puya is currently underway at Seyhun Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until January 16 at the gallery, which can be found at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.

Multimedia

■ Sets of installation and a collection of paintings by Maryam Hosseinkhani are on view in an exhibition at Vista Gallery.

The exhibition titled "My Encasements" will run until January 14 at the gallery located at No. 11, 12th Alley, Mir Emad St.

■ A group of artists, including Fatemeh Afshari, Maral Qandili, Ali Shiri, Mehrdad Karimi, Sadeq Hemmati and Farid Bayan, is showcasing their paintings, photos and installations in an exhibition at A Gallery.

The exhibit named "In Parenthesis" runs until January 14 at the gallery located at 7 Arshad Alley, off Azodi St., Karim Khan Ave.

Drawing

■ An exhibition of drawings by Parviz Heidarzadeh is underway at Elaheh Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until January 14 at the gallery located at 47 Golfam St., off Africa Ave.

Calligraphy

■ A collection of calligraphy works by Seyyed Alireza Motalebi is on display in an exhibition at Persian Idea Gallery.

The exhibit named "That" will be running until January 9 at the gallery located at 28 Azar Alley, Kolahdüz St., Shariati Ave.

Fajr Film Festival unveils official lineup

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 37th Fajr Film Festival announced on Friday that 22 movies will be screened in the official competition. "The Main Idea" by Azita Mogui, "African Violets" by Mona Zandi-Haqiqi, "Polo Coat" by Mehdi Alimirzai, "Jamshidieh" by Yalda Jebeli and "Blade and Termeh" by Kiumars Purahmad are among the competing films.

The lineup also includes "Tala" by Parviz Shabbazi, "Takhti" by Bahram Tavakkoli, "Oath" by Mohsen Tanabandeh, "A Man without Shadow" by Alireza Reisian and "Symphony No. 9" by Mohammadreza Honarmand.

The festival will also screen three animated films, "The Last Story" by Ashkan Rahgozar, "Benjamin" by Mohsen Enayati and "Sunny Night" by Seyyed Ali Madani, as well as seven short films.

The official lineup was announced at a press conference, during which veteran actor Jamshid Mashayekhi joined the president of the festival, Ebrahim Darughezadeh, to unveil the official poster of the event designed by Soheil Beidaqi.

The 37th Fajr Film Festival will take place in Tehran and several other Iranian cities from January 30 to February 11.



Actor Jamshid Mashayekhi (L) and the president of the 37th Fajr Film Festival, Ebrahim Darughezadeh, are seen after unveiling the official poster of the event in Tehran on January 4, 2019. (Mehr/Mohammad Khodabakhsh)

Shajarian's Bam Art Garden blooms

A R T **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian art elites arrived at the southern town of Bam on Thursday to attend an inauguration ceremony of the Bam Art Garden, which has risen from the rubble of the devastating 2003 earthquake based on an initiative from the living legend of Iranian music Mohammadreza Shajarian and his friends.

Shortly after the quake, which claimed tens of thousands of lives and flattened the town, Shajarian and his group, composed of his son Homayun, tar virtuoso Hossein Alizadeh and kamacheh master Kayhan Kalhor, organized benefit concerts titled "Compassion for Bam" to raise funds for the victims of the disaster.

"We believed that raising the spirit of people is of the first priority and also that art can bring life back to them... My colleagues and I were planning to take the art and cultural potential of our society to the city of Bam," Shajarian, who is currently fighting cancer, said previously in a statement.

In 2009, Shajarian entrusted the



Artists unveil a logo of the Bam Art Garden during the inauguration ceremony of the center in the southern Iranian town of Bam on January 3, 2019.

construction of the center to the Kerman Automotive Industrial Company.

The first phase of the art garden containing an amphitheater, a library,

several studios, classrooms and ateliers has recently been completed and opened at the ceremony.

Due to his illness, Shajarian could not attend the ceremony, but his wife, Katayun Khansari and Alizadeh were in attendance at the ceremony.

In his brief speech, Alizadeh pointed to the concert of "Compassion for Bam" and said, "Since the movement began, the deep affection and commitment master Shajarian had about the issue created a sense of solidarity among us."

"Making predictions in Iran is impossible, but any decision can definitely be implemented through love and belief," he added.

Khansari said, "Artists change tremendous grief into a way to build, and Mohammadreza's grief turned into motivation for the completion of the plan."

Architect Ali Nemati, who completed the project along with his father Masud Nemati, also said, "I hope soon to listen to performances from master Shajarian here."

"The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi" to celebrate Samandarian, Durrenmatt

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Ehsan Falahatpisheh will restage Swiss writer Friedrich Durrenmatt's 1952 play "The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi" at the main hall of Tehran's City Theater Complex tonight to celebrate the Iranian stage director and playwright, Hamid Samandarian, who translated the play into Persian in 1989, and Durrenmatt's 98th birthday.

Earlier in September and October 2015, Falahatpisheh staged the comedy play at the Nazerzadeh Kermani Hall of the Iranian Artist Forum in Tehran.

The play is about Florestan Mississippi, a public prosecutor and a fanatical exponent of Mosaic law who has murdered his wife. He visits Anastasia, who confesses to having murdered her husband. After Mississippi has persuaded Anastasia to marry him as a gesture of grotesque

retribution, the two dedicate themselves to presiding over a governmental system of "absolute justice" under which Mississippi sentences victims to death and Anastasia presides over their execution.

Mohammad-Sadeq Malek, Arezu Nabovvat, Mohammadreza Maleki, Mehdi Nosrati and Parisa Sanatkar are the main members of the cast for the play, which will be on stage until February 3.

U.S. judge orders Ed Sheeran to face Marvin Gaye plagiarism lawsuit

NEW YORK (Reuters) — A U.S. judge has rejected English singer and songwriter Ed Sheeran's request to dismiss a lawsuit accusing him of lifting from Marvin Gaye's 1973 classic "Let's Get It On" for his 2014 smash "Thinking Out Loud."

In a decision made public on Thursday, U.S. District Judge Louis Stanton in Manhattan said a jury should decide whether Sheeran, Sony/ATV Music Publishing and Atlantic Records should be liable to the estate and heirs of the late producer Ed Townsend, who co-wrote "Let's Get It On" with Gaye.

Stanton found "substantial similarities between several of the two works' musical elements," including their bass lines and per-

cussion, and said it was in dispute whether the harmonic rhythm of "Let's Get It On" was too common to deserve copyright protection.

He also said ordinary listeners might view the songs' "aesthetic appeal" as the same, despite defense arguments that "Thinking Out Loud" was characterized by "somber, melancholic tones, addressing long lasting romantic love" while "Let's Get It On" was radiating positive emotions.

Jurors "may be impressed by footage of a Sheeran performance which shows him seamlessly transitioning between [the songs]," Stanton wrote. His decision is dated Wednesday.

Sheeran has denied copying from Gaye.

Representatives for Sheeran and Atlantic did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Sony/ATV spokesman Paul Williams declined to comment.

Pat Frank, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said his clients were looking forward to their day in court "when this matter is tried."

Gaye was fatally shot by his father in 1984 at age 44.

Stanton oversees two lawsuits accusing Sheeran of lifting from Gaye's song.

In the other case, Structured Asset Sales LLC, which owns one-third of Townsend's estate, sued last June for \$100 million of damages.

Structured Asset Sales is owned by David

Pullman, an investment banker who in 1997 oversaw a \$55 million sale of "Bowie Bonds" that made David Bowie the first musician to sell bonds backed by royalties from his catalog.

"Thinking Out Loud" peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 in February 2015. "Let's Get It On" hit No. 1 in September 1973.

Sheeran, 27, has also faced infringement claims over his songs "Photograph" and "Shape of You."

Other recording artists accused in recent years of copyright infringement have included Miley Cyrus, Drake, Kendrick Lamar, Led Zeppelin, Madonna, and Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams.

Tehran Times salutes Christian colleague Baghdasarian

Just back from Christmas holiday, Herand Baghdasarian (C) has been with us for over 18 years.

A Christian, Mr. Baghdasarian currently writes for the Science page, while formerly he used to write for the Society and Technology pages.

Working with the Tehran Times "simply [makes me] feel pleased," he says, for its "amicable and cozy atmosphere."



© TEHRAN TIMES/ Mehdi Sepahvand