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# Mosaic by Farmanfarmaian leads Tehran Auction



Untitled mirror mosaic by Monir Farmanfarmaian was the first top seller, fetching over \$950,000, at the 10th Tehran Auction.

## Polish meeting means opponents have lost Iran case: Shamkhani

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, says for enemies looking forward to an anti-Iran summit means that they have lost their case against the country. "Someone who [used to] talk about strongest sanctions, when they resort to seminars and congresses it means they have lost the case," Shamkhani said on Saturday

in reaction to reports that Poland is going to host an anti-Iran summit next month. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Fox News in an interview aired on Friday that Washington will jointly host a global summit focused on Iran and the Middle East next month in Poland. The gathering will take place in Warsaw from February 13 to 14, the U.S. State Department said in a statement. **→2**

## Iran home to largest cord blood bank in Middle East

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Iran has the largest store of cord blood samples in Middle East by having collected 110,000 samples, announced the Managing Director of Royan Institute for Stem Cell Biology. A cord blood bank is a facility which stores umbilical cord blood for future use. Cord blood contains hematopoietic stem cells and are currently used to treat

blood and immune system related genetic diseases, cancers, and blood disorders. According to Dr. Morteza Zarrabi, Iran is now among the top ten containers of hematopoietic stem cells, IRNA reported on Thursday. Zarrabi added that storing cord blood samples have started in the country since 2005 and currently 400 hospitals are contributing to the collection process. **→9**

## Syria shoots down 'most of Israeli missiles' fired towards Damascus

Syrian air defenses have managed to destroy most of the missiles fired by Israeli warplanes toward the capital Damascus, Syrian state media say. "The results of the aggression so far were limited to a strike on one of the warehouses at Damascus airport," the country's SANA news agency reported, quoting an unnamed military source as saying. The source further said that the

aggression occurred at 11:15 p.m. local time on Friday, adding, "Eight enemy targets spotted in the skies of Damascus exploded." According to the military source, the Syrian air defenses were "immediately" engaged overnight after a number of Israeli fighter jets came "from the direction of the Galilee (and) fired several missiles towards the vicinity of Damascus." **→13**



### PERSPECTIVE

**M.A. Saki**  
Deputy editor-in-chief

## EU credibility at serious stake

It has repeatedly been said that the European Union is adamant in its determination to safeguard the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

These words of assurance to protect the JCPOA without the United States have been frequently uttered by the EU, especially by its chief diplomat Federica Mogherini.

In her latest remarks posted on the European Council on Foreign Relations website, Mogherini said, "We Europeans cannot accept that a foreign power – even our closest friend and ally – makes decisions over our legitimate trade with another country."

Europeans were promising to present their own mechanism, the so-called special purpose vehicle (SPV) by the start of 2019 to circumvent the Trump administration's sanctions against Iran.

As a journalist I don't know what Europeans, especially the E3 – Germany, France, and Britain which are signatory the JCPOA – are still doing, but one thing is clear: the Iranian people are losing their confidence of Europe and think that Europe either has no power or will to withstand the U.S. illegal demands to do business with Iran.

EU officials say that the SPV is a complicated mechanism to prepare. However, eight months have passed since Trump has withdrawn the U.S. from the UN-endorsed nuclear agreement and declared the reimposition of sanctions against Iran.

Some argue that protests in France, a weakened Angela Merkel's government in Germany, problems surrounding the Theresa May government over Brexit coupled with Washington's pressure and differences between the EU members over how to deal with Trump's White House in regard to the JCPOA have caused delays in presenting the SPV.

Some of these things are true but they will not excuse the EU not to abide by its commitments under the multilateral accord.

The EU, especially its heavyweight members, are facing a serious test. If Europe fails to decide about its business with Iran under pressure by a bullying Trump then it would not be an exaggeration to say that the European Union is a paper tiger. **→2**

## Not all EU members favor SPV: Shireen Hunter

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Shireen Tahmaasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells the Tehran Times that "It was clear from the beginning that establishing a special and separate channel for commercial dealings between Iran and Europe would not be easy."

"Not all EU members favor such measures. Many of them believe that pressure on Iran would lead to desired result in other areas beyond JCPOA, although they still pay lip service to

the agreement," Hunter tells the Tehran Times. She adds that "I think Iran relied too much on Federica Mogherini's assurances, but her influence is limited."

Following is the text the interview:

■ Due to U.S. is opposed to the financial mechanism between Europe and Iran and pushes European countries to prevent the implementation of the financial channel as called SPV, do you think this financial mechanism (SPV) will be implemented between Iran and Europe?

A: It was clear from the beginning that establishing a special and separate channel for

commercial dealings between Iran and Europe would not be easy. American opposition is one element in this picture. In general, bypassing the established global channels of commercial and financial exchanges is not easy even with the best of intentions. Meanwhile, not all EU members favor such measures. Many of them believe that pressure on Iran would lead to desired result in other areas beyond JCPOA, although they still pay lip service to the agreement. I think Iran relied too much on Federica Mogherini's assurances, but her influence is limited. **→7**

## 'Gadkari effect' on growing Iran-India relations

By MK Bhadrakumar

**TEHRAN** — If the 'Newton Effect' in physics has an equivalent in international diplomacy, we can describe what is happening to India-Iran relations as the 'Gadkari Effect'.

Like in the case of the 18th century English scientist Isaac Newton's optical property of physics, the minister in the Indian government Nitin Gadkari – arguably, by far the best performing colleague of Prime Minister Narendra Modi –

has created a series of concentric, alternating rings centered at the point of contact between the Indian and Iranian economies.

'Gadkari's rings' around the Chabahar Port in the remote province of Sistan-Baluchistan in southeastern Iran are phenomenally transforming the India-Iran relationship.

The first definitive signs of this appeared in December when the quiet, intense discussions between New Delhi and Tehran under Gadka-

ri's watch resulted in the agreement over a new payment mechanism that dispenses with the use of American dollar in India-Iran economic transactions.

Prime facie, it was a riposte to the use of sanctions ('weaponization of dollar') as a foreign policy tool to interfere in Iran's oil trade with third countries such as India. (See my blog India sequesters Iran ties from US predatory strike.) **→6**

## 'Level of mass-rigging in Bangladesh polls unprecedented in history of the country'

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

**TEHRAN** — Last week, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina retained power with a landslide victory in general elections that were marred by incidents of violence and allegations of rigging.

The main opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia slammed the

election results as "farical", amid clashes between rival supporters that killed at least 17 people.

Following the announcement of results, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) urged the Bangladesh authorities "to carry out prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations".

In an interview to Tehran Times, Bangladeshi blogger and human rights activist Pinaki Bhattacharya, said the level of mass-rigging is perhaps unprecedented in the history of the country. He said the irregularities in this case must be investigated by an independent body. **→6**



## Volunteer doctors dispatched to underprivileged areas of Tehran

A Group of volunteer doctors, known as Abouhamed, paid a visit to underprivileged areas on the outskirts of Tehran on Friday.

The group, including general practitioners, mid-wives, skincare and hair experts, physiotherapists as well as educational and family counsellors, were dispatched to Kahrizak, southeast of the capital.

Free of charge appointments and medications were offered to the residents. Meanwhile, patients in need of professional care were referred to the hospitals.



### ARTICLE

**Mahdi Pourhasani**  
Journalist

## Quantum computing and geopolitics competition between China and U.S. in cyber space

Quantum computing is the area of study that focuses on developing computer technology based on quantum theory. In information and communication technology it more focuses on the speed of computers. Quantum computing could make opportunities to advanced interests in cyberspace and out of cyberspace.

In Digital era this technology has been well-documented in machine learning, cryptography and Internet of thing. Big data and in out of cyberspace this technology has a positive effect in emerging technology like Artificial intelligence and transport section, for this reason IT companies in USA such as Google, IBM, INTEL and in China companies like Alibaba and Baidu are focusing on developing these technologies In 2018.

Google has quantum machines can run some algorithms 100 million times faster than conventional processors. In out of cyberspace folks wagon is working on quantum computing powered traffic management system that helps to predict traffic pattern. This technology will be able to simulate large chemical reactions, leading to new materials and medicines. First quantum computers have already been developed and sold by the Canadian company D-Wave.

As we know Technology and geopolitics effect on each other. Geopolitics of cyberspace will be affected by this technology so this technology effect on the entire political player such as states and non-governmental agency. These players try to make a set of policies that improve their ability to advance its interests in and through cyberspace. In this field, the first country can commercialize quantum technology that will be able to gain a geopolitical advantage.

In the writer's opinion, this technology will be affected on Geopolitical competitions between CHINA and USA, in and through cyberspace because this can help to Reinforcement security of countries and economic Relative advantage of stat that translate to their power. **→7**



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



‘Europe should stop backing MKO, separatists’

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Presidential chief of staff d e s k Mahmoud Vaezi said on Saturday that Europe should stop supporting the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) and separatist groups.

“Europe should not forget that it was the Islamic Republic of Iran that helped the Syrian and Iraqi people in fight against Daesh,” he told IRNA.

The remarks by the presidential chief of staff was in reaction to Danish Foreign Minister

Anders Samuelsen who in tweet on Tuesday said the European Union had agreed to enact sanctions against an Iranian Intelligence Service over claims of assassination plot in his country.



Zarif to visit Iraq Sunday

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is scheduled to leave Tehran for Baghdad on Sunday.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Saturday that a high ranking economic delegation will accompany Zarif in the trip.

CEOs of dozens of entrepreneur companies will accompany the foreign minister, he added.

Zarif is scheduled to meet with high-ranking Iraqi officials, attend joint business forums in several Iraqi cities, including Karbala and Sulaymaniyah.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh was in Baghdad on Friday to discuss expansion of energy ties.



Zarif resignation rumor a mad story: Foreign Ministry

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman d e s k Bahram Qassemi has vehemently dismissed claims that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has resigned, saying “some elements inside the country publish false reports in a mad way”.

“It seems that efforts are being made to undermine the country’s diplomatic apparatus and status of the foreign minister and spread lies in this respect,” he told ISNA on Saturday.

He also dismissed claims of Iran’s withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.



New submarine to join Navy soon

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A state-of-the-art homegrown submarine, dubbed Fateh (conqueror), is slated to join the Iranian Navy later this month.

Speaking to reporters in Tehran on Saturday, Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi, the commander of the Iranian Navy, said the submarine is planned to come into service on January 29, ISNA reported.

The 527-ton submarine is a semi-heavy undersurface vessel whose weight at depth increases to 593 tons.

The submarine is equipped with an advanced sonic radar system for identifying enemy vessels and uses a missile defense system.

Once Fateh joins the Navy, the fleet will be equipped with a full range of light, semi-heavy and heavy submarines.



Berlin pursuing SPV final requirements: Germany

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Germany is pursuing the final requirements for implementation of the special purpose vehicle (SPV) for trade with Iran, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has said.

Speaking to German magazine Der Spiegel in an interview published on Friday, Maas said identifying a country to host the mentioned mechanism is among these requirements.

He said it would not be easy when the U.S. is trying to put pressure.

Germany hopes to finalize SPV within weeks, he added. SPV is a financial mechanism that the European Union has proposed to facilitate trade with Iran by bypassing U.S. sanctions.

In response to a question on U.S. reliability as a partner, Maas said certainly Germany will no longer be able to have any consultations with the White House.



Iran holds talks with Taliban for border security: ex-diplomat

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Former Deputy Foreign Minister Ebrahim Rahimpour has said that Iran held talks with Taliban for security of its borders with Afghanistan.

In an interview with ILNA published on Saturday, he said that Iran’s talks with Taliban have been in line with protecting security of borders and helping peace process in Afghanistan.

He said Kabul has accepted that Taliban is part of the Afghan society.

The Foreign Ministry announced that Iranian diplomats held a meeting with a Taliban delegation in Tehran on December 30. Abbas Araqchi, the deputy foreign minister for political affairs, headed the Iranian negotiating team.

# Polish meeting means opponents have lost Iran case: Shamkhani

Zarif says Poland “can’t wash the shame” for agreeing to host anti-Iran summit

**1 →** Pompeo said the meeting would “focus on Middle East stability and peace, freedom and security here in this region, and that includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence”.

Since withdrawing from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal last year, the U.S. administration has steadily ratcheted up pressure on Tehran and vowed to increase it until Iran halts what U.S. calls Iran’s “malign activities” throughout the Mideast and elsewhere.

As part of its policy of maximum pressure, Washington in early November re-imposed what it called the harshest-ever sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

**■ Zarif reminds host, participants of futile 1996 Sharm el Sheikh ‘show’**

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also lashed out at the anti-Iran conference, describing it as a “desperate circus” that will disgrace the participants.

Reminder to host/participants of anti-Iran conference: those who attended last U.S. anti-Iran show are either dead, disgraced, or marginalized. And Iran is stronger than ever,” Zarif said in a Friday tweet.

Zarif also strongly criticized the Polish government for agreeing to host the conference, reminding Warsaw of thousands of Polish refugees saved by Iran during the Second World War.

“Polish Govt. can’t wash the shame: while Iran saved Poles in WWII, it now hosts desperate anti-Iran circus,” Zarif remarked.

During the World War II, up to two million Polish civilians were arrested by the Soviet secret police and deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Many did not survive the long journey (lasting many weeks) by cattle train; many more died during their imprisonment.

Others simply failed to get out after finally being freed from the Soviet gulags. A total of 120,000 Polish people, 3,000 of whom were orphans, escaped from the Soviet Union to Iran, starting a new life in Isfahan.

The Poles entered Iran from the port city of Anzali on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. Soviet ships docking in Anzali were packed with starving Polish refugees, and they were the lucky ones: Many others died along the way from



In January 1943, the camp in the city of Isfahan contained 2,457 Polish civilian refugees, of which 2,043 were children. Group photo of older Polish children.

typhus, typhoid and hunger.

Photos of the Poles and their graveyard in Iran were posted by Zarif in his Friday tweet.

Zarif also included a photograph from the 1996 “Summit of Peacemakers” in Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt.

The photo showed Jordan’s King Hussein, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, U.S. President Bill Clinton, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, among other world leaders.

Zarif’s deputy, Abbas Araqchi, also posted a photo of the Polish cemetery in Iran, stressing that Iran had welcomed

the polish refugees of WWII.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, the chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, also reacted to the news, saying the upcoming event in Poland will turn out to be a “scene of defeat” for the U.S.

He said that he believed U.S. media outlets will react to the White House initiative for falling in line with efforts to cause instability in the Middle East.

He added that Pompeo is a senior intelligence officer with a mission to “cover up America’s operational defeats via psychological operations”, including by taking such measures against Iran.

**“Polish Govt. can’t wash the shame: while Iran saved Poles in WWII, it now hosts desperate anti-Iran circus,” Zarif tweets.**

## Leader urges students to work on Iran’s total independence

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution d e s k Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has suggested that students should work on Iran’s total independence as an endeavor on the path of God.

“The Iranian students’ joining to

the path of the country’s progress and independence from foreigners is a Jihad on the path of God,” he said in a message to the 53rd meeting of the Union of Islamic Student Association in Europe (UISAE).

“We all know that you, the students, are among the best sources of hope for

the future of the country. The thing that everyone should know is that the yesterday’s students are busy doing great jobs in the country and enjoy serving advancement of knowledge and technology in their country,” the Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei added that the Iranian students at any country in the world have the opportunity to work on the country’s independence.

He noted that the youths at the Union of Islamic Student Association can be the forerunners in this Jihad.

## EU says will not allow U.S. to determine its trade ties with Iran

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy says the United States cannot impose its policies on the 28-nation bloc’s legitimate trade relations with Iran.

“We Europeans cannot accept that a foreign power – even our closest friend and ally – makes decisions over our legitimate trade with another country,” Federica Mogherini said in an interview with the European Council on Foreign Relations published on Friday.

She added that the EU is working with the rest of the international community to keep alive the landmark nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), despite the U.S. unilateral move to pull out from the deal.

The Iran nuclear deal “has so far been implemented in full, as certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 13 consecutive reports,” she said.

U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew his country in May from the historic Iran nuclear deal and decided to re-impose unilateral sanctions against Tehran.

Under the deal, reached between Iran and six major powers - the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China - Tehran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

The U.S. administration hoped to get the other parties to the deal with Iran to likewise scrap the deal, but instead they stressed that not only would they stick to the agreement, but they would also work to sustain it in the face of increased U.S. pressure.

A report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)



said in November that Iran has continued to implement all its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal even as the United States re-imposed fresh sanctions against Tehran.

The IAEA’s report said Iran has been complying with the restrictions to its nuclear program laid down in the nuclear deal. “There is nothing that indicates that Iranian cooperation or the Iranian attitude has changed since the 5th of November.”

Mogherini further rejected claims that Europe is motivated mainly by economic or trade considerations, saying all efforts by the EU to preserve the JCPOA have been made “because of our collective security.”

“That is not the case: we do this to prevent a nuclear non-proliferation agreement that is working from being dismantled, and to prevent a major security crisis in the Middle East,” the senior EU diplomat pointed out.

She emphasized that the EU should guarantee that firms

seeking to do legitimate business with Iran are allowed to do so.

“This is what we are working on right now: tools that will assist, protect, and reassure economic actors pursuing legitimate business with Iran. It is true that this situation has triggered a conversation on European economic sovereignty,” Mogherini said.

Iran and the 28-nation European Union have been discussing various ways to continue doing business with Iran by bypassing U.S. sanctions.

On September 24, Iran and its five partners released a joint statement announcing the setting up of a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to facilitate continued trade with Iran, bypass the U.S. financial system, and avoid any impact of America’s secondary sanctions.

Late last month, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Tehran will not stand by for Europeans to fulfill their commitments under the multilateral nuclear agreement.

“The Europeans are acting slowly in the fulfillment of their commitments under the nuclear agreement,” Zarif said, adding, “We will not wait around for them unless they adopt practical steps.”

Zarif’s remarks came after chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi warned that Tehran’s patience is running out over the failure of the EU’s economic pledges to deliver any “tangible results”.

Salehi said the EU’s efforts were encouraging but “we have not yet seen any tangible results. So, they are promising us that they are doing their best to be able to translate all that they have said in political terms and to turn it into realization, in other words, to materialize what they have said.”

## ‘European sanction on Iran over claimed assassination plot is a criminal act’

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Nozar Shafei, an expert on international affairs, has said that the European Union’s sanctions against an Iranian intelligence service over claims of Iran’s assassination plot is a “criminal” act.

“The act of Europe in giving shelter to groups opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran and imposing sanctions against the country because of those groups is criminal,” Mehr news agency quoted him as saying.

If European countries have the political will to continue cooperation with Iran they

should not let terrorist groups do activities on their soil, he suggested.

Danish intelligence chief Finn Borch Andersen claimed in October that an Iranian intelligence service had tried to carry out a plot to assassinate an Iranian Arab opposition figure on Denmark’s soil.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi dismissed the claim as a plot by enemies to affect Tehran’s growing relations with European countries.

Anders Samuelsen, the Danish foreign minister, tweeted on Tuesday that the Euro-

pean Union agreed to enact sanctions against an Iranian Intelligence Service over claims of assassination plot.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has told Europeans that making accusations against Iran won’t absolve them of the responsibility for harboring the terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) - also called Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) -- who has murdered tens of thousands of Iranians.

“Europeans, incl Denmark, Holland & France, harbor MEK—who killed 12000 Iranians & abetted Saddam’s crimes against Iraqi

Kurds—as well as other terrorists staging murder of innocent Iranians from Europe. Accusing Iran won’t absolve Europe of responsibility for harboring terrorists,” Zarif tweeted Tuesday.

The MKO did numerous terrorist acts in Iran, especially in the early years of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It also sided with Saddam Hussein’s army in the war against Iran in the 1980s.

Saddam also used the extremist group in violent crackdown on the Iraqi Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south.

## EU credibility at serious stake

**1 →** European leaders must be aware of this fact that if they submit to Trump’s unlawful demands, their independence and even their business sovereignty will come under serious question. It that situation, no country can take the EU seriously.

At this sensitive juncture in history, especially at a time that Trump and his soldiers are against a powerful Europe and are pushing for the disintegration of the European bloc, an inaction will send an unreliable image of the EU to the world.

In fact, if Europe surrenders to the U.S. pressure it will unwillingly contribute to lawlessness and bullying tactics.

The JCPOA is litmus test for the EU to prove that it is a major global power and a law-abiding bloc otherwise it should bear the consequences of appearing weak in the face of recalcitrant Trump.

Now the credibility of the EU is at a serious stake. If it fails to guard its reputation and independence, history will judge it as impotent and shameful.





# Two dead in Paris gas blast amid lockdown for yellow-vest protests

## Thousands march in 9th straight French yellow vest protests

Two firefighters died and nearly people 50 were injured in a massive gas explosion that gutted the ground floor of a building in a central Paris shopping district on Saturday, authorities said.

The accident occurred with Paris under security lockdown for a ninth consecutive Saturday of "yellow vest" protests, with large parts of the French capital blocked off by riot police.

"As firemen were looking for a gas leak in the building, a dramatic explosion took place," Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said, adding that one of the firemen had been buried under debris for several hours.

Castaner said on his Twitter feed that two firefighters had died, and that 10 people, including one firefighter, had serious injuries. Another 37 people had lighter injuries, he said. Earlier he had told reporters that two civilians had also died.

Just hours after the blast, thousands of yellow vest protesters marched noisily but peacefully through the Grands Boulevards shopping district of northern Paris, just a few hundred yards from the scene of the explosion.

In recent years, France has suffered a string of deadly Islamist militant attacks in Paris, Nice, Marseille and elsewhere but authorities quickly ruled out foul play.

"A this stage we can say it (the gas blast) is clearly an accident," Paris prosecutor Remi Heitz told reporters.

A police source said the explosion tore apart a bakery on the rue Trevisé and witnesses said the force of the blast shattered nearby storefronts and rocked buildings hundreds of meters away.

More than 200 firefighters joined the rescue operation and two helicopters landed on the nearby Place de l'Opera to evacuate victims. Ambulances struggled to access the blast area because of police barriers set up to contain any violence by yellow vest protesters.

An eyewitness at a hotel nearby said he



saw flames envelop the ground floor of the building blown out by the blast.

"There was broken glass everywhere, storefronts were blown out and windows were shattered up to the third and fourth floors," said 38-year-old David Bangura.

He said that as he approached the scene, a woman was crying for help from the first floor of a building: "Help us, help us, we have a child".

### ■ Yellow vest protests

Thousands of anti-government demonstrators marched in cities across France Saturday in a new round of "yellow vest" protests against President Emmanuel Macron, accused of ignoring the plight of millions of people struggling to make ends meet.

In Paris, a few thousand people set off from near the Finance Ministry in eastern Paris at around 11 a.m. (1000 GMT) and were walking peacefully in the central streets of the capital. They were planning to head toward

Champs-Elysees avenue.

Paris police say 24 people were arrested Saturday before the protests started, primarily for carrying potential weapons.

Meanwhile, another 1,000 or so protesters gathered in Chantilly, a well-heeled horseracing town just north of Paris, where they marched through the center before descending on the hippodrome where they delayed the start of a race, local media said.

And another 1,200 protesters began gathering in the central city of Bourges, where some yellow-vest organizers were hoping to those from areas far from Paris.

Local prosecutor Joel Garrigue said five people had been detained after police discovered a cache of ball bearings during a search of their car.

Officials have warned they expect this weekend's protests to be bigger and more violent than last week when demonstrators rammed a forklift truck through the main

doors of a government ministry in Paris.

Authorities deployed 80,000 security forces nationwide for a ninth straight weekend of anti-government protests. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner threatened tough retaliation against rioters and their backers, warning of increasing radicalization among the largely peaceful demonstrators.

Paris police said they wouldn't let down their guard, and deployed armored vehicles, horses and attack dogs around the city. Subway stations and some shops closed, notably around government buildings and the Champs-Elysees, the sparkling avenue whose luxury boutiques have been hit by repeated rioting in past protests.

Many cafes and retailers on the iconic avenue remained open for business, however, with workers washing the windows on the first weekend of post-holiday sales.

Paris police said in a statement they made several arrests before Saturday's actions, notably in France's historic Gypsy or traveler community, which has called for protests in support of a boxer caught on video punching police last weekend in central Paris.

That incident dominated French media over the past week and prompted fears of resurgent tensions between protesters and police. Boxer Christophe Dettinger turned himself in to police and is in custody pending trial.

Other protests are planned in several French cities Saturday, but many actions aren't officially declared in advance and pop up in unexpected places. Last Saturday, authorities estimated 50,000 people protested nationwide, including 3,500 in Paris.

The movement waned over the holidays but appears to be resurging, despite Macron's promises of billions of euros in tax relief and an upcoming "national debate" to address demonstrators' concerns. Protesters want deeper changes to France's economy and politics, seen as favoring the rich.

(Source: agencies)

# U.S. federal shutdown becomes longest in history

The partial government shutdown became the longest closure in the history of the United States when the clock ticked past midnight on Friday as President Donald Trump and nervous Republicans scrambled to find a way out of the mess.

A solution could not come soon enough for around 800,000 federal workers who got pay statements on Friday but no pay.

The House and the Senate voted to give federal workers back pay whenever the federal government reopens and then left town for the weekend, as the shutdown entered its 22nd day.

While Trump privately considered one dramatic escape route, declaring a national emergency to build the wall without a new stream of cash from Congress, members of his own party were fiercely debating that idea, and the president urged Congress to come up with another solution.

"What we're not looking to do right now is national emergency," Trump said. He insisted that he had the authority to do that, adding that he's "not going to do it so fast" because he'd still prefer to work a deal with Congress.

With polls showing Trump getting most of the blame for the shutdown, the administration accelerated planning for a possible emergency declaration to try to get around Congress and fund the wall from existing sources of federal revenue.

The White House explored diverting money for wall construction from a range of other accounts. One idea being

considered was diverting some of the \$13.9bn allocated to the Army Corps of Engineers after last year's deadly hurricanes and floods.

That option triggered an outcry from officials in Puerto Rico and some states recovering from natural disasters and appeared to lose steam on Friday.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said in a statement that it was "time for President Trump to use emergency powers to fund the construction of a border wall/barrier". But other Republicans have expressed doubts, given the potential legal hurdles such a move may face.

Earlier, on Thursday, federal workers across the country rallied against the shutdown.

At a Washington rally, Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO, a federation of unions, called the shutdown a "lockout".

"Shame on the Senate. Shame on the White House," he told the crowd. "This lockout has to end, and it has to end now."

The last government shutdown to have lasted this long was the impasse that stretched from December 1995 to January 1996, when former President Bill Clinton and the Republican-controlled Congress were at loggerheads.

### ■ Thousands of U.S. federal workers miss first paycheck of year

Meantime, hundreds of thousands of the U.S. federal

workers have missed their first paycheck of the year due to the ongoing partial government shutdown, which occurred after President Donald Trump and Congress failed to agree on an appropriation bill that would include funding a border wall.

About 800,000 federal employees have been affected by the government shutdown, forcing workers to scale back spending, cancel trips, apply for unemployment benefits and take out loans to pay bills.

Roughly 420,000 federal employees were deemed essential and are working unpaid. An additional 380,000 are staying home without pay.

While furloughed federal workers have been compensated in previous shutdowns, it's not guaranteed that will happen this time. Government contractors, who have been placed indefinitely on unpaid leave, don't get compensated for lost hours. Most of the government workers received their last paycheck two weeks ago, and Friday will be the first payday with no money.

Around the country, some federal workers are relying on donations, including launching GoFundMe campaigns. A food pantry has opened up in Boston. Some government workers are thinking about taking second jobs.

Angry furloughed U.S. government workers staged protest rallies on Thursday across the country.

(Source: agencies)

# Leader of Venezuela Congress says he is prepared to assume presidency

The leader of Venezuela's opposition-led congress said he was prepared to assume the country's presidency on an interim basis and call elections, just one day after leftist President Nicolas Maduro was sworn in for a disputed second term.

Juan Guaido, a lawmaker from the hard-line Popular Will opposition party who was elected to head the National Assembly on Jan. 5, said he would only take office with support of the armed forces. He also called for protests on Jan. 23, the anniversary of the fall of a military dictatorship in 1958.

"It should be the people of Venezuela, the armed forces, and the international community that give us a clear mandate to assume" the presidency, Guaido said in a speech to supporters outside the United Nations (UN) program office in Caracas.

Maduro was re-elected last year in a vote that was widely dismissed as fraudulent, and countries around the world have called his continued leadership illegitimate. Ruling Socialist Party leaders have described the criticism as colonialist interference led by the United States.

The Supreme Court and an all-powerful legislature called the Constituent Assembly have stripped Congress of its powers, meaning it does not have the capacity to remove the president as would a legislature in many countries.



Guaido's comments, however, caused some confusion.

Luis Almagro, head of regional diplomatic group the Organization of American States, tweeted that Guaido had assumed the interim presidency of Venezuela. Guaido did not respond to a message seeking clarification.

The country's perennially fractured opposition has made numerous failed attempts over the past 20 years to remove the ruling socialists. Now, opposition leaders have disavowed Maduro's second term as illegitimate, and have called for the National Assembly

to declare the presidency vacant.

The country's constitution says a presidential vacancy can be filled by the head of the legislature, and some opposition activists have called on Guaido to assume the presidency.

U.S. national security adviser John Bolton said in a statement that the United States "resolutely supports" the National Assembly, which he called "the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people."

"In particular, we support the courageous

decision of the National Assembly President, Juan Guaido, to invoke protections under Venezuela's constitution and declare that Maduro does not legitimately hold the country's presidency," Bolton said.

Maduro's allies were quick to denounce Guaido. Prisons Minister Iris Varela appeared to threaten to jail him, although she has previously threatened other opposition members who remain free. "Guaido, I already got your cell ready, with your uniform," Varela wrote on Twitter.

The opposition has promised to keep up the pressure. Some 2,000 people gathered outside the U.N. site listening to opposition lawmakers and civil society leaders denounce Maduro as a "usurper."

"[Congress] is the only legitimate power that we have," said Servando Valecillos, a 67-year-old salesman and one of the protesters.

Maduro's critics accuse him of creating a dictatorship and destroying the OPEC nation's economy.

Venezuela is experiencing the worst economic crisis in its history, with inflation headed toward 2 million percent. Some three million people have left the country amid chronic shortages of food and medicine.

Maduro says the country is victim of an "economic war" led by his political adversaries with the help of Washington.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Pompeo says good outcome possible for both Turkey and Syrian Kurds



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Saturday he was optimistic that a "good outcome" could be reached between Turkey and Syrian Kurdish groups, after speaking to the Turkish foreign minister. "We recognize the Turkish people's right to defend their country from terrorists, but we also know that those ... who are not terrorists and fighting alongside us for all this time deserve to be protected," Pompeo told reporters.

"There are many details to be worked out but I am optimistic we can achieve a good outcome," he said.

Speaking in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi as part of a regional tour, Pompeo also said the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria is a "tactical change" and does not alter U.S. military capacity to counter Daesh (ISIL).

### ■ U.S.-led coalition says it has started Syria withdrawal

The U.S.-led coalition against ISIL has begun the process of withdrawing from Syria, a spokesman said on Friday, indicating the start of a U.S. pullout that has been clouded by mixed messages from Washington.

U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement last month that he had decided to withdraw 2,000 U.S. troops stunned allies that have joined Washington in the battle against ISIL in Syria. Senior U.S. officials were shocked too, among them Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who quit in protest.

The coalition "has begun the process of our deliberate withdrawal from Syria. Out of concern for operational security, we will not discuss specific timelines, locations or troop movements," Colonel Sean Ryan said. Russia, which has deployed forces into Syria in support of the Damascus government, said it had the impression that the United States wanted to stay despite the announced withdrawal of U.S. troops, RIA news agency reported.

Residents near border crossings that are typically used by U.S. forces going in and out of Syria from Iraq said they had seen no obvious or large-scale movement of U.S. ground forces on Friday.

The U.S. decision has injected new uncertainties into the eight-year long Syrian war and a flurry of contacts over how a resulting security vacuum will be filled across a swathe of northern and eastern Syria where the U.S. forces are stationed.

On the one hand, Turkey aims to pursue a campaign against Kurdish forces that have allied with the United States, and on the other the Syrian government sees the chance to recover a huge chunk of territory.

(Source: agencies)

## Protests in Bahrain amid Pompeo's visit as part of anti-Iran Middle East tour

People in the tiny Persian Gulf state of Bahrain have held anti-regime protests, expressing anger at crackdown on pro-democracy activists.

The protests coincided with the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to the kingdom as part of his tour of the Middle East aimed at coordinating an "anti-Iran campaign".

The demonstrators in the villages of Diraz and al-Musalla honored those who lost their lives during the anti-regime protests and expressed their solidarity with the country's most prominent Shia cleric, Sheikh Isa Qassim.

In June 2016, Bahraini authorities revoked Sheikh Qassim's citizenship over accusations that he used his position to serve foreign interests and promote violence, a charge the clergymen strongly denies. He has since been confined to house arrest, resulting in deterioration of his health condition.

In May 2017, a regime court convicted Sheikh Qassim of illegal collection of funds and money laundering, and sentenced him to one year in jail suspended for three years.

Also on Friday, the Bahraini people held protests in the villages of Abu Saiba and Shakhurah to denounce the House of Khalifah regime's crimes and voice their support for the Saudi Shias in the Qatif region. Recently, the Saudi regime forces conducted a deadly raid on Qatif, claiming that they were searching for a number of wanted people. Pompeo is on a Middle East tour, which has already taken him to Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. He is also set to travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Kuwait.

In his meeting with Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah, the U.S. secretary of state called for enhanced cooperation between Washington and Mamma in all fields, especially in the political, economic and defense sectors.

Elsewhere, Bahrain, a key U.S. ally in the Persian Gulf region, hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet with some 7,800 U.S. military personnel, as well as a British naval base.

Since February 2011, Bahraini people have been holding peaceful protest rallies regularly, demanding that the House of Khalifah relinquish power and let a just system representing all Bahrainis be established.

They have also been complaining against widespread discrimination against the Shia majority in the kingdom.

Manama has responded to the demonstrations with an iron fist. The authorities have detained rights campaigners, broken up major opposition political parties, revoked the nationality of several pro-democracy activists and deported those left stateless.

### ■ Bahrain rejects UN call to free Rajab

In another development on Friday, Bahrain dismissed a United Nations call to release human rights activist Nabeel Rajab.

Bahrain's General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Crimes said in a statement that the campaigner is serving a five-year sentence for "false" tweets that "do not fall within freedom of expression."

"Nabeel Rajab posted false and malicious tweets which do not fall within the freedom of expression," read the statement.

(Source: Press TV)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	164929.9
IFX	1941.67

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,160 rials
GBP	53,929 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$51.59/b
Brent	\$60.48/b
OPEC Basket	\$56.29/b
Gold	\$1,288.55 /oz
Silver	\$15.64/oz
Platinum	\$814.30/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Starbucks will be the next U.S. brand to warn of China trouble after Apple

Apple shares collapsed earlier this month after warning that iPhone sales would fall short because of weakness in the China economy.

Starbucks will be next, according to Goldman Sachs. The firm downgraded the world's largest coffee seller to neutral from buy on Friday, citing "a number of points of caution on China."

"The recent AAPL [Apple] announcement (while potentially also product-driven) cited trade concerns/macro, and MCD [McDonald's] acknowledged softer trends in the region at a late November event," analyst Karen Holthouse wrote in a note to clients. "The GS macro team also expects a continued slow down in GDP, at least partially driven by consumption."

Goldman also lowered its price target on Starbucks to \$68 from \$75. The shares fell 0.8 percent in trading Friday to \$63.73 following the Goldman call.

Starbucks has 3,600 stores in China and wants to double that number in the next four years.

(Source: CNBC)

U.S. government shutdown may depress January job growth

A partial shutdown of the U.S. government could slash job growth by as much as 500,000 in January and lift the unemployment rate above 4.0 percent unless the impasse in Washington is resolved before next Friday, economists warned.

Some 800,000 government workers missed their first paycheck on Friday following the partial shutdown which started on Dec. 22 as President Donald Trump demanded that the U.S. Congress give him \$5.7 billion this year to help build a wall on the country's border with Mexico.

The Labor Department, which has not been affected by the shutdown, surveys employers and households for its closely watched employment report, which includes nonfarm payrolls and the unemployment rate, during the week that includes the 12th of the month.

For this month, the pay period for most federal employees that includes the week of the 12th runs from Jan. 6 to Jan. 19. About 380,000 workers have been furloughed, while the rest are working without pay.

Unless the government reopens next week, furloughed workers will probably be counted as unemployed, as they would not have received a salary during the pay period survey.

"So, if the government remains closed past January 19, then furloughed federal workers will not receive pay during the survey week, meaning that we'd very likely get a big drop in the headline payrolls report, something on the order of perhaps 500,000 to 600,000," said Omar Sharif, senior U.S. economist at Societe Generale in New York.

That could result in the first monthly decline in employment since September 2010 and snap a string of 99 consecutive months of jobs gains.

But if Congress decides to pay these workers retroactively as was the case following the October 2013 government shut down, they would be considered employed.

"You can look at the private sector payroll figure to bypass this distortion, but it'll create some uncertainty and prevent us from getting a clean read on the labor market," said Sharif.

The economy created 312,000 jobs in December, the most in 10 months. Trump likes to boast about the strong labor market as one of his crown achievements. The shutdown, which on Friday tied the record for the longest in the nation's history, could also drive up the unemployment rate in January.

Higher unemployment rate

The household survey from which the jobless rate is derived would likely consider the furloughed workers as unemployed.

"These workers account for about 0.2 percent of the current labor force, so all else equal, the increase in unemployment associated with the government shutdown could lead to a 0.2 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate in January," said Daniel Silver, an economist at JPMorgan in New York.

The unemployment rate rose two-tenths of a percentage point to 3.9 percent in December as some jobless Americans piled into the labor market confident of their employment prospects.

While these impacts on the labor market are likely to be temporary, they could make it difficult for policymakers to get a clear read of the health of the economy for monetary policy.

Economists also worry that a prolonged government shutdown could hurt both business and consumer confidence, and undercut business and household spending.

Richmond Federal Reserve President Thomas Barkin said on Thursday that the shutdown, which has delayed the release of Commerce Department data, including November trade figures, could affect the amount of economic data available to the Federal Reserve, the U.S. central bank.

(Source: Reuters)

Daily gas output hits 800mcm: NIGC managing director

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN— In a press conference on Saturday, the managing director of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced that daily production of gas in the country has reached 800 million cubic meters (mcm).

Hassan Montazer Torbati also said that of the total produced gas, some 25 percent goes to household consumption, 37 percent is supplied to the power plants, 30 percent is used in the industry sector, four percent used as CNG and four percent is for other consumptions.

The official noted that household subscribers used about 90 percent of the gas produced in the country some years ago, but in the recent years, especially since the Iranian calendar year 1380 (March 2001-March 2002) while most areas of Iran have been supplied with the natural gas, the country has turned some part of its approach in gas sector toward exports and also supplying feedstock to the petrochemical units.

Telling the history of Iran's gas industry, the official mentioned the year 1380 a turning point in this sector.

He said gas industry in Iran entered a new era since the Iranian calendar year 1367 (March 1988- March 1989) when production of gas in South Pars gas field (Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) started. Then gas industry entered the golden years until 1380 which was a revolution in this sector.

Gas supplied to 93.6% of population

Montazer Torbati further said that 93.6 percent of Iran's population enjoy natural



gas; saying that gas is supplied to 97 percent of people in the urban areas and 82 percent of people in the rural regions.

He said 1,139 cities and 27,000 villages enjoy natural gas in the country, stressing that the process of gas supplying to the villages will be accelerated in the coming years to materialize the objective of gas supplying to all villages with over 20 families as soon as possible.

The official further put the daily transferring capacity of gas network at 750 mcm.

He also said that supplying gas to the power plants is estimated at 70 billion cubic meters in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2019).

India to continue shipping in Iranian oil

ENERGY DESK TEHRAN — India's Ministry of External Affairs announced that the country will continue importing Iranian oil using the U.S. granted waiver, Sputnik reported on Friday.

"We have had several rounds of meeting with Iran and several other stakeholders. I can tell you that India continues to import oil from Iran. We have got a waiver in this regard and we will continue to be engaged with all the stakeholders as far as matters related to India's energy security are concerned," Raveesh Kumar, spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs, said on Friday afternoon during weekly media briefing.

The U.S. has granted exemptions to eight key Iranian oil buyers — China, India, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Taiwan, Italy and Greece.



Earlier this week, India's top bank executive said that New Delhi had begun paying Iran in Indian rupees for its oil.

Indian imports from Iran totaled about \$11 billion between April and November, with oil accounting for about 90 percent.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday said that Tehran would continue to be a reliable supplier of crude oil to India. The economic partners continued to engage in the trade of oil under previous sanctions.

Indian crude imports from Iran are expected to average about 300,000-350,000 barrel per day (bpd) during the waiver period, which ends in March.

Sputnik reported on 26 December that India is looking to extend the waiver period to ensure its energy security beyond March 2019.

Minerals, mining exports at \$7.2b in 9 months

ECONOMY DESK TEHRAN — The value of Iran's minerals and mining exports stood at \$7.2 billion during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 22, 2018), showing a one-percent growth from the figure of the same period of time in the past year.

In terms of weight, the exports from this sector fell 10 percent to 44.721 million tons, IRNA reported on Saturday citing the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The worth of Iran's minerals and mining exports stood at \$9 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2018), according to the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

Meanwhile, based on the latest data



released by IMIDRO, domestic mining companies have injected 50 percent of their revenues to the Forex Management Integrated System, locally known as NIMA, since the beginning of the present Iranian year 1397 (March 21, 2018) to December 31, 2018.

The total revenues of the mining companies in the said time stood at \$2.19 billion, the report confirmed, 1.1 billion of which (50.1 percent) has been pumped into NIMA.

Tehran to host doors, windows exhibition in late Jan.

ECONOMY DESK TEHRAN — The tenth edition of Iran's Doors and Windows Technology International Exhibition (Do-WinTech 2019) is due to be held on January 23-26 in Tehran, IRIB reported.

During the four-day event, over 350 domestic and foreign companies will gather at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds to showcase their latest products and services.

The exhibition will cover a variety of areas including porticos and frames, machinery and manufacturing tools, assembly and production lines, robotic systems and industrial automation, sliding doors and etc.



Introducing the industry's potentials and capacities, presenting a platform for attracting investment and familiarizing visitors with the role of this industry's products in optimizing energy usage are among the main goals of the exhibition.

China's plans for tax cuts targeting smaller companies will help to support employment and economic stability, and will expand the country's tax base over the long term, Premier Li Keqiang was quoted as saying on Saturday.

"Implementing tax cuts for small and micro enterprises is mainly to support employment," Li said in comments posted on the Chinese government's website.

Developing and strengthening small companies is linked to economic stability and stable employment, he said.

"Looking at the long term, this will continue to expand the tax base, conserve tax resources and ultimately achieve wins for mass employment, corporate profits

and fiscal revenues," he was quoted as saying, referring to the corporate tax cuts.

Li's comments come amid growing official concern over China's slowing economic growth and its impact on the labor market.

Chinese authorities plan to set a lower economic growth target of 6 to 6.5 percent in 2019, compared with "around" 6.5 percent in 2018, sources told Reuters, as weakening domestic demand and a damaging trade war with the United States drag on business activity and consumer confidence.

Analysts expect that China's economy grew around

Details of establishing intl. bourse in free zones announced

ECONOMY DESK TEHRAN— Advisor to the head of Iran Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) announced the details of the establishment of the international bourse in the country's free zones, IRNA reported on Saturday.

"Regarding that most of the necessary steps to inaugurate international bourse in free zones have been taken by the present time, it seems that the cabinet will approve its implementation before the yearend (March 20, 2019)", Bahador Bijani said.

Iran's Free Zones High Council submitted the draft bill on establishment of international bourse in the country's free zones to the economic committee of the parliament on January 7.

The parliament will send the draft to the cabinet afterwards.

This draft was prepared through coordination between Free Zones High Council and SEO and then it was approved by the



Supreme Council of Securities and Exchange and after that the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Establishment of international bourse in the free zones is considered as a new potential for the attraction of foreign currency resources especially foreign investment in the country and it will provide financial resources for many projects and economic activities.

An international bank will conduct transitions related to this bourse and an international body will supervise its activity.

Budget review committee to submit report on budget bill in a month

ECONOMY DESK TEHRAN — Iranian parliament (Majlis)'s ad hoc budget review committee will submit its report on the administration's proposed budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2019) to the parliament within a month, IRIB reported on Saturday.

As Mohammad Mehdi Mofatteh, the speaker of the committee, announced, the body is required to submit its report within the next two weeks but the deadline can be extended for another two weeks.

Receiving the committee report, the

parliament members have 10 days to announce their final verdict about the budget bill.

President Hassan Rouhani presented the administration's draft of the 17.03-quadrillion- rials (about \$405 billion) national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1398 to the Majlis on December 25.

Supplying basic goods, treatment and medical equipment; securing livelihood; supporting production and employment; promoting tourism; and preserving water resources and environment are the focal points of the bill.

6.6 percent last year, its slowest pace since 1990, and it is expected to cool further in coming months before a slew of support measures start to kick in.

"The bottom line for the policymakers is social stability, which is crucially tied to the unemployment rate and job creation," analysts at BoAML said in a recent note. "With U.S.-China trade risks still looming large, we believe policymakers would not hesitate to take pre-emptive measures to stabilize expectations on job stability."

More growth boosting steps are expected this year as policymakers seek to avert the risk of a sharper slowdown.

(Source: Reuters)



# Oil bears get out of the way as crude's rebound takes hold

Crude oil's rally is starting to sweep away the pessimists. After starting 2019 on a cautious tone, hedge funds this week slashed bets on falling Brent crude prices to the lowest level since mid-November, as they looked to get out of the way of a recovery that pushed oil back into a bull market. Wagers on increasing prices climbed the most in a month, reversing course from last week.

The global benchmark surged this week, as the U.S. and China made progress in trade talks and Saudi Arabia reaffirmed its commitment to head off a supply glut. Money managers have turned alternately bullish and bearish on the rally in recent weeks, but the evidence for a sustained move higher is getting harder to ignore, said Mark Waggoner, president of Oregon brokerage Excel Futures Inc.

"Just having another positive week is going to be huge for a lot of people's psyches, after we got so beat up last year," Waggoner said by telephone. "I think you're going to see more of them coming on board next week."

Brent has gained more than 20 percent since hitting an 18-month low in late



December. Nonetheless, it's still down by almost a third since October and faces continuing pressure from the boom in U.S. shale drilling and an uncertain economy.

Prices fell for the first time in two weeks on Friday, retreating 2 percent to \$60.48 a barrel. U.S. crude prices finished the week up 7.6 percent, their best showing in six months.

Data on hedge fund wagers for West Texas Intermediate crude weren't available due to the U.S. government shutdown.

Brent net-long positions -- the difference between bullish and bearish wagers -- climbed 3.8 percent to 158,146 options and futures contracts in the week ending Jan. 8, the ICE Futures Europe exchange said on Friday.

Most of the shift came from a 3.6 percent decline on contracts predicting a Brent drop. Bets on rising prices edged up 0.8 percent. They've traded gains and losses for the past six weeks.

Late December's more bearish stance "was more about hedge funds squaring their books after they'd had a very bad year," said Frances Hudson, a global thematic strategist at Aberdeen Standard Investments in Edinburgh. Sentiment has improved markedly, she said in a telephone interview.

"Things seemed to have settled down a little bit in terms of production," Hudson said. "Saudi Arabia is being very disciplined and is following cuts in December with more cuts in January."

(Source: Bloomberg)

## U.S. rig count flat as Canadian drillers add 100+ rigs in winter season

Baker Hughes reported no change to the number of active oil and gas in the United States this week.

The total number of active oil and gas drilling rigs is holding steady at 1,075 according to the report, with the number of active oil rigs decreasing by 4 to reach 873 and the number of gas rigs increasing by 4 to reach 202.

The oil and gas rig count is now 136 up from this time last year, 121 of which is in oil rigs.

WTI prices were down on Friday despite newfound hopes that trade talks between China and the United States will prove fruitful soon.

At 12:25pm EDT, the WTI benchmark was trading down \$0.75 (-1.43 percent) at \$51.94—up week on week, with Brent crude trading down \$0.87 (-1.41 percent) at \$60.81 per barrel—also up week on week. Today's price decline marks the end to a more than week-long uptrend for prices that reached a five-week high, after a particularly volatile 2018, even by oil industry's standards.

Canada's oil and gas rigs increased by 108 rigs this week—a rather abrupt halt to the 4-week losing streak that saw the energy-rich but infrastructure-poor country



lose about 100 rigs over the last four weeks as drillers are gearing up for winter season. Canada's total oil and gas rig count is now 184, which is 92 fewer rigs than this time last year, with an 83-rig increase for oil rigs, and a 25-rig increase for gas rigs for the week. Canada's falling rig count is likely due in part to a new mandate that called for the country to collectively shave 300,000 bpd off its crude oil production figures.

The EIA's estimates for U.S. production for the week ending January 4 has the United States holding fast at an average rate of 11.7 million bpd for the week.

By 1:07pm EDT, WTI had decreased by 1.73 percent (-\$0.91) at \$51.68 on the day. Brent crude was trading down 1.75 percent (-\$1.08) at \$60.60 per barrel.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Russia starts gradual oil output cuts as OPEC+ deal kicks in

Russia is gradually reducing oil production in line with the OPEC+ deal and is on track to get about a fifth of the way toward its pledged cut this month.

Preliminary data show the nation's output has already fallen by more than 30,000 barrels a day relative to October levels, Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Friday. "The companies have said they can decrease total production by 50,000 barrels per day in January," he told reporters in Moscow.

Russia has agreed with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to gradually implement a cut of 228,000 barrels a day by the end of the first quarter, compared with October production of 11.418 million barrels a day. The country opened the taps before the restrictions began, pumping a post-Soviet record of 11.45 million barrels a day in December, meaning the month-to-month output drop will be steeper.

In the OPEC+ accord, Russia was allowed to make the cuts gradually since the harsh climate and complex geology of Siberia, its main oil province, prevent swift field shutdowns. In contrast, Saudi Arabia said it has already fully implemented its production cut and even gone a little deeper, pumping



10.2 million barrels a day.

Russia's reductions are modest compared with the cuts from some of its partners. In December -- before the agreement to curtail supplies even started -- OPEC production plunged by 530,000 barrels a day, the most in almost two years. The OPEC+ alliance agreed to trim output by a total 1.2 million barrels a day in the first half of 2019.

While the curbs have helped push benchmark Brent crude back above \$60 a barrel, prices remain about 30 percent below their four-year high in early October.

The next meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee, which oversees implementation of the production cuts, may take place in April, although that date could change, Novak said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## China: no wind or solar if it can't beat coal on price

China has said it will not approve wind and solar power projects unless they can compete with coal power prices.

Beijing pulled the plug on support for large solar projects, which had been receiving a per kWh payment, in late May. That news came immediately after the country's largest solar industry event and caught everyone by surprise.

Officials are understood to have been frustrated at seeing Chinese suppliers and engineering firms building solar projects overseas that delivered electricity at prices far below what was available back home.

The country also has its own issues with

grid logjams. These have caused power from wind and solar projects to be wasted due to a lack of capacity on the network to transmit and distribute it. In 2017 12 percent of wind generation and 6 percent of solar was curtailed.

In the plans announced on Thursday, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the top strategic planning authority, and the National Energy Administration (NEA) set out a series of conditions under which new solar and wind projects would be approved from now till the end of 2020.

Chief among these is that the price matches or undercuts the national coal benchmark,

something that happened for the first time ever just last month.

Projects will also have to show that the grid can handle their output. Technical specifications will ensure that the highest standards are met on that front.

Local governments have been told they are free to offer their own subsidies to projects if they wish.

In the past, provincial authorities have spent heavily to bankroll uncompetitive solar manufacturers. Thursday's announcement warned that any attempt to use project subsidies to invest in "local factories" or to make the use of locally made components

a condition of the subsidy.

Also included in the wide-ranging changes is the introduction of a green certificate scheme. A small trial of such a scheme was undertaken in 2017. It would work in a similar way to renewable energy certificates schemes in the U.S. and elsewhere. A certificate is created for each unit of electricity generated. These are then traded among utilities who may have targets to meet as determined by regulators or purchased by an end user to demonstrate their use of "clean" power. Details on the mechanics of the certificate scheme have not yet been released.

(Source: Forbes)

## OPEC producers open their wallets as they curb output

By Simon Flowers

OPEC is being marginalized – or, more accurately, is allowing its volumes to be squeezed to protect price. OPEC's share of global liquids supply has fallen steadily from 42 percent a decade ago to just over one-third today. The decline, of course, mirrors the rise of U.S. tight oil production.

Yet on my latest visit to the Middle East in December, I was struck, once again, by the commitment to investing in upstream by three Persian Gulf countries that together contribute half of OPEC production – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

I talked through what's going on with Jessica Brewer, our Dubai-based Principal Analyst.

■ **How much is the industry spending in the Middle East?**

The region has been something of a haven for upstream investment through the downturn. Spend has fallen just 19 percent from \$83 billion in 2014 to \$67 billion in 2018, whereas global spend is down 40 percent.

Most of the drop has been in Iraq, where government finances have been affected by lower oil prices, and Iran, where geopolitical uncertainty has cut inward flow of capital.

Investment hasn't fallen at all in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE – spend has been stable at \$40 billion a year. Given that service sector costs have fallen, this indicates activity levels are well up.



■ **Where's the focus of spend?**

The dominant theme in the region is the expansion of oil production capacity, which accounts for \$4 of every \$5 spent.

Iran and Iraq have enormous undeveloped resources and significant growth potential in the longer term.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE are focusing on brownfield projects with large-scale reserves around core fields already in production. Saudi Aramco's Zuluf field is fairly typical. The next phase of development doubles reserves to over 16 billion barrels of oil and condensate, and doubles current production of 600,000 barrels per day (b/d) by 2023.

Developing these resources will tend to be more expensive than in the past, but the projects will still be highly competitive in global terms.

All-in costs of the incremental development of Zuluf are around \$17/bbl on our estimates, below those of best-in-class non-OPEC greenfield projects and well below the best of pre-drill Permian tight oil wells.

■ **What are the strategic drivers?**

The energy transition and threat that oil demand may peak in the next 20 years has concentrated minds. Even the lowest-cost producers don't want to run the risk of leaving low-cost oil in the ground. There's a commercial incentive to develop reserves and be in a position to sell into a market where price is still supported by buoyant demand.

It's also about regaining market hegemony. Kuwait is committed to increasing capacity from just over 3 million b/d today to 4.75 million b/d in 2040. The UAE is similarly ambitious,

aiming to lift capacity from just over 3 million b/d to 4 million b/d by 2020 and then 5 million b/d by 2030. Saudi Arabia has no plans to increase capacity, but will invest to maintain the current 12 million b/d, which makes it OPEC's biggest producer.

■ **Does the world need more oil from Persian Gulf?**

Yes, but not right now. The call on OPEC crude will edge lower for another year or two to just under 30 million b/d. Beyond 2020, we forecast the market needs more OPEC oil, perhaps an additional 5 million to 6 million b/d by the 2030s. Assuming decline from maturing OPEC countries, there's potentially sizeable volume growth for Persian Gulf producers to go for.

But there are risks in the strategy. Chief among these is the near-term is from the U.S. We forecast U.S. tight oil adds another 5 million b/d by 2023, taking volumes to a plateau of 10 million to 11 million b/d by 2023. If the Permian continues to surprise on the upside, then more tight oil volumes would push additional OPEC volumes out into the future.

The other pillar supporting investment in capacity is oil demand. We expect the rate of demand growth to slow in coming years, but cumulative demand to increase by another 10 million b/d before peaking in the late 2030s. Tightening environmental policy and an accelerated penetration of electric vehicles beyond our aggressive base case are threats that could bring forward peak demand.

(Source: Forbes)

## UAE energy minister expects average oil price of \$70 in 2019

United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei said on Saturday he expects an average oil price of \$70 a barrel in 2019 on the back of an agreement to cut output by OPEC and non-OPEC oil exporters.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other leading global oil producers led by Russia agreed in December to cut their combined oil output by 1.2 million barrels per day in order to balance the oil market starting from January.

"Today, we look at an average year of around \$70 for Brent," Mazrouei said at an industry news conference in Abu Dhabi, adding that this level would help encourage global oil investments.



Al-Mazrouei also said the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries is not the enemy of the United States.

"We are complementing each other, we are not enemies here," he told an industry news conference in Abu Dhabi, addressing the relationship between OPEC and major consuming countries, like the United States.

The decision came despite U.S. President Donald Trump's calls to oil exporters to refrain from cutting production, saying it would trigger higher oil prices worldwide.

(Source: Reuters)

## Iraq to upgrade southern oil output capacity in 2019

Iraq plans to raise output from its southern Majnoon oilfield to 290,000 barrels per day (bpd) by the end of 2019 and to 450,000 bpd by the end of 2021 from a current 240,000 bpd, the director of the Basra Oil Company said.

Ihsan Abdul Jabbar, in an interview with Reuters late on Friday, said Iraq's southern oil exports were a little below 3.6 million bpd so far in January after hitting a record high of 3.63 million bpd in December.

Iraq, OPEC's second-largest producer, is producing below its maximum capacity of nearly 5 million bpd in line with an agreement among members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other exporters, such as Russia, to curtail global supply in order to support prices.

Baghdad is still aiming to increase that capacity, however, especially from its southern fields, where exports account for around 95 percent of state revenue.

Iraq's oil exports averaged 3.726 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, an increase from the previous month.

Abdul Jabbar said Hyundai Engineering was the front runner to win a tender to build a vital water injection project in southern Iraq.

Basra Oil Co began preparing to tender for the project in February last year if talks with Exxon Mobil failed, the head of the oil ministry's licensing and contracts office said at the time. The oil ministry received bids from three foreign contractors for the project, the oil minister said in November.

Iraq is also planning to operate a new offshore oil export pipeline with a capacity to transport 700,000 bpd by the end of 2019, Abdul Jabbar said.

Iraq had approved an investment budget of around \$7 billion for 2019 to develop five giant oilfields in the Basra region, he said. Around \$700 million would go towards development of the Majnoon field.

A deal was agreed with U.S. company Schlumberger Ltd to drill 40 wells at Majnoon, the oil ministry said last month.

(Source: Reuters)

## Renewables, natural gas to lead new U.S. electric capacity

Wind, natural gas, and solar capacity will lead the new electricity capacity in the United States this year, while coal-fired generation will account for more than half of scheduled capacity retirements, the EIA said in its latest inventory of electric generators.

In 2019, the U.S. electric power sector is expected to add 23.7 gigawatts (GW) of new capacity, while 8.3 GW capacity is planned to be retired.

New utility-scale capacity will be led by wind power, which will account for 46 percent of the additions, followed by natural gas with a 34-percent share of new capacity, and solar photovoltaics, which will make up 18 percent of new electric capacity, the EIA said. The remaining 2 percent of new additions will consist mainly of other renewables and battery storage capacity.

In wind power, a total of 10.9 GW of capacity is currently planned to start up this year, with Texas, Iowa, and Illinois accounting for more than half of the 2019 planned wind capacity additions.

New natural gas capacity will be mostly combined-cycle plants, which are planned to add 6.1 GW of electric capacity, while combustion-turbine plants are scheduled for 1.4 GW new capacity. Most of the natural gas-powered electric capacity is planned to become operational by the middle of the year in order to be able to meet high summer demand, the EIA said. Sixty percent of all new natural gas-fired capacity will take place in three states—Pennsylvania, Florida, and Louisiana.

Solar photovoltaics will add 4.3 GW this year, and nearly half of those capacity additions will be in Texas, California, and North Carolina.

Among the capacity scheduled for retirement, coal will lead with 53 percent of all planned retirements, followed by natural gas with 27 percent, and nuclear with 18 percent. One hydroelectric plant in Washington State and other smaller renewable and petroleum capacity retirements will account for the remaining 2 percent.

The 4.5 GW of coal-fired electric capacity that is planned for retirement this year is relatively small compared with the estimated 13.7 GW of coal generation capacity that retired in 2018. Last year saw the second-highest amount of coal capacity retired in a year in the United States, according to the EIA.

(Source: oilprice.com)



## NEWS IN BRIEF



## India stops water from entering Pakistan

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Indian government has moved to stop unutilized water allotted to India under the 'Indus Waters Treaty' from entering Pakistan, senior minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday.

Gadkari, the minister for water resources and river development, signed MoU with chief ministers of six Indian states for the construction of multi-purpose dam project in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

The agreement was signed with chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh.

The minister said there is enough water available in the country, but the real issue is its effective management, as India does not utilize its water resources well.

Under the Indus Waters Treaty, waters flowing in three of Indus tributaries -- the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi -- have been allotted to India; while the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus waters have been allotted to Pakistan.

Of the total 168 million acre-feet, India's share of water from the three allotted rivers is 33 million acre-feet, which constitutes nearly 20 per cent. India uses nearly 93-94 per cent of its share under the Indus Waters Treaty. The rest of the water remains unutilized and goes to Pakistan.



## Afghanistan most dangerous for journalists

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Underlining the perils of reporting from the war-ravaged country, Afghanistan has been named as the most dangerous country for journalists with a death toll at 17 in 2018.

According to the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), an organization that provides support to media workers in Afghanistan, the death toll was documented in 121 violence cases against journalists and media workers in 2018.

Out of total cases, 11 were committed against women journalists and media workers.

Besides death, many journalists faced risks of injury, threats, temporary detention and abduction in Afghanistan, as well as difficulty in accessing information, according to the report.

In 2018, a total of 34 media outlets stopped to operate in the country for various reasons. The 2018 death toll showed a slight decline versus the figure of 20 in 2017.

Nine of them, including senior photojournalist Shah Marai, were killed in twin blasts in April this year, the most deadly attack on the media in Afghanistan since 2001.

Journalists in Afghanistan, where the foreign-imposed war has now stretched into its 18th year, continue to walk a tightrope, living dangerously while trying to report the daily incidents.



## 'Americans not going to leave Afghanistan'

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai believes Americans are not going to leave Afghanistan, despite the partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from the war-torn country.

Addressing the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, Karzai said Americans are discussing military bases with the Taliban during their talks and that he believes that the U.S. forces are not going to bid adieu to Afghanistan.

"I am among those who believe that Americans are not going to leave Afghanistan," Karzai said when he was asked about the possible withdrawal of a "significant" number of US forces from Afghanistan.

Taking an indirect dig at direct talks between the U.S. and Taliban, the former Afghan President said the peace process will not succeed if it is not fully Afghan-led and that if it does not enjoy support from the neighboring countries and the region.

He maintained that the Afghan peace should be achieved through Afghan-led efforts not through a deal between the United States and Pakistan.

"We don't want a deal between the United States and Pakistan on Afghanistan, but we do want a peace process in which Pakistan and U.S. play an important role, including India, Russia and China and Iran," Karzai said.



## Kashmir bureaucrat resigns against 'killings'

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A young bureaucrat is creating ripples in Indian controlled Kashmir after calling it quits from government service in protest against "unabated killings" in the conflict-torn region.

Shah Faesal, the 2010 national topper in India's civil service exam, who had become the poster boy of India in Kashmir, last week announced his resignation from bureaucracy.

Faesal called for reimagining mainstream politics in the restive state and bringing the vocabulary of Azadi (freedom) and plebiscite into the mainstream discourse.

Stating that he wouldn't join any political party now, he said his choice of politics would depend on what the youth of Kashmir want him to do.

He said when it comes to resolution of political dispute of Jammu and Kashmir, mainstream political parties have "not been able to represent the peoples' sentiment correctly".

Talking about anger in the Kashmir valley over how mainstream has conducted itself, he said he wanted create a niche outside the existing narrative.

His resignation has evoked mixed response as some see it as a "brave decision" while some others believe he will be joining a bigger evil -- mainstream politics.

# India hits back at Pakistan PM, says offers for dialogue 'not serious'

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The blame games continue between India and Pakistan, as the two estranged South Asian neighbors accuse each other of creating roadblocks for peace process.

On Friday, India hit back at Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan that the Indian government was unresponsive to his peace overtures, saying Islamabad's offers for dialogue were not serious.

At a media briefing in New Delhi, India's foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said Pakistan's attempts to mainstream terrorist groups operating from its soil belied claims of Khan. Citing instances of Pakistani ministers meeting "proscribed terrorists" and expressing support for them, the spokesperson said if Pakistan is ready for talks it should take action against the terror groups.

The remarks were in response to Khan's interview to a Turkish media group earlier this week, where he said India was not responding to his peace initiatives and that any war between two nuclear-armed nations would be suicidal. In the interview, Khan expressed his desire for talks with India. He said that even a Cold War was not in the interests of the two countries.

"Two nuclear-armed countries should not even think of war; not even a Cold War because it could worsen any time. The only way is bilateral talks. Two nuclear-armed



countries at war is like a suicide," he was quoted as saying.

He said that India did not respond to his peace overtures. India has been maintaining that terror and talks cannot go together. "India was offered to take one step towards and we shall take two. But India rejected Pakistan's offer for talks several times," Khan said.

Khan also said that India would never be able to suppress the rights of the Kashmiri people. Responding to his remarks, India's foreign ministry posed a series of questions to Khan and his government noting that even before Khan was sworn in as the prime minister in August, Prime Minister Narendra



Modi had called him and congratulated him on his election win.

"When they say they are ready for talks, then why do their ministers share platform with internationally designated terrorists. There have been many instances in the past few months when their ministers have shared a platform with such people," Kumar asked.

"If Pakistan is ready for talks then why no action has been taken against terrorists involved in the (2008) Mumbai and (January 2016) Pathankot terrorist attacks," he said, adding, organisations such as the JuD and its charity front, the Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF), were no longer on the list of

proscribed organisations after an ordinance banning them lapsed.

"It is clear that the explicit support that banned organisations used to get from Pakistan is still continuing. There has been no change in that," Kumar said. "So this statement that they want to have talks, there is no seriousness in it and it should be backed up by some action."

Responding to questions on Afghanistan and whether India had changed its policy vis a vis talks with the Taliban, Kumar said India's position was "very clear and consistent."

"We have said in the past that we support the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We have also said that we support the process which is inclusive in achieving this goal," he stressed.

Indian army chief Bipin Rawat's last week said that India should consider talks with the group that controls large area of the war-ravaged country. His comments coincided with a visit of U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad to New Delhi.

"Many (countries) are engaging with Taliban for having peace. We should engage unconditionally to the extent of having a sense as to what is happening. India has contributed immensely to peace in Afghanistan and plans to do so."

"We have interests in Afghanistan. We can't be out of the bandwagon," he said.

## 'Level of mass-rigging in Bangladesh polls unprecedented in history of the country'

**1 →** A: In the real sense no election took place in Bangladesh on December 30. "Vote-rigging" is a pretty mild word to define what happened in Bangladesh that day. The State machineries were put in use to rob the people of their voting rights.

In connivance with the election officials and police, the ruling Awami League party stuffed ballot boxes across most voting centers in the country hours before polling began on December 30 morning.

According to several estimates, around 80 or 90 percent voters were not allowed to enter voting centers or could not cast their vote that day. At most voting centers the ruling party cadres told the voters that they would be allowed to cast their votes only if they voted for the Awami League.

During the run-up to the election the ruling party leaders and activists violently attacked the opposition party election candidates and their supporters to keep them away from electioneering. Interestingly, in many cases the attacks by the ruling party workers took place in the presence of police.

■ Opposition parties led by BNP accused Sheikh Hasina government of brutal crackdown and rights violations in the run up to elections. Can you tell us what happened?

A: Between 2009 and 2018, at least 90,340 cases were filed against over 2.57 million leaders and workers of the BNP, the largest opposition party in the country. Right now, around 76,000 opposition leaders and workers are behind the bars. In the past decade 1,512 BNP leaders and workers were killed. In December, when the parties were campaigning for the election, over 12,000 opposition leaders and activists were arrested. Police arrested thousands of activists from the opposition coalition who were to work as polling agents during the election.

Arrests of the polling agents were aimed to keep the opposition representatives away from the voting centers so that the ruling party activists could rig the election smoothly.

■ United Nations has called for independent and impartial probe into the elections and said those responsible must be held accountable. Do you think that's possible under present circumstances?

A: The vote-rigging took place at over 95% voting centers across the country. This level of mass-rigging is perhaps unprecedented in the history of the country. The irregularities in this case must be investigated by an independent body. The government of Bangladesh is likely to oppose such an investigation. But, it would not be able to place any hurdle if there is enough pressure from the international community, including the United Nations.

■ Some voters were quoted saying in media that it was a choice between lesser of the two evils. What do you think about Khaleda Zia and her incarceration. Is she a bigger evil?

A: Neither Khaleda Zia nor any member from her family was a candidate in this general election. The opposition coalition was led by a respected personality like Kamal Hossain who does not belong to Zia's BNP.

Those who demonise Khaleda Zia are actually supporting Awami League's misrule. I would like to ask them some questions. Was bank reserve siphoned off during the rule of Khaleda Zia? Were as many as 1,677 people extrajudicially killed in the country during the regime of Khaleda Zia? Were 225 billion takas plundered from banks when she was in power?

■ While for her supporters Sheikh Hasina is an 'iron lady', her critics say she believes in high-handedness and suppression of any form of dissent. What is true about her?

A: After some people called Sheikh Hasina a dictator, her son said it was a badge of honor. I have nothing else to comment on this issue.

■ She hosted Rohingya refugees at a time when many countries in the region refused to accept them or deported them. Doesn't she deserve appreciation for this humanitarian gesture?



A: Sheikh Hasina was forced to provide refuge to the Rohingya people. Her government did not open the border first when the refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar sought to enter Bangladesh. She was forced to allow them entry only after a massive public outcry in Bangladesh support of the Rohingya.

After the border was opened it was largely the people of Bangladesh who provided relief to the refugees. We supplied food and ran medical camps for months for the refugees. Several Bangladeshi and other international relief organizations helped the refugees in Bangladesh.

The taxpayers' money in the country is used to provide relief to the refugees. Sheikh Hasina should not personally be credited for this support to the Rohingya refugees.

■ Now that she is set to take oath as PM for the third time, do you think the government will be unstable given the controversial results?

A: It's a pretty difficult job to remove such a regime after it takes control of a nation. This regime has resorted to violence to silence its critics. Fear and terror rules the country now. People are too scared to protest against the misrule. This nation has a history of uprising by its people. I am sure they will rise against this regime again on time.

## 'Gadkari effect' on growing Iran-India relations

**1 →** However, the 3-day visit to Delhi by the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on January 7-9 highlighted that the application of the payment mechanism to the Indian-Iranian cooperation over Chabahar Port holds seamless potential to energize the economic partnership between the two countries across the board. In a historical sense, an opportunity is at hand to make the partnership, which has been 'oil-centric', a multi-vector 'win-win' relationship.

The meeting between Gadkari and Zarif in Delhi on Tuesday signaled that the two sides have a 'big picture' in mind. Thus, the opening of a branch of Bank Pasargad in Mumbai is a timely step. Pasargad is a major Iranian private bank offering retail, commercial and investment banking services, which provides services such as letters of credit, treasury, currency exchange, corporate loans syndication, financial advisory and electronic banking. (It is ranked 257th in the Banker magazine's "1000 banks in the world".)

Bank Pasargad is establishing presence in India just when the Chabahar Port has been 'operationalized' and a first shipment from Brazil carrying 72458 tons of corn cargo berthed at the port terminal on December 30.

More importantly, the discussions between Gadkari and Zarif have covered proposals for a barter system in India-Iran trade. Iran needs steel, particularly rail steel and locomotive engines "in large quantities, and they are ready to supply urea," Gadkari told the media.

Then, there is a proposal for a railway line connecting Chabahar with Iran's grid leading northward to the border with Afghanistan. Zarif summed up the broad sweep of discussions this way:

"We had very good discussions on both

Chabahar as well as other areas of cooperation between Iran and India. The two countries complement each other and we can cooperate in whole range of areas... We hope that in spite of the illegal US sanctions, Iran and India can cooperate further for the benefit of the people of the two countries and for the region."

Paradoxically, the collaboration over Chabahar Port, which has been a "byproduct" of India-Pakistan tensions, is rapidly outgrowing the zero-sum and gaining habitation and a name in regional security. There are many ways of looking at why this is happening so.

Clearly, both India and Iran have turned the Chabahar project around to provide an anchor sheet for spurring trade and investment between the two countries. This approach holds big promises. There is great complementarity between the two economies.

Iran is the only country in the Middle East with a diversified economy and a huge market with a fairly developed industrial and technological base and agriculture and richly endowed in mineral resources. It is an oil rich country and the needs of Indian economy for energy, of course, are galloping.

Second, Chabahar Port can provide a gateway for India not only to Afghanistan and Central Asia but also to Russia and the European market. Logically, Chabahar should be linked to the proposed North-South Transportation Corridor that would significantly cut down shipping time and costs for the trade between India and Russia and Europe.

Thus, it falls in place that the Trump administration, which keeps an eagle's eye on Iran's external relations, has given a pass to the Indian investment in Chabahar. Prima

facie, Chabahar Port can provide access for Afghanistan to the world market and that country's stabilization is an American objective. But then, Chabahar can also provide a potential transportation route in future for American companies trading and investing in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

According to a Pentagon task force set up to study Afghanistan's mineral wealth, that country is sitting on untapped rare minerals, including some highly strategic ones worth at least 1 trillion dollars. Indeed, President Trump has pointedly spoken about it to rationalize the US' abiding business interests in Afghanistan. Now, from indications of late, conditions have dramatically improved for an Afghan settlement that provides for enduring US presence in that country.

We must carefully take note that Iran is in effect supplementing the efforts of Pakistan and the US to kickstart an intra-Afghan dialogue involving the representatives from Kabul and the Taliban.

Importantly, China has also adopted a similar supportive role. A high degree of regional consensus is forging that security and stability of Afghanistan should not be the stuff of geopolitical rivalries.

The bottom line is that Iran's own integration into the international community, which the Trump administration is hindering, is inevitable at some point sooner than we believe.

The disclosure that behind the cloud cover of shrill rhetoric against Iran, Washington secretly made two overtures to Tehran recently to open talks shows that Trump himself is looking for a deal to get out of the cul-de-sac in which his Iran policies have landed him.

Washington cannot but take note of the

constructive role that Tehran is playing on the Afghan situation. (Interestingly, Zarif and Zalmay Khalilzad, US special representative on Afghanistan who go back a long way, have paid overlapping visits to Delhi.)

There is an influential constituency of strategic analysts and opinion makers within the US already who recognize the geopolitical reality that American regional policy in the Middle East will forever remain on roller coaster unless and until Washington normalizes with Tehran. They acknowledge that at the end of the day, Iran is an authentic regional power whose rise cannot be stopped.

From such a perspective, what Zarif's discussions in Delhi underscore is that while Iran is keeping its end of the bargain in the 2015 nuclear deal, it is incrementally defeating the US "containment strategy" by its variant of "ostpolitik", focused principally on three friendly countries -- Russia, China and India.

This is where much depends on the Indian ingenuity to create new webs of regional partnerships. There are tantalizing possibilities. Remember the 3-way Moscow-Baghdad-Delhi trilateral cooperation in the bygone Soviet era?

That is only one model of how the three big countries -- Russia, India and Iran -- can have common interest to create sinews of cooperation attuned to Eurasian integration. It is a rare convergence since there are no contradictions in the mutual interests of the three regional powers.

The writer has served as Indian diplomat in former Soviet Union, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, Turkey etc. He writes mainly on Indian foreign policy and the affairs of the Middle East, Eurasia, Central Asia, South Asia and the Asia-Pacific.



# Trump: Lurching towards a new foreign policy?

By Graham Fuller

If the rise of strong new powers like China poses a challenge to the older US-dominated geopolitical order, what about about the converse? The challenge to the international order created by a declining and erratic great power ever more at odds with an emerging new order— even without Trump?

Every day the headlines reveal a sense of the decay of American geopolitical power and influence. Some of this is due to the natural rise of other nations like China, Russia, India, Turkey, and Brazil as important new players. But much of it is also due to the collapse of the logic of American empire, the massive US foreign policy blunders of the past three decades, and the brutal deprivations that these losing wars have exacted upon the American political, economic and social order—not to mention upon the overseas victims of those wars.

The mercurial and disastrous nature itself of so many Trump administration policies tends to mask the deeper roots of this self-generated decline. How easy, even comforting, and ultimately dangerous it is to lay it all on figure of Donald Trump. Such focus on his personal failings fosters the illusion that Trump himself is basically the problem and that his departure will thus lead to fixing these problems. It will not. Their roots lie far deeper. In foreign policy they trace back at least to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called “unipolar moment” when the US embraced the idea that it was now the world’s sole superpower, capable of establishing long-term unchallenged global hegemony. Remember how this was to herald the coming “American Century?”

Most of the US foreign policy elite still embodies these notions. They perceive US hegemony as the natural state of affairs, perhaps even God-given; any views that work against that belief are alien, naive about the nature of the world, ideologically unacceptable, or even treasonous.

We see this in the elite views all across the mainstream media starting with Trump’s meeting with Kim Jong Un in early 2018. We see it in the fervent voices singing from the hymn book of the foreign policy establishment against Trump’s decision to pull out remaining US troops from Syria. Or in any efforts to overcome the truly dangerous deterioration of US relations with Moscow—in which Washington finds it inconceivable that any element its own policies could have any kind of causal effect on such deterioration.

Now, I am well aware of Trump’s ignorance about foreign affairs, among his many other failings. Typically so far the meeting with North Korea’s leader has been widely denounced as unproductive and naive. For sure there is not going to be any major North Korean denuclearization in the near future, but the Korean Peninsula has already changed markedly. Relations between North and South Korea are now on a vastly different footing



today compared to a year ago; bombast and threats of nuclear exchanges have given way to cautious rapprochement. South Korea is taking some calculated risks in this process, but it is proceeding apace with cautious but fairly broad public approval there. The Korean Peninsula is starting to calm.

The downside? The US military presence in South Korea is certainly headed for termination if things continue to go well between the Koreans. A key US geostrategic base in East Asia will be lost. But for Koreans, indeed for most of the world, should Korean steps towards normalization and perhaps eventual reunification be seen as a negative step? Perhaps it is in the eyes of US policy elites that still cling to the illusion of permanent US stewardship over global geopolitics, even on China’s doorstep.

There is of course a Japanese factor. Tokyo will likely draw the minimal conclusion that it will need to improve and deepen its bilateral relations with China rather than depend over the next decades in hiding behind US strategic skirts. But isn’t Japan, a powerful state in its own right, destined to come to terms with Chinese reality on its own terms? Should the US remain permanently engaged in working against the evolution of more “normal” regional power relationships in East Asia? Is US foreign policy permanently committed the maintenance and manipulation of international conflicts?

Syria is the latest hot button issue in Washington in which conservatives, most liberals and foreign policy professionals seem to unite in condemning Trump’s decision to pull out America’s small number of troops from the Syrian morass. But does the US military presence in Syria actually facilitate some gradual restoration of peace in Syria—an end to the killing and refugee flows? Yet what headlines do we see? “Trump’s Christmas gift to Putin,” “US loses its place in Syria,” “Who lost Syria?”, “Iran and Russia big winners in Syria” and other such stories dominate

American mainstream commentary.

Much of the hostility to the Syrian pullout is unfortunately based on automatic political opposition to anything that Trump does, in order to weaken him. Others bemoan this further step away from a once dominant US position in the Middle East. Yet here we must ask whether US domination of the Middle East—involving strong support for autocratic rulers, military invasions, bombings, special operations, destruction of infrastructures, deaths of upwards of a million Muslims—has done anything at all good for the region in the past many decades. At best these policies now serve the ill-conceived political goals of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Do we really believe that neighboring Iran and Turkey, or Russia and China can be permanently excluded from roles as major regional players there? Does everything have to be a proxy war?

Afghanistan may well be the next arena of withdrawal. The longest war in American history has gone nowhere. Does the US really harbor a national mission to stand guardian in Afghanistan in perpetuity? Remember, although the ostensible reason for the invasion of Afghanistan was to destroy al-Qaeda—which never quite took place—the real geopolitical goal was to establish American military bases in the heart of Asia on the very doorstep of Russia and China. (Can we conceive of the US reaction to a Russian or Chinese effort to establish military bases in countries neighboring the US?)

Some will take issue with my views here. They believe the US, as an “exceptional nation,” has the right, nay the duty, to serve, indefinitely and unchallenged, as policeman to the world. (“Bringing democracy to the world” is the favored characterization.)

But yet, to give these critics their due, there is indeed a legitimate and deeper geopolitical question to be posed here—involving one’s understanding of the nature of international politics. Does the global order really require the permanent presence of some kind of a police-

man? If yes, then in the event of US abdication or incapacity to serve as global policeman, must another nation inevitably take its place? Or should there be a global policeman at all? Indeed, is the evolution of a multipolar international order the inevitable and desirable future of the international system?

I see little prospect of US relinquishing its self-appointed role as global policeman for a long time to come, even as its policies founder. Sadly, it seems as if the US is in the process of inflicting massive damage upon itself, as did Rome and Britain and many other empires before, by draining its life blood and fortune in feckless international military interventions—all proclaimed “essential.” The opportunity costs of the US military budget—bigger than the next five nations put together—robs money that should go to decaying US infrastructure, public transportation, sustainable income distribution, a drastic reduction to the political power of the “military industrial complex,” failing health care, the building of civilian sciences, free higher education, and fostering social harmony. It seems like China itself is investing heavily in many of these socially productive spheres even as the US prefers to put its money into building geopolitical alliances and preparing for conflict.

Why are so few at home challenging the view that the US mission in the world is to intervene anywhere, everywhere, all the time—and primarily in the interests of maintaining US international hegemony? We seem reluctant to acknowledge that we live in a more complex world that requires a sharing of international responsibilities. Can we really believe that the future of Afghan politics really matters more to the US than it does to Afghanistan’s immediate neighbors of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and India? Is “permanent war” and permanent military intervention the path to keeping America great?

We can argue over the details, the fine print, and the timing of gradual disengagement from a large number of international conflicts. Yet, however feckless the Trump administration and its style may be, perhaps we should consider carefully whether at least one of Trump’s default instincts—gradual American disengagement from myriad unending US overseas military commitments—might have some merit. Foreign policy must consist of something more than perpetual identification of enemies, and perceptions of “threats”—long a special and costly cottage industry of Washington.

Ironically for Trump, some of his inchoate foreign policy instincts are shared within what passes for the “American left.” Whatever Trump does in this area, and whether he is “allowed” to do so by the entrenched foreign policy bureaucracy, it will likely take more than a generation to wean that powerful establishment, or “deep state,” away from reflexive US interventionism. But maybe we are witnessing a start.

(Source: Lobelog)

## Quantum computing and geopolitics competition between China and U.S. in cyber space

➡ In the U.S. research budget decreased but Congress increases funding of quantum in 2018, U.S. research budget decreased but Congress increase funding of quantum research.

One of the areas that the USA and China’s competition has deepened is next generation ICT technology such as 5G and quantum computing. This technology will be able to provide better encryption than today possible also using these computers will help to decrypt the content.

Quantum computers will be able to simulate things formerly impossible. For instance, forecasting large chemical reactions leading to new materials and medicines. In business issues, we will be able to analyze the best way for investment. So any country that will be able to use quantum computers for firstly will gain a geopolitical advantage in and through cyberspace.

China is creating new national industries in quantum computing and robotics and building up advanced defense industries. Since 2016 China has launched a mega project for quantum computing to achieving the advance in this technology by 2030, including the development of infrastructure, building the national laboratory for Quantum

information science. China’s try for developing Quantum computing may help to change the balance of power between USA and CHINA in and through cyberspace..

it is too early to say which country will dominate in quantum computing competitions but someone predict us companies will advance in hardware but China will be dominated in software and applications, for example, Chinese researchers focus on encryption, last year Chinese quantum communications satellite claimed to have sent unbreakable code from space.

Quantum computing would be able to affect most of geopolitical of cyberspace. These aspects will be covering internet governance, cooperation, and conflict between players such as government, private and also a digital divide between countries in the topic of the USA and China relation in cyberspace. U.S. and China have a dispute about internet governance each of them can dominate in this technology will be able to control the space of international policymaking in digital space and winning the race in near future.

Quantum computing would be able to affect most of geopolitical of cyberspace. These aspects will be covering

internet governance, cooperation, and conflict between player such as government, private and also the digital divide between countries. In the topic of the USA and China relation in cyberspace.

The USA and China have a dispute about internet governance. each of them could dominate in this technology will be able to control space of international policymaking in digital space and winning the race in near future. so if China could dominate in quantum computing will be able to bridge the digital divide between the USA and their country..

It seems that geopolitical rivalries between China and USA will be continuing in this field in next decade.

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## Not all EU members favor SPV: Shireen Hunter



➡ Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Bahram Ghasemi recently said that European countries were not able to implement the SPV because of U.S. pressure. On the other hand, the failure to implement the SPV and the failure of the financial mechanism between Iran and

the EU may lead to inappropriate results in relations between Iran and EU. In your opinion, if the financial mechanism of Iran and the EU fails, what will be the fate of the nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)?

A: If Iran becomes convinced that Europe is incapable of fulfilling its part of the commitments under the JCPOA it will face a serious dilemma: If it continues to honor its commitments under the JCPOA, it would demonstrate how limited its options in reality are. If it decides to exit the agreement, it would face greater pressure from all sides, including Russia and China. It would also provide the hawks in America with excuse to push for more drastic, including military actions. Already, the Trump administration has appointed a new

member of the NSC (Richard Goldberg) to oversee the question of Iran’s weapons of mass destruction. Should Iran exit the agreement and resume high level uranium enrichment or consider the development of weapons capability, its problems would only worsen. In general, under the current conditions, Iran does not have many good options.

Iran has also stated that it is not only focusing on a financial mechanism with the European Union. Tehran believes that, in addition to Europe, it will be able to continue to trade with other countries, including Russia, China and India. Will Iran’s economic and financial cooperation with non-European countries meet the goals of Tehran in a nuclear deal (JCPOA)?

A: All three countries will trade with Iran

only as long as their own interests are not threatened. China, in particular, is already experiencing an economic slowdown partly due to its trade dispute with America. It is unlikely that it would jeopardize its relations further with U.S. Russia’s own economic conditions are quite precarious. India will trade only as long as America waives some conditions of Iran sanctions for Delhi. The fact is that no country will run any risk to rescue Iran from its current problems. On the contrary, its neighbors and rivals will try to replace it with its trading partners. Moreover, the three countries that Iran hopes to help it have diverging regional interests. For example, India and China are economic and political rivals in South and Central Asia. It is difficult to see how Iran would be able to keep both of them happy.

## Defence spending cut in Iran’s budget bill sparks controversy

By Alireza Hashemi

TEHRAN — The Iranian government’s latest bill for state budget has been a hot topic in political and media circles in recent days. The bill, presented to the parliament by President Hassan Rouhani late last month, allocates over 4,700 trillion rials for the fiscal year that will start on March 21.

An in-depth analysis of the budget shows the spending for many activities has been reduced, at a time when the US is bent on minimizing Iran’s revenues through efforts to hamper Iran’s foreign trade and oil sale.

In this bill, for the first time, the government has broken down the budget for some sectors to two parts.

The first part of the budget is fixed, while the other part will be allocated if the government’s predicted revenues are fully collected. The new method has also covered the defence sector, leading to controversies among political and media circles.

According to the proposal, Iran’s military spending has been cut by 27%, compared to the 2017-2018 budget.

However, if all government revenues are met, this sector’s budget would have been increased by 21%.

Although some officials have welcomed the initiative, the possibility of a plunge in the defence sector’s share of the official spending has worried many. Critics argued decreasing Iran’s defence budget makes no sense amid non-stop threats issued by US President Donald Trump, who has hardened his country’s line on Iran and controls dozens of military bases in Iran’s surroundings.

Put the US aside, critics say other adversaries of Iran have gone aggressive too, with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman threatening to bring war against Iran inside the country and Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu openly threatening to destroy Iran.

Opponents also criticize the government for failing to allocate at least five percent of the annual budget to this sector, as the Sixth Development Plan (2016-2021) demands.

The criticism prompted members of the parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission to react, vowing to work to boost the defence sector’s share amid mounting threats.

Notably, Allaedin Boroujerdi, the former chairman of the commission, said the panel is against any decrease in defence budget.

“We believe that taking into account serious threats against [Iran] ... Tehran should not only avoid decreasing its defence spending but it needs to increase it. We will do our best in the commission and the parliament to make that happen,” he said.

### Pariah State?

Surprisingly, the Western media and politicians who are quick to jump at the chances to magnify divisions inside Iran, were largely silent on the defence budget controversies.

But this could be natural, as a sharp decrease in Iran’s military spending weakens the narrative of the anti-Iran propaganda machine that spares no chance to talk up Iran’s military might and its alleged threats to the region, as part of their government’s wider policy of framing Iran a pariah state.

In order to better grasp the situation, one only needs to look at numerous examples of the western media and politicians seeking to portray a caricature of the Iranian politics and show a scary image of the country. Notably, Trump made a misleading claim about Iran’s military budget early May, saying it had increased by more than 40 percent since the negotiation of the Iran nuclear pact.

“Iran’s Military Budget is up more than 40% since the Obama-negotiated Nuclear Deal was reached.. just another indicator that it was all a big lie. But not anymore!” Trump tweeted, as he announced the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal.

### Contrasting Realities

But had Iran’s military spending really increased that much? Much to the frustration of anti-Iran fanatics who love to exaggerate Iran’s military activities, a close look at Iran’s military spending shows Iran is by no means dreaming to conquer the world.

According to statistics by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reporting countries’ military spending from 1988 to 2017, Iran’s military budget had increased by only about 30 percent from 2015, the year the Iran deal was reached, to 2017, the year Trump was referring to.

But putting this obvious mistake aside, Trump was missing an important context, failing to notice that looking at raw increase or decrease in any country’s military budget is not meaningful.

From 2015 to 2017, Iran’s military spending had increased alongside the overall government spending, not on its own.

Let’s consider Iran’s military expenditure as a share of overall government spending. In 2015, it accounted for 15.4% of the government spending, and in 2017, it accounted for %15.8, showing a 0.4 percentage point increase.

Looking at Iran’s defence expenditure as a share of GDP, there’s a similar trend: It has increased by only half a percentage point, going from 2.6 percent to 3.1 percent from 2015 to 2017.

The nuclear accord lifted sanctions and allowed for a rise in the oil export, enabling the government to go towards restoring budget levels of 2000s. To be accurate, the 30-percent increase brought Iran’s military spending back to near-2006 levels.

### What about Iran’s Rivals?

Trump was missing an even more important context, failing to mention the military spending of regional rivals Iran could come into conflict with. In fact, Iran’s military budget has fallen short of individual regional rivals for decades, if not centuries.

According to SIPRI, at nearly \$16 billion in 2017, Iran’s defence budget is teeny in comparison to its probable battlefield enemies: Israel’s \$18.5 billion (plus \$3.5 billion in military aid from the US); Saudi Arabia’s \$76.7 billion; and the United States’ nearly \$600 billion.

Moreover, military expenditure per capita reports put Iran \$166 in 2017, ranking 53, while Saudi Arabia is at the top with over \$2,100 dollar and Israel is second with more than \$1,980.

### Facts Talk

Looking at facts, Iran’s budget has decreased significantly compared to the last year, taking into account the sharp devaluation of the Iranian currency in 2018.

In the 2017-2018 budget, Iran’s defence spending was nearly 618 trillion rials, or \$16.2 billion based on an official exchange rate of around 38,000 rials for each dollar.

According to the government’s proposal, this year’s military spending would be nearly 515 trillion rials, or \$8.5 billion based on dollar’s official exchange rate of around 60,000 rials.

Even if government revenues are fully collected, the budget would be around 715 trillion, or \$11.9 billion.

So Iran’s budget is disproportionate to similar powers in the region, let alone world powers. Is this the same apocalyptic government that the 31-year-old Saudi Crown Prince has described?

Next time you heard a wily politician or a wicked reporter saying things that make you feel Iran is preparing to launch its world domination projects, just remember these facts.

(Source: Iran Front Page)



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# Iran home to largest cord blood bank in Middle East

**1 →** “There are both public and private cord blood banks in Royan, but Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization and Shariati Hospital only have public banks,” said Zarrabi.

Public cord blood banks accept donations to be used for anyone in need, and as such function like public blood banks. Private cord blood banks store cord blood solely for potential use by the donor or donor's family.

According to Royan's managing director, the institution's private bank charges 32 million rials (around \$760) for the collection and around 400,000 rials (around \$9.5) a year for storage of cord blood samples.

Private banks typically charge \$2,000 for the collection and around \$200 a year for storage.

“We also have offices in the United Arab Emirates and Iraq and accept cord blood samples from them as well,” Zarrabi further remarked.

**Few cord blood transplants are happening**

“Despite our large storage of stem cells,



**Storing cord blood samples have started in the country since 2005 and currently 400 hospitals are contributing to the collection process in Iran.**

there are unfortunately few transplant and cell therapy centers in the country,” Zarrabi regretted.

“Up to now, we have done 30 cord blood stem cell transplants for patients with blood disorders and 120 clinical-trial transplants for patients with brain paralysis.”

“Annually, we need around 3,000 bone marrow transplants, but there has been only a total of 3,500 bone marrow transplants in the country over the last ten years. There are a number of reasons for such few transplants, including the small number of transplant centers, the shortage of doctors, and the high expenses of such procedures.”

“As for transplant expenses, the former health minister believed that the transplants must be free of charge; however, it incurs high costs on the hospitals; subsequently, many of them are reluctant to do such procedures.”

According to Zarrabi, every cord blood transplant costs around 60 to 70 million rials (\$14,000 to \$16,000).

## Cancer ‘sponge’ could cut hair loss and other side-effects of chemotherapy

The toxic side-effects of chemotherapy could be reduced by a sponge-like device which strains leftover cancer drugs from the blood stream before they damage the brain or cause hair loss.

U.S. researchers showed that, in animal tests at least, up to two-thirds of the unwanted drugs were absorbed by a filter placed in a major vein leading away from the site of a tumour.

If the results can be reproduced in human tests, the device could allow doctors to deliver drugs in higher doses which would usually be too toxic to be used medically.

The filter was inspired by absorbers used to remove unwanted impurities like sulphur from fuel, and works like the stents already routinely used in cardiovascular medicine, researchers from the University of California at Berkeley said.

“Literally, we’ve taken the concept out of petroleum refining and applied it to chemotherapy,” Professor Nitash Balsara, one of the authors of the study published in ACS Central Science.

“Surgeons snake a wire into the bloodstream and place the sponge like a stent, and just leave it in for the amount of time you give chemotherapy, perhaps a few hours.”

The research was trialled in pigs and tested on the liver cancer chemotherapy drug doxorubicin. The device, dubbed the “chemofilter” has a honeycomb structure coated with a polymer which reacts with the drug and prevents it being released – similar to the catalytic convertor in a car exhaust.

In the pig trials the device captured 64 per cent of the drug that would otherwise have circulated around the body, damaging the immune system and causing ulcers, nausea and other symptoms. Side-effects of doxorubicin in humans include hair loss, anaemia and increased risk of infection, as the circulating drugs kill off sensitive hair follicles and blood cells, according to Macmillan Cancer Support.

Dr Steven Hetts, another of the authors, said if it’s shown to work in humans the device could be rapidly approved for patients because it’s a removable implant.

“We are developing this around liver cancer because it is a big public health threat – there are tens of thousands of new cases every year,” he added.

“But if you think about it, you could use this sort of approach for any tumour or any disease that is confined to an organ, and you want to absorb the drug on the venous side before it can distribute and cause side effects elsewhere in the body.”

(Source: The Independent)



## ‘High potential for local production of plasma-derived medicine’

**HEALTH DESK** TEHRAN — Iran has true potential to manufacture plasma-derived medicinal products as it has high-quality plasma, said an official with Iranian Food and Drug Administration.

Plasma is the largest single component of blood, and makes up about 55% of total blood volume. It is a vital source material for a number of plasma-derived medications that treat and prevent life-threatening diseases, illnesses and conditions. Plasma can’t be created in a laboratory; rather, it is usually derived from people donating their plasma.

“By using its own plasma, Iran can locally produce 100 percent of its requirement to Factor IX (nine) and Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG) and 30 percent of its needs to Factor VIII (eight),” said Dr. Ali Vasheqani, head of the biology department at the Food and Drug Administration.

Factor eight and nine are essential blood-clotting proteins; they are used to treat hemophilia and some bleeding disorders.

“Currently, the plasma collected by Iranian Blood Trans-



fusion Organization (IBTO) and some private organizations are sent to European countries, so the required medicine is produced and is sent back to the country,” said Vasheqani,

IRNA reported on Friday.

“According to European medical manufacturers, Iran’s plasma is among the top in the world in terms of quality, virus safety and stability,” Vasheqani noted.

“World Health Organization has named Iran a successful example of using its own plasma for manufacturing the medicine required for treating rare, life-threatening diseases,” he added.

According to Vasheqani, increasing the provision of plasma and setting up plasma processing units are now among the top objectives of the Food and Drug Administration.

“Usually, the countries who want to send their plasma for processing to another country, first dispatch some inspectors to screen and endorse the plasma-recipient centers of the target country. Fortunately, the IBTO and other Iranian private centers have been approved in all inspections and it means that we are following all the necessary standards and we are perfectly ready to produce such medicines,” he concluded.

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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:**  
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**Aghdasiyeh**  
**Shahrak Gharb**  
**Shariati-Pasdaran**  
**Valiasre**  
**Tajrish**  
**Jordan**  
**Vanak**  
**Arjantin**  
**Zafar...**  
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## Centuries-old water supply system discovered in Iran



**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — A team of Iranian archaeologists has found remnants of a centuries-old network, which used to supply water to an underground “city” in central Iran.

“An intricate water supply system is unearthed in the underground city of Nushabad, located in the central district of Aran-Bidgol County, Isfahan Province,” IRNA reported on Saturday. “This system, which includes historical water structures, has been constructed in two historical periods, probably the eras of Ilkhanids (1256–1335/1353) and Safavids (1501–1736),” said Zahra Saroukhani who currently leads the fifth season of excavations at Nushabad. An exact proof the antiquity of the structure, which may also date back to the pre-Islamic era, requires further excavations and studies in this regard, she added.

The labyrinthine “city” is comprised of three stories of tunnels, chambers, air ducts, staircases, and canals. It is widely considered a marvel of ancient architecture and engineering.

For thousands of years, man-carved subterranean canals (best known as qanats) have delivered water to agricultural and permanent settlements in arid regions of Iran. They simply enjoy the force gravity.

The concept of “Persian Qanat” was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2016, representing a select of eleven aqueducts across Iran.

## Tehran palace hosts half a million visitors in autumn



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Some half a million people toured the Sa’dabad Cultural-Historical Complex in northern Tehran during autumn, which shows a 40 percent year-on-year growth.

Of the number, about 20,000 were foreign nationals, IRNA reported. Sprawled on about 110 hectares of a mountainside parkland, the Sa’dabad complex was once a royal summer residence during Qajar era (1789–1925) and its subsequent Pahlavi epoch (1925–1979).



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Chartres Cathedral

Notre-Dame de Chartres Cathedral, located in the Centre-Val-de-Loire region in France, is one of the most authentic and complete works of religious architecture of the early 13th century.

It was the destination of a pilgrimage dedicated to the Virgin Mary, among the most popular in all medieval Western Christianity. Because of the unity of its architecture and decoration, the result of research of the first Gothic era, its immense influence on the art of Middle Age Christianity, Chartres Cathedral appears as an essential landmark in the history of medieval architecture.



The outstanding stained-glass ensemble, monumental statuary of the 12th and 13th centuries and the painted decorations miraculously preserved from the ravages of humankind and time, make Chartres one of the most admirable and the best-preserved examples of Gothic art.

The west façade built around the middle of the 12th century, with its three portals whose splays are decorated with statue columns (Royal Portal), its two towers, its southern spire and its three large incomparable stained-glass windows, comprise an authentic and complete example that remains with us of this art created at St Denis, and which marked the advent of an original mode of plastic expression, known as the Gothic style.

A little later, the nave and the choir, reconstructed as of 1194, effected for the first time an architectural formula which would be widely employed throughout the 13th century.

The monumental sculptures of Chartres Cathedral are valued both for their abundance and for their quality.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iran on New York Times “Places to Go” list for 2019

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The New York Times has included Iran in its 2019 edition of Places to Go list, noting the country takes “the top spot.”

The inclusion comes among escalating tensions between Iran and the United States as President Donald Trump pulled America out of the Iran nuclear deal in May 2017 and restored sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

This year, the American newspaper, has chosen Sebastian Modak, a journalist with an “impressive background and resume”, who will set off travels to the selected destinations.

Answering a question about his most desired destination, Modak said, “There’s nothing I’m not excited about, but I think Iran takes the top spot,” online edition of the newspaper reported on Wednesday.

“More than any other place on the list, or even in the world, Iran is somewhere that



From left: A spice vendor in the Grand Bazaar in Isfahan; the Imam Mosque; ruins at Persepolis. (Credit Greg Von Doersten for The New York Times)

I’ve only ever been able to look at from afar, through the lens of scary newspaper head-

lines. I’ve found that there’s often a huge gap between the everyday lived experience

## Exhibit to highlight ‘Iranian Home’



**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — “Iranian Home”, an approach that embeds traditional handicrafts in modern homes, will come under the spotlight at the 9th International Exhibition of Midex in Tehran.

“Iranian Home” made its debut at the 28th National Crafts Exhibition in 2017 to promote Iranian crafts through presentation of their usefulness in practice.

International exhibitors and companies

from South Korea, Malaysia, Germany, Poland, Turkey, Finland, England, China, Belgium, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Italy attended previous editions of the event, according to its website.

Organized by Tehran-based Nama Negar International Co., the exhibit opened at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground on January 11 and will run until January 14. It revolves around interior and landscape designs.

## Spain to host exhibit on Iranian civilization



**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — To enrich cultural scene between Tehran and Madrid, a Spanish museum will be hosting a loan exhibit on history of Iran.

Titled “Iran – Cradle of Civilization”, the loan exhibit made its debut at the Drents Museum in Assen, the Netherlands, where it was well received by museumgoers from June to November 2018.

The scheme was approved by the Iranian government last week based on a proposal

by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, IRIB reported.

The report, however, didn’t provide further information on the event.

“Iran – Cradle of Civilization” features earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms.

# Is Instagram ruining travel? The short answer is it’s a bit hysterical

By Bridie Jabour

When I moved to Sydney five years ago, I found out about a magical place called Gordons Bay from my friend’s friend. I went to explore and found a stunning inlet with crystal-blue water and only a few people sitting on the rocks. I went most weekends that summer, enjoying swimming, snorkelling and general lazing at what felt like far from the enormous eastern suburbs crowds.

It wasn’t exactly a secret place. It’s along the Bondi-Coogee coastal walk, but the path passes above it and it doesn’t have any lifeguards. I assumed that’s what kept many people away.

Last time I was there you could barely move on the rocks, and there was not one, but two, giant pink flamingoes in the water.

Did I mention how picturesque Gordons Bay is? Really picturesque. Instagram-worthy picturesque. So Instagram-worthy it’s become one of the photo-taking meccas of Sydney. I have no scientific evidence but the rise of Gordons Bay has coincided with the rise of the phenomenon of “going places for the ‘gram”. I suspect the bay’s popularity may have something to do with that.

People also seem unable to visit the McIver Women’s Baths (as close to a spiritual place as I have ever experienced) or Icebergs in Bondi without declaring via Instagram they were there and it’s still as attractive as the last time someone visited. But Gordons Bay has got off lightly it seems.

Hyams beach village in Jervis Bay, which is said to have the world’s whitest sand, has had to employ traffic controllers and turn people away as up to 5,000 cars per day try to visit a village with 400 car spaces. Why so suddenly popular? It’s become a “social media phenomenon”.

In New Zealand people are queuing for up to an hour to create a photo that has the illusion of seclusion at one of the most spectacular spots in the photogenic country.



A barely-known beach in Japan had 50,000 visitors in July and August last year as they sought a “mirror-effect” shot with the fiery dusk.

There’s an endless supply of articles bemoaning Instagram “ruining” photography and even “ruining” travel. Is the Instagram generation ruining these locales? The short answer is it’s a bit hysterical and, anyway, we’re ruining the entire planet so, as ever, there’s something more worthy to fret over.

It is easy to lament the sensation of visiting places just for the ‘gram as a sign of an increasingly self-absorbed society at worst, and unoriginal at best. But we cannot just blame Instagram for these places being mauled by people. Instagram is just the natural progression of what was begun by Lonely Planet and then TripAdvisor – giving people a guaranteed AMAZING/ INCREDIBLE/ BEST EVER travel experience to brag to everyone at home about.

As people have become wealthier and air travel more accessible, the world has grown smaller. It’s not a particularly

reveatory observation to say we are travelling more but in the Instagram and TripAdvisor age what many people seem to have lost sight of is: travel can be a bit shit.

There’s the actual flight, the airline queues, paying \$50 in your own currency for an incredibly ordinary breakfast, bad weather, boredom in art galleries, fatigue, sore feet, underwhelming iconic sites, enforced checkout times hours before you have to be somewhere, heavy luggage, dirty underwear, missing your bed; the list goes on.

So why risk a bad Schweinebraten in Berlin when you can go to Clubrestaurant am Wannsee? TripAdvisor and Instagram may take some of the imagination out of travel but who has time to have imagination? We have an expectation of ourselves to wring the productivity out of every moment, even in our down time.

People are hungry for social media to be evil, because if it’s bad then it must be the reason for a lot of bad in our world – such as the rise of Nazis, rigged elections and a bone deep malaise, and not, say, human nature and late-stage capitalism.

I cannot say for sure whether Instagram, or social media for that matter, is a net good or a net bad because it probably isn’t either. Every morning many members of my family – my siblings, my parents, my cousins, my aunts and uncles – take a photo of wherever we are and send it to each other with GM written on it for “good morning”. My uncle said at Christmas that he feels like he has watched my son grow up over the year despite only actually getting to see him twice in that time.

It doesn’t seem a particularly balanced ledger upon close inspection but people are not going to stop using social media. Instagram could be ruining some beautiful places, but people have been ruining beautiful places on Earth since the beginning of time.

(Source: The Guardian)

# How airlines are catering to their smallest customers: children

More and more airlines are turning their attention to their youngest travelers — both to appease their parents, and to keep other passengers happy on long flights.

Airlines are constantly trying to find new ways to win customers. In this never-ending competition, carriers — mostly international ones — are now turning their attention to their youngest passengers, wooing children (and beleaguered parents) with new amenities such as toys, child-friendly toiletry kits, meals and amped up seat back entertainment.

Paul Tumpowsky, a father of a toddler daughter and the co-founder and chief executive of the New York travel agency Skylark, said that these new amenities go a long way in keeping children occupied on long flights. “If children are happy, then parents are happy, and they associate the airline with a positive flying experience and are more likely to choose it for future trips,” he said.

■ “Kids kits” keep children seated,

happy, and quiet

Emirates recently introduced a kit that young passengers receive as soon as they board. It contains a travel-themed reusable bag or lunch box, a coloring book with markers and an arts and crafts project such as an origami kit. Older children get an animal backpack with a travel journal, and babies and toddlers get a stuffed animal such as an elephant or alligator.

In addition, the airline has an expanded menu of children’s in-flight meals including chicken tenders and various kinds of pasta, served on a colorful tray. To keep them satiated between meals, children get a snack box with a cookie and sliced fruit.

Qatar Airways also has a new activity pack for children with crayons, coloring pages, stickers and a puzzle book. Infants get a stuffed toy, along with a plush book. The airline has also introduced new seat back entertainment aimed at children. It includes

more than two dozen family-friendly movies that change monthly, and children’s television such as The Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, the Cartoon Network and BabyTV.

Qantas also offers a kit with an activity book with puzzles and word games and even an Etch a Sketch toy. On select international flights, youngsters get colorful antiskid socks that they can wear onboard.

Turkish Airlines has several new onboard offerings for children. They receive a sack of three sustainably-made wooden figurines like pandas and soldiers, and a backpack amenity kit that includes a child-sized headset, a dental kit, socks and slippers. Parents with babies get a kit with a diaper changing mat, disposable bib, rash cream, baby lotion and shampoo, a packet of wipes and a breast pad.

■ Toys and videos keep children calm and entertained

On Singapore Airlines the cabin crew gives out toys to children based on their age.

Babies, for example, receive plush blocks, while pre-school-age youngsters get mini puzzles, and older children get a Monopoly Deal card game. The airline plans to change the toys quarterly.

Young passengers also get to pick from a children’s menu with more than a dozen items, like a burger with fries, fish sticks with diced vegetables and pancakes with sausage.

When it comes to domestic carriers, JetBlue recently debuted kid-focused videos from Headspace, a meditation service, as part of its in-flight entertainment. One of the videos, for example, is a five-minute cartoon that teaches children how to stay calm on a flight. The airline also has a new “Party Up” food box designed with youngsters in mind. Sold onboard for \$9, it includes M&M’s, popcorn, Fig Newtons, Parmesan cheese crisps and salami slices.

(Source: The New York Times)



# Scientists baffled by Cow explosion in deep space

Something highly unusual was picked up by the Asteroid Terrestrial Impact Last Alert System (ATLAS) on June 16, 2018. The discovery of a strange flare in the sky — brightening and fading — was reported in an astronomical telegram, which then alerted scientists. The source was named AT2018cow — based on a naming convention for transient sources where the last three letters are randomly assigned. Understandably, though, scientists quickly nicknamed it “the Cow”.

Astronomers all around the world started watching the Cow, which is one of the strangest and most observed objects recently discovered. Measurements of its brightness and wavelength suggest that it is located close to 200 million light years away, far outside our own galaxy. This means that the explosion would have been extremely bright to have been detected at all, producing as much energy as the sun radiates in 1,700 years.

Today, a race is on to work out exactly what it is. Our new research, to be published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, has come up with one explanation.

## Gamma-ray burst

The Cow must have appeared extremely suddenly — it was not seen in a search just 32 hours earlier. Follow up observations using instruments in space and on the ground suggested its brightness was larger than expected from a supernova (an exploding star). A gamma-ray burst — an intense explosion of light—would have been another possibility,



but the accompanying X-ray emission from the event seemed too small for it to fit this description.

The temperature profile of the source indicated that the object was glowing at a temperature of about 26,000 degrees Celsius, with peak brightness in the ultraviolet region of light.

Assuming the brightness of such a thermal source was a sphere, the size came out to be very large — about 50 times the orbit of the Earth around the sun. A supernova would also extend to something similar in size.

A second surprise was that the spectrum — a measurement of how light breaks down according to wavelength — did not show the

same features as that of a typical supernova. It was like the glow of a hot body only.

## The hot glowing body

Some faint but broad bumps and dips suggested there was, however, some material emitting at extremely high velocity in a cocoon around the hot glowing body.

As a member of the Neil Gehrels Swift observatory (in short “Swift”) team, I was asked to dig into our data to find out more. Swift is a satellite in a low-Earth orbit which is able to point to a new source automatically in about 90 seconds after a gamma-ray burst, or after being commanded to do so from the ground. Swift has many telescopes and can provide data in a range of different light regions — from the visible and ultraviolet to gamma rays.

At the time, several other teams were investigating the source using various observatories. Papers based on the Swift’s X-ray data and the ATLAS data had already been published. Dan Perley from Liverpool John Moores University and his collaboration was just finishing the Herculean task of analyzing the optical and infrared data from the large GROWTH collaboration — comprising telescopes around the world — following up on interesting sources.

By the last weeks of August, all this research had made it clear that the Cow did definitely not fit the profile of a normal gamma-ray burst, nor a supernova or a superluminous supernova (an extremely bright supernova).

(Source: Newsweek)

**Assuming the brightness of such a thermal source was a sphere, the size came out to be very large — about 50 times the orbit of the Earth around the sun. A supernova would also extend to something similar in size.**

## Quick-stepping hydrogen causes light bulb to flicker, team finds

At one point in my life, I spent several years trying to understand surfaces. It had come as a shock to me to learn that surfaces rule the world. It came as even more of a shock to discover how difficult it was to understand or even measure what is happening at a surface. That makes a light switch made from a single hydrogen molecule sitting on a surface very interesting for what it can tell us about surfaces.

To begin with, we’re not talking about surfaces like the one your kitchen table provides for your dinner plates. Instead, the surfaces we’re talking about are the ones you’d see if you could zoom in on your kitchen table to the point where individual atoms were visible, and some of the molecules from the air in the room would be bouncing off or occasionally stopping to sit on the surface until vibrations knocked them back off.

Almost all of modern life relies on catalysts. In very simple terms, catalysts are surfaces that kick reactions into motion. There is more to them than that, but without the strange behavior we see at these surfaces, life would be very boring.

## In an unusual situation

Surfaces don’t make any of this easy to understand, though. The atoms that make up a surface are in an unusual situation. Inside the material, all atoms are surrounded by their mates in a mutually satisfying way. In the interior, material properties can be understood by examining the structures that hold the atoms in a satisfying way and the symmetries the structure possesses. At the surface, the symmetry is broken, and, like Mick Jagger, can’t get no satisfaction. The atoms’ attempts to find satisfaction is what makes the surface both interesting and frustrating.

That lack of satisfaction has conse-



quences for anything near the surface. Because surface atoms don’t know what to do with their electrons, molecules like water or nitrogen will stick temporarily to a surface. The surface may even tear these adsorbed molecules apart. However, for the most part, the bonds between the surface atoms and the adsorbed molecule are often weak; they constantly break and reform.

This makes the surface an active place, as molecules attach, maybe break up, and reform. The molecules move around, they detach and are replaced by fresh copies. All this activity takes place in just a single layer of material, so any measurement of it is often very weak and takes time to gather. As a result, our understanding of them is incomplete. Imagine that you have to review a movie, but you can only choose between viewing a single frame or the average of all the frames in the movie.

## How a molecule moves

That is what makes this latest bit of research interesting. It allows us to get an impression of how a molecule moves about on a surface, albeit in a limited fashion.

The researchers started with a gold surface. They then probed the surface with a very sharp tip of gold—so sharp that it ends in a single atom. The tip is placed less than a nanometer from the surface and is moved around until it finds a hydrogen atom.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

## More stable light comes from intentionally ‘squashed’ quantum dots

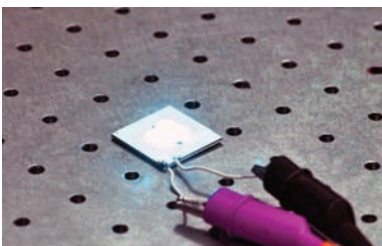
Novel colloidal quantum dots are formed of an emitting cadmium/selenium (Cd/Se) core enclosed into a compositionally graded Cd<sub>x</sub>Zn<sub>1-x</sub>Se shell wherein the fraction of zinc versus cadmium increases towards the dot’s periphery. Intentionally “squashing” colloidal quantum dots during chemical synthesis creates dots capable of stable, “blink-free” light emission that is fully comparable with the light produced by dots made with more complex processes.

The squashed dots emit spectrally narrow light with a highly stable intensity and a non-fluctuating emission energy. New research at Los Alamos National Laboratory suggests that the strained colloidal quantum dots represent a viable alternative to presently employed nanoscale light sources, and they deserve exploration as single-particle, nanoscale light sources for optical “quantum” circuits, ultrasensitive sensors, and medical diagnostics.

“In addition to exhibiting greatly improved performance over traditional produced quantum dots, these new strained dots could offer unprecedented flexibility in manipulating their emission color, in combination with the unusually narrow, ‘subthermal’ linewidth,” said Victor Klimov, lead Los Alamos researcher on the project. The “squashed dots also show compatibility with virtually any substrate or embedding medium as well as various chemical and biological environments.”

The new colloidal processing techniques allow for preparation of virtually ideal quantum-dot emitters with nearly 100 percent emission quantum yields shown for a wide range of visible, infrared and ultraviolet wavelengths. These advances have been exploited in a variety of light-emission technologies, resulting in successful commercialization of quantum-dot displays and TV sets.

The next frontier is exploration of colloidal quantum dots as single-particle, nanoscale



light sources. Such future “single-dot” technologies would require particles with highly stable, nonfluctuating spectral characteristics.

## Random variations in emission

Recently, there has been considerable progress in eliminating random variations in emission intensity by protecting a small emitting core with an especially thick outer layer. However, these thick-shell structures still exhibit strong fluctuations in emission spectra.

In a new publication in the journal Nature Materials, Los Alamos researchers demonstrated that spectral fluctuations in single-dot emission can be nearly completely suppressed by applying a new method of “strain engineering.” The key in this approach is to combine in a core/shell motif two semiconductor with directionally asymmetric lattice mismatch, which results in anisotropic compression of the emitting core.

This modifies the structures of electronic states of a quantum dot and thereby its light emitting properties. One implication of these changes is the realization of the regime of local charge neutrality of the emitting “exciton” state, which greatly reduces its coupling to lattice vibrations and fluctuating electrostatic environment, key to suppressing fluctuations in the emitted spectrum. An additional benefit of the modified electronic structures is dramatic narrowing of the emission linewidth, which becomes smaller than the room-temperature thermal energy.

(Source: phys.org)

## ‘Realistic’ new model points the way to more efficient and profitable fracking

A new computational model could potentially boost efficiencies and profits in natural gas production by better predicting previously hidden fracture mechanics. It also accurately accounts for the known amounts of gas released during the process. “Our model is far more realistic than current models and software used in the industry,” said Zdenk Bažant, McCormick Institute Professor and Walter P. Murphy Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Materials Science and Engineering at Northwestern’s McCormick School of Engineering.

Despite the industry’s growth, much of the fracking process remains mysterious. Because fracking happens deep underground, researchers cannot observe the fracture mechanism of how the gas is released from the shale.

“This work offers improved predictive capability that enables better control of production while reducing the environmental footprint by using less fracturing fluid,” said Hari Viswanathan, computational geoscientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory. “It should make it possible to optimize various parameters such as pumping rates and cycles, changes of fracturing fluid properties such as viscosity, etc. This could lead to a greater

percentage of gas extraction from the deep shale strata, which currently stands at about 5 percent and rarely exceeds 15 percent.”

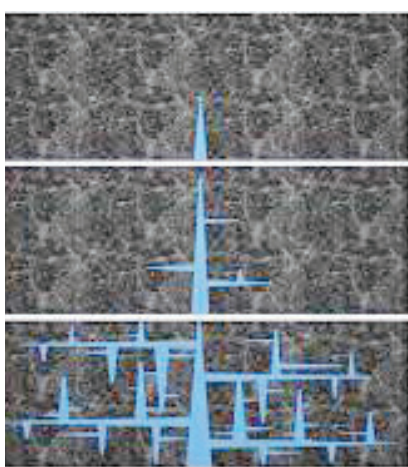
## Tectonic events

By considering the closure of preexisting fractures caused by tectonic events in the distant past and taking into account water seepage forces not previously considered, researchers from Northwestern Engineering and Los Alamos have developed a new mathematical and computational model that shows how branches form off vertical cracks during the fracking process, allowing more natural gas to be released.

The model is the first to predict this branching while being consistent with the known amount of gas released from the shale during this process. The new model could potentially increase the industry’s efficiency.

The results were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on January 11, in a paper titled Branching of Hydraulic Cracks in Gas or Oil Shale with Closed Natural Fractures: How to Master Permeability.

Understanding just how the shale fractures form could also improve management of sequestration, where wastewater from the process is pumped back underground.



To extract natural gas through fracking, a hole is drilled down to the shale layer -- often several kilometers beneath the surface -- then the drill is extended horizontally, for miles. When water with additives is pumped down into the layer under high pressure, it creates cracks in the shale, releasing natural gas from its pores of nanometer dimensions.

## From horizontal bore

Classic fracture mechanics research

predicts that those cracks, which run vertically from the horizontal bore, should have no branches. But these cracks alone cannot account for the quantity of gas released during the process. In fact, the gas production rate is about 10,000 times higher than calculated from the permeability measured on extracted shale cores in the laboratory.

Los Alamos National Laboratory, a multidisciplinary research institution engaged in strategic science on behalf of national security, is operated by Triad, a public service oriented, national security science organization equally owned by its three founding members: Battelle Memorial Institute (Battelle), the Texas A&M University System (TAMUS), and the Regents of the University of California (UC) for the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration.

Los Alamos enhances national security by ensuring the safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear stockpile, developing technologies to reduce threats from weapons of mass destruction, and solving problems related to energy, environment, infrastructure, health, and global security concerns.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

## Signal from star being destroyed at supermassive black hole’s event

“It is very hard, the Spin of a Black hole limit, as the Spin effects occur only very close to the hole itself, where the gravity is extremely strong and it is hard to get a clear view”, explains Pasham, in a communication to the European space Agency ESA. A black hole is a collapsed star with a core so dense that it has near-unimaginable gravitational power.

Now researchers at MIT and elsewhere have pored through data from multiple telescopes’ observations of the event, and discovered a curiously intense, stable, and periodic pulse, or signal, of X-rays, across all datasets.

The crumbs left over from a supermassive black hole’s recent meal have allowed scientists to calculate the monster’s rotation rate, and the results are mind-boggling.

Astronomers back in 2014 were searching the night sky for something cool and found what they were looking for.

This artist’s impression shows hot gas orbiting in a disk around a rapidly-spinning black hole.

This is how Diego Simeone reacted to Alvaro Morata rumours Chelsea have four offers on their table for Alvaro Morata, who is determined to leave the club in the January transfer window. Chelsea striker Alvaro Morata has surely been one of the biggest flops that the Blues fans have seen in recent years.

Astronomers found evidence that the corona of a black hole is what drives its evolution. The black hole was a buzz saw, spinning fast enough to stretch the star into a rotating ring around the black hole’s event horizon, the point beyond which not even light can escape.

“That’s not super fast - there are other Black holes whose Spin is estimated to be close to 99 percent of the speed of light”, explains Pasham.

“There have already been measurements of spins from black holes that are actively accreting”, or acquiring more matter under the influence of gravity, the study’s first author Dheeraj Pasham, Einstein Postdoctoral Fellow at the MIT Kavli Institute, told Gizmodo.

(Source: personaltechmd.com)



## Far-ranging fin whales find year-round residence in Gulf of California, study says

Researchers from Mexico and the United States have concluded that a population of fin whales in the rich Gulf of California ecosystem may live there year-round -- an unusual circumstance for a whale species known to migrate across ocean basins.

A fin whale surfaces in Gulf of California, Mexico, during the 2001 study showing the characteristic black coloration of the body contrasting with the white lower right jaw. Photograph by Craig Hayslip, Oregon State University Marine Mammal Institute, under U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service Permit 369-1757 issued to Bruce Mate.

Researchers from Mexico and the United States have concluded that a population of fin whales in the rich Gulf of California ecosystem may live there year-round -- an unusual circumstance for a whale species known to migrate across ocean basins.

What makes the discovery even more unusual, researchers note, is that they identified the pattern of movement of the fin whales, which are the second largest whale species in the world, using a satellite tracking data set from 2001. Oregon State University professor Bruce Mate, director of OSU’s Marine Mammal Institute and co-author on the study, tagged 11 whales that year and was able to record the movements of nine of them for up to a year.

Since then, the OSU scientists have worked with colleagues in Mexico to further study the whales, in the process identifying via a 2011 photograph at least one female fin whale from the 2001 study -- this time, with a calf, indicating the whales may even stay in the region for breeding and calving.

“Researchers have known since at least the mid-1980s that fin whales inhabited the Gulf of California, but we just haven’t been able to get much information about them. As it turns out, we had an important piece of the puzzle in the tracking data set we just hadn’t yet fully analyzed.”

(Source: Science Daily)

## Alien life may exist on newly discovered Barnard’s star planet, according to astronomers

Barnard’s Star, a nearby star system located just six light-years away, is orbited by a frozen Super-Earth. The exoplanet called Barnard b (or GJ 699 b) was discovered only two months ago.

Researchers who found the planet do not think the icy world could support life because of its extreme conditions. Barnard b only receives about 2 percent of radiation our home planet gets from the sun and its surface temperature is nearly -275 degrees Fahrenheit.

A new group of astronomers, however, is more optimistic, saying alien life could potentially thrive on some parts of the planet.

Edward Guinan, from Villanova University in Pennsylvania, and colleagues suggested that heat generated by geothermal processes could warm pockets of water beneath the icy world’s surface, which could potentially support the evolution of life.

Guinan and colleague Scott Engle, also from Villanova University, found that while Barnard b could be too cold for liquid water and probably life to exist on its surface, it may have subsurface oceans depending on how big it is. These oceans could form on rocky worlds.

If Barnard’s Star b indeed has a mass 3.2 times greater than Earth’s as currently thought, it could be a rocky super-Earth. If its mass is seven or eight times more than that of our planet, it would be a smaller version of Neptune, which could mean that like the Solar System’s blue gas giant, the exoplanet would not have enough surface for life to evolve on and would likely be inhabitable.

Researchers are not yet precisely sure how large the planet is, but once it launches, NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope could help determine the size of this Super-Earth and whether or not it has the right size for subsurface oceans to exist.

“Super-Earths may have a capability of having extra geothermal energy that could, if it had water ice around it, melt the ice in places,” Guinan said.

(Source: Tech Times)



## 40% of Tehran rundown areas renovated: expert

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — There are 3,268 hectares of rundown areas in Tehran, 40 percent of which has been renovated, head of the Tehran City Council commission on urban planning and architecture has said.

However, Mohammad Salari explained, mostly renovations concerned the old buildings not the area's infrastructure.

“The most important barrier to retrofitting rundown areas is the lack of coordination, which will be broken down by setting up a renovation headquarter to be a coordinative body and pursue the issue,” Fars quoted Salari as saying on Wednesday.



Tehran needs renovation through an urban regeneration approach, in which the city's infrastructure being retrofitted and modernized, to do so, apart from citizen participation, the developers and investors must cooperate, he further explained.

Pointing to the renovation of 40 percent of the total 3,268 hectares of rundown areas in the capital, he regretted that only old buildings have been reconstructed constituting 40 percent, while the city's infrastructure and public facilities have not been reconstructed.

Kaveh Ali-Akbari, head of the renovation of rundown areas organization affiliated to the Municipality, said in November 2018 that over 5 percent of the properties in the busiest province of the country are extremely old, according to the statistics published in the Iranian calendar year of 1385 (March 2006-March 2007), once the statistics are revised, a considerable increase will show up.

“Currently, over 1.2 million people live in rundown areas, amounting to 15 percent of the total population of Tehran,” he added.

On December 27, Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi said headquarters for sustainable renovation of rundown areas in the capital city of Tehran has been established.

In a tweet Hanachi explained that “after two years of putting off the matter the headquarters for sustainable renovation of the rundown areas in Tehran was formed... we are planning on taking effective steps by mobilizing integrated management and public participation to renovate the rundown areas.”

In the national budget bill proposed for the current Iranian calendar year 1397 (started on March 21, 2018), Majlis (the Iranian parliament) has approved a \$200 million budget for renovation of rundown areas.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Buying a Camera

A: Hello, ma'am, can I help you find something?  
B: Yes, actually I'm looking to buy a camera.  
A: We've got a wide selection do you know if you'd like a **point-and-shoot**, or something a little fancier? Are you shopping for yourself or for someone else?  
B: Actually I'm buying a camera for my husband.  
A: Ah, well then I'd recommend a nice **entry-level** digital SLR.  
B: Yeah? Can I take a look at the SLRs you carry?  
A: Sure thing, follow me. This here is the.  
B: The Canon Eos. Yeah it's ok, but I'm looking for something that performs better in low light, has a better display panel, and longer battery life.  
A: Oh, ah, um, the Nikon D60 is a nice option.  
B: Yeah, but what kit **lens** does this camera come with? I don't want some bulky telephoto lens.  
A: Oh, well this one has the, uh.  
B: Looks to me like an 18-55mm lens. pretty standard, that will do. Not like my husband will be stalking celebrities or anything!  
A: So, ahem, can I **interest you** in any acc...  
B: Accessories? Do you carry **polarizing filters**?  
A: Polarizing filter um we should! I'm sorry, ma'am. looks like we're sold out.  
B: No you're not! There are some right here!  
A: Oh, well, would you look at that! Po-la-ri-zing filters.  
B: Thanks for your help, Ralph!  
A: No problem, ma'am.

■ **Key vocabulary**  
**point and shoot:** any compact non-SLR camera with non-interchangeable lenses, using automatic settings and simplified controls. Generally desired by novices and casual users  
**entry level:** simple and appropriate to an inexperienced person  
**lens:** a transparent optical device used to converge or diverge transmitted light and to form images  
**interest someone in:** try to persuade someone to buy, do, or eat something  
**polarizing filter:** a camera lens filter used to control the plane of polarization of light entering the lens  
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**tripod:** a three-legged stand for a camera  
**filter:** a lens screen of dyed gelatin or glass for controlling color or for diminishing the intensity of light  
**exposure:** the process of light hitting a photosensitive surface, such as film or a digital image sensor  
**shutter:** a mechanical device for opening and closing the aperture of a camera lens to expose film  
**wide angle lens:** a lens which has a wide coverage angle so it can take in a great deal of scene, usually any lens shorter than 42mm



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

# Subsidies doubled for underprivileged patients suffering autism

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The Ministry of Health has doubled the subsidies allocated to 4,000 autistic patients under the Welfare Organization's coverage, granting 10 million rials (nearly \$250) subsidies per patient, head of the transplantation and treatment of diseases department at the Ministry of Health has announced.

“Currently, some 8,000 people have been diagnosed with autism disorder in the country,” ISNA quoted Mehdi Shadnoosh as saying on Saturday.

“It should be noted that autism disorder is among the most prevalent disorders in the country, which has increased dramatically over the past decade,” he added.

Although, regional programs have been implemented or are being implemented in rural and urban areas, the programs are less satisfactory from the parents of autistic individuals point of view, he lamented.

In order to promote facilities and services for these patients, various governmental bodies, public and families of the autistic individuals must participate through a comprehensive and coordinated program, he also added.

He went on to say that significant programs are underway through the country's Special Education Organization, but we need a comprehensive program to achieve better results in this field.

“It is estimated that about 320,000 autistic individuals can be identified in the country, approximately 35,000 of them are children under school age, up to 7 years old,” he stated, adding, early diagnosis and interventions for autistic children is of great importance.

Pointing to each level of the disorder having its own therapeutic methods which sometimes differ from one another, he



**Some 62 centers offering treatment and rehabilitation services to autistic patients are operating under the medical sciences university's supervision nationwide, which mostly offer services to those financially struggling patients.**

noted that an identification card for different autistic patients is currently being provided in the country, through which different rehabilitation and educational services will be provided to the patient.

“Some 62 centers offering treatment and rehabilitation services to autistic patients are operating under the medical sciences university's supervision nationwide, which mostly offer services to those financially struggling patients,”

he highlighted.

“A supportive package including occupational therapy, speech therapy, behavioral interventions, and counseling services have been scheduled to be provided to these children and their families by the aforesaid centers,” he also stated.

“These centers are supposed to provide the packages with government tariffs, in addition, some 4,000 patients in financial distress will receive subsidies

amounting to 10 million rials (nearly \$250), which is doubled compared to before,” he concluded.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are characterized by social-interaction difficulties, communication challenges and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors.

World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 160 children has an autism spectrum disorder worldwide.

Autism cannot be diagnosed at birth. A study, published in February 2010 in Science Daily, of the development of autism in infants, comparing the behavior of the siblings of children diagnosed with autism to that of babies developing normally, has found that the nascent symptoms of the condition -- a lack of shared eye contact, smiling and communicative babbling -- are not present at 6 months, but emerge gradually and only become apparent during the latter part of the first year of life.

According to Autism Parenting Magazine research is increasingly proving that children with an autism spectrum disorder benefit from the earliest interventions possible. In 2001, the U.S. National Research Council urged families not to use the “wait and see” method for early intervention as it was “likely to have significant and negative consequences.”

Evidence-based psychosocial interventions including behavioral treatment and parent skills training programs, can reduce difficulties in communication and social behavior, with a positive impact on wellbeing and quality of life for persons with autism and their caregivers.

Globally, people with ASD are often subject to stigma, discrimination and human rights violations, and in general access to services and support for people with ASD is inadequate.

## Education Ministry needs \$16b budget: deputy minister

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The Ministry of Education has demanded a total budget of 700 trillion rials (nearly \$16 billion), while a budget of 563 trillion rials (around \$13 billion) has been proposed in the budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 21), deputy education minister has said.

This is while, the Ministry received 434 trillion rials (about \$10 billion), accounting for 11.3 percent of the national budget for the Iranian current calendar year (March 2018-March 2019), Ali Allahyar Torkaman said, Fars reported on Saturday.

“Compared to the next year's budget of 563 trillion rials (around \$13 billion) constituting 13.4 percent of the total national budget, the amount has increased by 25 percent,” he added.

The national budget bill for the next year, proposed by President Hassan Rouhani to the Majlis on December 24, amounts to 17.03 quadrillion rials (about \$405 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials).



“The Ministry's staff in the next school year (starting September 22, 2019) will inevitably increase to 957,800, which requires 94 percent of the total budget the Ministry

receives,” he lamented.

He went on to explain that education fund must grow to 700 trillion rials (nearly \$16 billion), although there is no possibility to provide it from national budget, so it must be supplied from 4 percent of the country's total gross domestic product.

“The Ministry requires special laws, through which being entitled to exemptions from paying some costs,” he also said.

“We are drafting a bill in this regard to propose to the Majlis, which will be prepared on the second Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht (April 21-May 21),” he highlighted.

Torkaman further called on the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) to cooperate on legislating special laws same as the Ministry of Science.

Referring to the parliament's move to exempt schools from paying water and electricity bills, he lamented that schools are not supposed to pay water and gas bills, while the Ministry of Energy resists on electricity bills.

## Air quality on London Underground ‘30 times worse than congested roads above’

Transport bosses have been urged to reduce pollution on the London Underground network after it was found to be 30 times higher than on busy roads in the capital.

The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) warned Transport for London it was “likely that there is some health risk associated with exposure to underground PM” – tiny particles known as particulate matter.

In its first study looking into the issue since 1998, COMEAP found underground particles were larger in size and concentration than those in outdoor air above ground.

Researchers found that a person travelling on a bus for two and a half hours was exposed to a third of what they would be travelling on the Tube for just an hour.

Unpublished data from King's College London also showed that Hampstead station on the Northern Line had the highest levels of pollution.

Tests recorded an average of 492 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m3) of air on the station's platforms, compared with an annual average of 16 µg/m3 from a roadside monitoring site in the capital.

An average of 4.8 million journeys are made on the London Underground every day.

The report found that the London Underground was affected more than any other subway system because it was the oldest and due to “deep, poorly ventilated tunnels”.

The committee concluded that there was likely to be some health risk associated with using the Underground system – but that a

lack of studies into this made it impossible to determine the extent.

It added that further investigation was required into the toxicity of the dust breathed in by tube passengers, which is heavier and more metal-based than the smaller, carbon-based particles in the air above ground.

“We would encourage Transport for London to continue to find practicable ways of reducing PM levels on the Underground network,” the committee said.

Professor Frank Kelly, chair of COMEAP, said people should continue to use the tube given the relatively short time spent underground and lack of evidence of harmful effects.

He told The Guardian: “We've got all this information about the health impacts



of the particles above the surface.

“Below ground, we know we have a higher mass but of a different type – we don't yet have the research into the level of the toxicity, and hence the health risk.”  
(Source: The Independent)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

### DOE chief demands UN to cooperate on negotiating Hamoun water right

Over a meeting held in Tehran on Wednesday with the UN resident coordinator and UNDP representative Ugochi Daniels, Issa Kalantari, chief of Iran's Department of Environment (DOE), emphasized the need for negotiating with Afghanistan to discuss Hamoun Lake water right.

### رئیس سازمان محیط زیست خواستار همکاری سازمان ملل برای مشکل حقابه هامون

به گزارش روز چهارشنبه ایرنا، عیسی کلانتری معاون رئیس جمهوری و رئیس سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست با اوگوچی دانیلز نماینده سازمان ملل در ایران دیدار و پیرامون مسائل زیست محیطی و زمینه های همکاری مشترک با یکدیگر گفت و گو کرد و در این دیدار بر همکاری فعال سازمان ملل برای حل مشکل حقابه ایران و افغانستان تاکید شد.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “-able, -ible, -ble, -ably, -ibly, -ibility”

■ **Meaning:** ability to receive the action of the verb  
■ **For example:** The procedures described are appropriate for removing stains from **washable** fabric.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Make off with

■ **Meaning:** steal and scape  
■ **For example:** A young man made off with my briefcase while I was checking the timetable.

### IDIOM

#### Come rain or shine

■ **Explanation:** If a person does something come rain or shine, they do it regularly, whatever the circumstances  
■ **For example:** He goes to the gym club every day, come rain or shine.



# Syria shoots down 'most of Israeli missiles' fired towards Damascus

1→ SANA further quoted an unnamed Ministry of Transport official as saying that the Damascus International Airport traffic was normal and that it was not affected by the Israeli aggression.

The Israeli regime launches airstrikes on the Syrian territory from time to time, aggressive moves usually viewed as attempts to prop up terrorist groups that have been suffering defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces.

In October, Moscow equipped Damascus with the advanced S-300 surface-to-air missiles, days after Israeli fighter jets attacked Syrian targets using a Russian surveillance plane flying nearby as a shield and hence misleading the Syrian air defenses to shoot it down.

Since then Israel has been very careful with its operation over Syria.

It is not yet clear whether the S-300s were among the air defense systems used in the Friday night counterattacks.

■ **Western-backed White Helmets still in Jordan, active in Syria provocations: Russia**

Meantime, Russia has warned that members of the White Helmets volunteer organization are still in Jordan after their withdrawal from Syria as their Western sponsors are reluctant to resettle the so-called aid workers.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told a media briefing on Friday that the White Helmets had been promised shelter in European countries, but "the matter has not been



resolved so far."

"Clearly, the West is not ready to welcome those who were involved in serious crimes," she added.

The White Helmets claims to be a humanitarian NGO, but it has been accused of working with anti-Damascus terrorists and staging false-flag chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad described the White Helmets as "a branch of al-Qaeda and al-Nusra" militant outfits and a "PR stunt" by the United States, Britain and France.

Western countries decided last year to rescue White Helmets members amid stepped-up territorial gains made by the Syrian army against Takfiri terrorists.

Last July, hundreds of White Helmets volunteers and their family members were evacuated from Syria to Israel and then to Jordan, to be resettled later in Britain, Canada, and Germany.

Elsewhere in her remarks, Zakharova said that a group of White Helmets still remains in Jordan.

"They are actively participating in

provocations staged in Syria, and they also cooperated with terrorists," she noted.

The Russian official further stressed that the White Helmets' sponsors are afraid of the threat posed by the group to their own citizens.

"Supporting instigators in a foreign country is one thing, but welcoming them on your own territory is quite another matter, as it creates threats for your citizens," she said. "It is also possible that once out of the Middle East, some White Helmets members would be ready to tell the truth about their activities in Syria. Their sponsors are definitely not interested in that."

The White Helmets was founded in Turkey in 2013 by former British MI5 officer James Le Mesurier.

Since its establishment, the group has received at least \$55 million from the British Foreign Office, \$23 million or more from the U.S. Office of Transition Initiatives and untold millions from Qatar.

■ **British-made arms uncovered in Syria**

Separately on Friday, the Syrian government forces discovered weapons and munitions, some of them manufactured in Britain, and vehicles belonging to the White Helmets during a clean-up operation in the western countryside of Damascus and Quneitra provinces.

Syria's official SANA news agency reported that the arms had been left behind by the terrorists.

(Source: agencies)

## Brits to vote again? Brexit delay creates headache for Europe

Brexit paralysis has prompted talk of a British election or a second referendum but one odd side-effect could be Britons having to cast their votes for an EU parliament they had decided to leave.

Britain is scheduled to quit the European Union on March 29, two months before citizens of the other 27 EU states elect a new European Parliament.

But with Prime Minister Theresa May looking unlikely to win British parliamentary backing next week for her EU withdrawal treaty, speculation is mounting that London will try to delay departure, creating a legal headache for Brussels.

"We are looking into what this might mean, but there is very little that is clear, legally, and it depends on what Britain decides to do," one senior EU official said, describing growing discussion of the issue around Brussels and in EU member states.

Key complications are:

- how long an extension Britain may seek to its two-year exit deadline under Article 50 of the EU treaty — notably whether it leaves before or after the current EU legislature lapses on July 1

- whether an extension might end up cancelling Brexit altogether

- whether a need for Britons to vote for new EU representatives could be delayed beyond May

- whether the new EU chamber will need to ratify the Brexit terms.

"It's being discussed informally. There's not been any formal proposal and indeed a proposal would have to be kicked off by the UK government, at some juncture," said Richard Corbett, a leading British Labour Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

A European affairs minister from an EU government said the prospect of Britons having to hold a vote in late



May to elect MEPs to a chamber they were still about to leave would be "mad politically, but legally we might have no other option".

A second EU official said Britain had told the EU it had budgeted for an election that, without Brexit, would have been scheduled for Thursday, May 23.

Asked about such plans, Britain's Electoral Commission said it had no plan for an election but it was "experienced in delivering well run, unscheduled elections and can draw upon this expertise as required".

■ **Scenarios**

There are several scenarios for how a delay to Brexit could play into the EU elections, which are shaping into a showdown between eurosceptic nationalists and more mainstream parties:

- An extension of Britain's EU membership of six weeks or so to allow for loose ends to be tidied up if May eventually wins parliamentary backing. That would have little impact as Britain would be out before European Parliament elections.

- An extension of three months to end-June could also have limited impact, as the existing EU parliament

would be within its five-year mandate and could ratify the Brexit treaty.

- From July 2, any EU decision must be ratified by the new parliament elected on May 23-26. If Britain is still formally a member and has not returned its MEPs, there could be legal challenges to the validity of any agreement.

- That could strengthen arguments for Britons to go to the polls anyway on May 23 to elect MEPs — though there could then be questions over the role of those MEPs in any vote on Brexit.

- Britain could hold a "catch up" election for MEPs later, if for example if it used the extension to hold a second referendum that might revoke the Article 50 notification and scrap Brexit.

- Some officials also note a mechanism whereby new member states send representatives from their national parliament to the EU legislature until they have held a direct EU election; but applying that to an existing member state is problematic.

- Adding to the problems, the EU already handed some of Britain's seat allocation to other countries — but that change will be put on hold until after Brexit, leaving some states such as France unsure how many MEPs they may actually be electing.

The confusion could have a serious impact on EU business by delaying a timetable for choosing a new EU executive and setting a new legislative program, including a new seven-year budget.

Officials say President Jean-Claude Juncker and his European Commission expect to have to stay in office beyond their end-October mandate even if Brexit goes smoothly, due to likely wrangling with eurosceptics in the new parliament and among national leaders over who should replace Juncker and his team.

(Source: Reuters)

## Five Palestinian families face eviction in favor of Israeli settlers

Israeli officials have handed down orders to five Palestinian families residing inside a building in occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem) to evacuate their homes by the end of the month.

The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ) said on Saturday that Israel's so-called Law Enforcement Department had given the order to the Sabbagh family to leave the building in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem), and turn it over to the extremist settlers who had claimed its ownership by January 23.

Established in 2005, the CCPRJ is a Palestinian non-governmental organization that aims to contribute to effective mobilization and cooperation of civil society vis-à-vis Israeli policies undermining Palestinian rights in occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

In 2012, the Sabbagh family lodged a lawsuit at the Israeli District Court in al-Quds (Jerusalem) against the Israeli settlers'

claim that they owned the land in question.

Even though the family provided the court with conclusive evidence proving ownership of the land and that Israeli settlers' land registration process done in 1972 was illegal, the court ruled in favor of the settlers.

The family appealed the decision to the High Court on November 15, 2018, and requested to open the file of land ownership. However, the High Court rejected the appeal and upheld the District Court's decision.

The family, through its lawyers, then re-appealed against the High Court's ruling through asking for a five-judge panel instead of three. The attempt failed as well, which left the eviction of the five families imminent.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 settlements built since Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank in 1967. This is while much



of the international community considers the settler units illegal and subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied land.

Less than a month before the United States President Donald Trump took office in January 2017, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem" al-Quds.

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230

illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

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

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

Trump backtracked on Washington's support for a two-state solution two years ago, saying he would support any solution favored by both sides.

"Looking at two-state or one-state, I like the one that both parties like. I'm very happy with the one both parties like. I can live with either one," the U.S. president said during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington in February 2017.

(Source: Press TV)

## Saudi teen Rahaf Alqunun due to arrive in Canada for asylum

An 18-year-old Saudi woman who fled her family saying she feared for her life, is due to arrive in Canada on Saturday, after being granted asylum in the North American country.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday that Canada had accepted a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to take in Rahaf Mohammed Alqunun, who grabbed international attention earlier this week after she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room to resist being sent home to her family, which denies any abuse.

"Canada is a country that understands how important it is to stand up for human rights, to stand up for women's rights

around the world, and I can confirm that we have accepted the UN's request," Trudeau told reporters.

The decision is likely to exacerbate Canada's already poor relations with Saudi Arabia, which last year barred the Canadian ambassador to Riyadh after Ottawa criticized Saudi regime authorities for detaining female activists.

Alqunun had arrived in Bangkok on January 5 and was initially denied entry, but she soon started posting messages on Twitter from the transit area of Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport saying she had "escaped Kuwait" and her life would be in danger if forced to return to Saudi Arabia.

Following a 48-hour standoff at Bangkok

airport, some of it barricaded in a transit lounge hotel room, she was allowed to enter Thailand and was then processed as a refugee by the UNHCR.

The UNHCR welcomed Canada's decision and also acknowledged Thailand had given Alqunun a temporary refuge.

"Ms. Alqunun's plight has captured the world's attention over the past few days, providing a glimpse into the precarious situation of millions of refugees worldwide," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a statement.

Alqunun has accused her family of abuse and has refused to meet her father and brother who arrived in Bangkok to take her back to Saudi Arabia.

## Renewed clashes erupt in Hudaydah despite ceasefire between warring parties

Fresh clashes have erupted between Yemeni Ansarullah (Houthi) movement fighters and militants loyal to the country's Saudi-backed former regime in Hudaydah despite a United Nations-brokered truce in the vital Red Sea port city.

An AFP correspondent reported artillery and machine-gun exchanges in Hudaydah's south early on Saturday, adding that they abated later in the day.



The renewed fighting came amid a Hudaydah ceasefire, which was reached between Yemen's warring parties in Sweden in December.

They agreed to the withdrawal of their forces and deployment of UN monitors to the port, the entry point for most of Yemen's vital aid and commercial goods.

On Friday, the UN aid coordinator Lise Grande visited Hudaydah, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis, and held talks with local officials.

Grande is in Hudaydah to "see the humanitarian situation... and ensure the arrival of aid through the port," said Jaber al-Razahi, the head of Yemen's National Authority for the Administration and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The House of Saudi regime and allies, which waged a war on Yemen in March 2015, regularly violate the Hudaydah truce and conduct deadly airstrikes on the port city and elsewhere in the war-torn country.

On Thursday, the Ansarullah launched a retaliatory drone attack on a military parade by the Saudi regime-backed militants in the southern Lahij Province, killing several elements.

Separately on Friday, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, the head of Yemen's Supreme Revolutionary Committee, blamed the occupying Saudi regime mercenaries for a recent fire at an oil refinery in the southern port city of Aden.

In a post on his Twitter account, he accused the aggressors of targeting the people of Aden and the port's refineries.

He further stressed that the Yemeni army and allied fighters from Popular Committees have been working to defeat the United States-Saudi-backed forces and restore security and stability in the country.

"We do not list vital Yemeni institutions and infrastructure as targets for their attacks," al-Houthi said. "This is what the army and Popular Committees are entrusted to do by the Yemeni People."

An explosion sparked fire at an oil refinery in Aden's Buraika neighborhood on Friday. There were no reports of casualties.

■ **New Yemeni Qasf K2 drone launches 2nd strike in less than 24 hours**

Meantime, Yemeni army forces, backed by allied fighters from Popular Committees, have launched another airstrike with the new domestically-developed Qasf K2 (Striker K2) combat drone, less than 24 hours after they used the same unmanned aerial vehicle to target Saudi regime-paid militiamen loyal to resigned and fugitive president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

A Yemeni military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that Yemeni troops and their allies used the drone to strike the Saudi regime soldiers in the kingdom's southern border region of Asir.

The source added that the strike was carried out following intense aerial reconnaissance, stressing that scores of Saudi troopers besides several high-ranking commanders were killed in the assault.

The development came less than a day after spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, said at a press conference in the capital Sana'a that Yemeni forces and Popular Committees fighters had attacked the Saudi regime mercenaries at al-Anad Air Base in the country's southwestern province of Lahij with a Qasf K2 drone.

Saree went on to say that dozens of high-ranking Saudi-paid militiamen were killed or injured in the aerial attack, noting that the injured mercenaries were transported by helicopter to Aden German International Hospital in the port city of Aden.

He pointed out that the Saudi regime mercenaries were now in a state of panic and terror as a result of the high-precision military operation, stressing that their commanders would no longer be able to escape unscathed if they continued to serve the aggressors.

Also on Friday, a number of the Saudi regime-backed militiamen were killed and injured, when Yemeni forces and their allies launched a salvo of artillery rounds at their position in an area of the Khabb wa ash Sha'af district of Yemen's northern province of al-Jawf.

The House of Saud regime and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating military campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the aim of bringing Hadi's government back to power and crushing the country's Ansarullah movement.

According to a new report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, the Saudi regime-led war has so far claimed the lives of around 56,000 Yemenis.

The Saudi regime-led war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The United Nations has already said that a record 22.2 million Yemenis are in dire need of food, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger. According to the world body, Yemen is suffering from the most severe famine in more than 100 years.

A number of Western countries, the United States and Britain in particular, are also accused of being complicit in the ongoing aggression as they supply Riyadh with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

(Source: agencies)



## Japan golden oldie ‘King Kazu’ renews contract before 52nd birthday



Former Japan striker Kazuyoshi Miura, who turns 52 next month, has extended his record as the J-League's oldest player after renewing his contract with Yokohama FC, the club said.

The veteran footballer, admirably nicknamed “King Kazu” for his spirited onfield style, will kick off his 34th career season this year, the second division club announced Friday.

“I thank fans for supporting me all the time,” Miura said in a brief statement.

“I want to work out at full stretch every day... and play as many games as possible by making every minute count.”

In 2017, Miura surpassed football's previous professional longevity record and became the oldest player to score a competitive goal in a professional match. Both records were previously held by English legend Stanley Matthews.

Last year he played nine games for Yokohama but failed to score. Miura left Japan for Brazil in 1982 and signed a contract with Santos FC in 1986 to make his professional debut.

He made his Japan debut in 1990 and pushed for the country's first ever World Cup appearance in 1998 but failed to join the final squad for France despite scoring 55 goals in 89 games for the national side. He was one of the stars of the professional J-League at its 1993 launch before joining Italy's Genoa on loan the following year. Miura, who has played for Yokohama since 2005, has said he wants to play on until he turns 60.

Yokohama lost in the first division play-offs last year. Their 2019 season kicks off on February 24.

(Source: AFP)

## IHF World Championship: Germany beat unified Korea in historic opener

The Germans had little trouble in the opening match of the IHF (International Handball Federation) World Championship, which they are cohosting with Denmark, leading almost from start to finish as they beat the unified Korean side 30-19 in front of a sell-out crowd in Berlin's Mercedes-Benz-Arena.

German coach Christian Prokop told reporters afterwards that he was pleased with his team's performance against a weaker opponent, saying they had done a lot of things right, even if they had failed to capitalize on a number of scoring chances.

His counterpart, Korean coach Cho Young Shin praised the fighting spirit displayed by his team, who are made up of 16 South and four North Koreans.

“Although we were underdogs, our players didn't allow themselves to be intimidated, so for that, I compliment each and every one of them,” he said.

However, going beyond their performance on the night, the very fact that the team features players from both South and North Korea is seen as historic – and possibly even a milestone on the road to reconciliation between Seoul and Pyongyang.

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(Source: Deutsche Welle)

## Declan Rice hits winner as West Ham United sink Arsenal

Declan Rice's first goal in the Premier League secured West Ham a memorable victory over Arsenal at the London Stadium.

Former Arsenal man Samir Nasri, making his league debut, set up the teenage midfielder to wallop home the winner from just inside the box on 48 minutes as West Ham fans celebrated a famous win over their London rivals.

The Hammers were the better side throughout and Unai Emery's side could not have complained if the hosts led at the break. Felipe Anderson sent a shot crashing inches wide midway through the half, while Rice glanced wide from just six yards.

But the 19-year-old made amends with a lovely strike three minutes after the restart, and though Arsenal had two goals ruled out for offside, they weren't deserving of any points on the day.

The feel-good factor for the hosts, playing in front of a record home crowd, was slightly hampered by want-away striker Marko Arnautovic, however, as the Austrian appeared to wave goodbye when he was replaced by Andy Carroll. A move to China during the January transfer window now looks inevitable for the 29-year-old.

West Ham move up to eighth spot in the standings while Arsenal - who have lost back-to-back games under Emery for the first time - remain fifth in the table, and fail to join Chelsea in fourth spot on points.

Emery's side have now gone five games since their last away league victory, going all the way back to their 2-1 victory at Bournemouth on November 25. Since then they have picked up just two points on their travels, conceding an eye-watering 13 goals in the process.

(Source: Eurosport)

# ‘Suffering’ Murray has made right decision - Nadal

Andy Murray's impending retirement was a decision he had to take because he is “suffering”, says long-time rival Rafael Nadal.

The 31-year-old Briton announced on Friday that he will quit this year, and next week's Australian Open could be the final tournament of his career.

“When you are going on court without a clear goal because you cannot move well and you have pain, then it is the time to take a decision,” Nadal said.

“He will be a big loss for tennis.”

Nadal, 32, knows more than most players what it is like to battle injury having had a catalogue of serious problems over the years, with his knees and wrists in particular.

But the Spaniard, a 17-time Grand Slam singles champion, says he has never “arrived” at the point of feeling he had to quit the sport.

“I always had the feeling that we'll fix it,” said the world number two, who begins his Australian Open campaign against home wildcard James Duckworth on Monday.

“But, of course, there are periods of time



that you don't see the light. It is tough.

“I know it is hard mentally. It is tough when you have one thing, then another thing.

“Andy has probably been fighting to keep

going for a long time. If he doesn't feel that the injury can become better, he has probably done the right thing for his mental health.”

Scotland's Murray first met Nadal, who

## Battling Kvitova downs Barty to claim Sydney title



Petra Kvitova warmed up for the year's first Grand Slam by coming from behind to beat home favourite Ashleigh Barty 1-6 7-5 7-6(3) and win her second Sydney International title on Saturday.

Kvitova, the 2015 champion, surrendered her serve in the opening game and struggled to recover from her poor start, with the Czech's usually lethal backhand disintegrating amid a flurry of unforced errors in the first set.

The world number eight hit her stride in the second, staying within touching distance of Barty until pouncing to take a 6-5 lead with a late break of serve and holding to force a decider.

“Ash, I know it's a tough one. For sure, it's hurting not to win at home,” Kvitova said after closing out the match in two hours, 19 minutes. “One day you're going to make it for sure, so good luck in the Aussie Open and well done this week.”

Kvitova made 45 unforced errors to Barty's 33, but struck 31 clean winners, nine more than her opponent, as she edged the contest from the back of the court.

Barty, ranked 15th in the world and a losing finalist in Sydney last year, has a reputation for being a fighter and called

on every last ounce of grit to force another early break and take a 3-0 lead at the start of the third.

Yet Kvitova showed plenty of fight of her own, clawing her way back to 3-3 despite struggling with an apparent injury and, with her backhand finally firing, broke again to give herself a chance to serve for the championship.

Incredibly, the momentum shifted once more, with Barty breaking the Czech to love to keep her hopes of a first Sydney title alive, but the Australian's composure deserted her as she lost the next game on serve to give Kvitova another chance.

Once again, the Czech fluffed her lines, surrendering her serve with successive double faults to send the match into a tiebreak but clung on grimly to carve out a championship point that she claimed with a blistering crosscourt forehand.

“I left everything out here but it wasn't quite enough,” Barty said. “Sorry I couldn't get it done today.”

This year's tournament is likely to be the last Sydney International – a competition with a history dating back to 1885 – in its current format, with the ATP Cup coming on board next season.

(Source: Reuters)

## Leeds manager reminded of club's integrity after spygate



Leeds United have reminded head coach Marcelo Bielsa of the “integrity and honesty” the club is built on after the Argentine admitted sending one of his coaching staff to spy on Derby County ahead of their Championship match on Friday.

“It's true there was someone from Leeds United. I am responsible for this incident,” ex-Argentina manager Bielsa said before the game at Elland Road which Leeds won 2-0, extending their lead at the top of the table to five points.

“I am the only (one) responsible for it because I didn't ask for the permission of Leeds United to do that.”

Derby said earlier that local police had spoken to a person acting suspiciously outside their training ground on Thursday.

The club's Italian owner Andrea Radrizzani has met with his Derby counterpart Mel Morris to apologise for Bielsa's actions. The Yorkshire club issued a statement on its website on Saturday saying it will “look to work with our head coach and his staff to remind them of the integrity and honesty which are the foundations that Leeds United is built on”.

Leeds are three-time winners of the English top flight and have also won the FA Cup and League Cup as well as being

has won 17 Grand Slam titles, when they were teenagers and played against each other at junior tournaments.

The pair have met 24 times as seniors, with the Majorcan winning 17 of the contests.

“I always had good relationship with him,” said Nadal. “We shared moments in my academy. We shared courts in the most important stadiums in the world, competing for the most important things. That's impossible to forget.

“So all the best to him. We will miss him. But today is him. Tomorrow another one. We are not 20 any more. Our generation, everyone is more than 30 - these kind of things happen.

“He will be a very important loss for us, for the world of tennis, for the tour, for the fans. But that's life. It seems like he had not a very long career because today players are playing that long. But he's 31 - 10 years ago, if he retired at 31, we would say he had a great and very long career.”

(Source: BBC)

runners-up in the European Cup and now defunct FA Cup Winners' Cup.

The FA is investigating the incident, while a Football League spokesman said: “It is, of course, up to Derby County as to how they progress this matter, but as of yet we have received no complaint or contact from the club.”

On Friday Bielsa said: “I understand (Derby manager) Frank Lampard is angry because he thinks I'm someone who is cheating.

“I understand he draws this conclusion. But I don't feel I cheated because my goal was not to get an illegal advantage.

“I can explain my behavior but my intention is not to be understood or to justify it. I have to respect the norms in the country where I work.”

Lampard, a former Chelsea and England midfielder, said the situation was “not right” and had to be dealt with.

“I've never heard of going to a training ground on your hands and knees with pliers trying to break into private land to watch,” Lampard told the BBC.

“But I don't attribute our performance (in the defeat at Leeds on Friday) to it, because that's on us.”

(Source: Mirror)

## Return of ‘encyclopedia’ Ferguson massive for United - Pochettino

Alex Ferguson's return to Manchester United's training ground has been massive for his old club, according to the man tipped to take over at Old Trafford next season.

Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino, whose side host United interim boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's resurgent team at Wembley on Sunday, is a huge admirer of Ferguson — a man the Argentine describes as an encyclopedia of football.

Ferguson reportedly gave a rousing speech to United's first-team squad after being invited back by Solskjaer recently — his first appearance at the training ground since emergency surgery for a bleed on the brain last May.

“I think it's fantastic news because he is football,” Pochettino told reporters at his news conference on Friday.

“I think to be involved again, I think for him and for Manchester sure it's a massive important thing.

“He's one of the people I admired the most. An inspiration.”

The Scot, now 77, retired as United manager in May 2013 after winning 38 trophies during 26 years in charge.

Ferguson's re-appearance at the Carrington training ground has added to the feel-good factor sweeping the club in the wake of Jose Mourinho's sacking last month — a move that instantly put Pochettino's future at Tottenham in the spotlight.

Former United and Norway striker Solskjaer has won all five of his matches in charge and Pochettino said the Ferguson effect cannot be dismissed ahead of Sunday's Premier League clash.

Rashford is expected to line up as the



### ■ MASSIVE IMPACT

“I think all the fans of Manchester United, and of course for the players and for the staff, to have a person (like him) involved is a massive impact,” he said.

“And I think he was the best manager in the world, in the history of football. To have the possibility to see him every day is massive. It's like having the big book of Larousse (an encyclopedia), like a dictionary.

“I remember it was a treasure for me when my dad and mum gave a present to me at Christmas. It was a book where you find everything. He (Ferguson) is an encyclopaedia of football.”

Pochettino said he was present on one of the greatest nights in Ferguson's 27 glittering years as United boss — the 1999 Champions League final at Barcelona's Nou Camp

## Rashford can be as good as Kane, says Solskjaer

Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says Marcus Rashford has the potential to be as good a centre-forward as England teammate Harry Kane as the pair prepare to face off in the Premier League this weekend.

Rashford is expected to line up as the

spearhead of United's attack when they face Kane's Tottenham at Wembley on Sunday with both the team and striker on a hot run of form under the interim manager.

Rashford looks reborn under interim coach Solskjaer, scoring three times in the centre-for-

ward position as United have rattled off four straight league wins since the Norwegian took over from the sacked Mourinho in December to close in on the Champions League places.

“He can become a top, top striker,” said Solskjaer. “We can talk about Harry Kane

and his class and I'm sure Marcus as well. He's got the potential to get up there.

“He's got frightening pace, he's now become stronger and can hold the ball up for us. He's a great link player.”

(Source: Express)



# Azmoun nets brace against Vietnam to send Iran to Asian Cup Round of 16



**S P O R T S   TEHRAN** — Iran national football team defeated d e s k Vietnam 2-0 thanks to a brace from Sardar Azmoun at the Al Nahyan Stadium in Dubai, the UAE on Saturday.

Team Melli assured themselves of a spot in the competition Round of 16. Carlos Queiroz's side have made it six points from six – an impressive start to a campaign which will see the three-time champions of Asia assured of qualification should Yemen draw or lose when they play Iraq in the group's later game.

Fresh from a 5-0 defeat of Yemen on Matchday One, Iran controlled the match and put Vietnam under pressure.

Vietnam goalkeeper Dang Van Lam denied Saman Ghoddos with a sprawling save, before the custodian produced another fine stop to repel a fierce Azmoun drive shortly before the half-hour mark.

In the 38th minute, Azmoun found the back of the net with a header from Goddos cross.

Vietnam began the second period brightly, and they could – very possibly should – have drawn level in the 52nd minute when substitute Nguyen Van Toan's pass found Nguyen Cong Phuong, whose shot from 12 yards was parried to safety by the advancing Alireza Beiranvand.

Iran, clearly intent on scoring a second, continued to press, and their patience was duly rewarded on 68 minutes, Azmoun neatly gathering a Mehdi Torabi pass and firing past Van Lam to extend his side's advantage and register his third goal of the tournament.

Iran are set to complete their group stage fixtures against Iraq next Wednesday in Dubai, with Vietnam scheduled to face Yemen in Al Ain on the same day.

## Son's arrival won't spark new approach says Korea's Bento

The arrival of Tottenham Hotspur forward Son Heung-min for South Korea's Asian Cup campaign will not change their approach to a tournament in which they have reached the last 16 knockout round, coach Paulo Bento has said.

The Koreans laboured to a 1-0 win over debutants Kyrgyzstan on Friday, having beaten the Philippines by the same scoreline in their opening match at the continental championship, as they failed to turn their domination into goals.

But with 26-year-old Son due to join up with the squad on Monday after Spurs' Premier League game against Manchester United at Wembley on Sunday, the former Portugal coach expects his team's overall game to improve.

"We are not going to change our way of playing when we have Son Heung-min with us," said Bento.

"What I think we are going to do is improve our collective game, try to attack better than we have played until now and, of course, a player with the quality that Son has and, in the moment (form) that he has at this moment, can help the team.

"But we need to wait until the game against China or the knockout phase."

Son is due to arrive in the United Arab Emirates on Monday but, with the Koreans due to face China on Wednesday, Bento is yet to decide whether the winger will feature in a

game that will decide who takes first place in the group.

"Son is going to arrive on January 14, so after he arrives we will see what we are going to do in the game against China," said Bento referring to their final Group C match on Wednesday with both team settign the pace on six points.

"We will talk and then we are going to take the best decisions for the team.

"So we need to wait for the game that he is probably going to play on Sunday (for Tottenham) and then check everything he has made in the last months, because he has played a lot of games during the last months."

(Source: Reuters)

## Group D: Yemen 0-3 Iraq



Iraq sealed a place in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 knockout stage after cruising to a 3-0 win over Yemen in a Group D tie at the Sharjah Stadium on Saturday.

Iraq's second successive victory - having defeated Vietnam 3-2 on Matchday One - meant Srecko Katanec's team join Iran on six points with Wednesday's clash with Team Melli to determine who finishes at the top of the standings.

Iran defeated Vietnam 2-0 earlier on Saturday. For Yemen, it was their second defeat after having lost 5-0 to Iran in their opener.

Despite Iraq coming into the match as the heavy favorites, it was Yemen who applied the early pressure.

Iraq, however, gradually began to dominate possession and took the lead in the 11th minute when 18-year-old Mohanad Ali Kadhim beat the Yemen defense before unleashing a shot from outside the box into the bottom right corner.

Yemen had their first look at goal from a set-piece five minutes later, but Abdulwasea Al-Matari sent his header just above the bar.

Yemen goalkeeper Saoud Al-Sowadi soon found himself under incessant

pressure and conceded the second goal in the 19th minute when Bashar Resan Bonyan's strike from the top of the box bounced off the right post before settling in the net.

Iraq took their foot off the pedal after that but Jan Kocian's Yemen found it difficult to gain possession as the 2007 champions comfortably held on to their lead going into the break.

It was end to end action in the second half as both teams came close to finding the net with Ahmed Saeed's right-footed shot from outside the box just kept out by Iraq goalkeeper Jalal Hassan Hachim in the 59th minute.

Iraq responded five minutes later, with Ali Kadhim coming close to getting his second but his lob was denied by the post and Ahmed Yaseen Gheni missed the chance to tuck the rebound home.

Yemen had another chance to give themselves a chance to find a way back from a set-piece in the 82nd minutes which missed the target.

Instead, 2015 semi-finalists Iraq ended proceedings on a high note as Alaa Abbas score with a left-footed shot from the center of the box into the net.

(Source: the-afc)

## Five highest-valued players in Asian Cup



The AFC Asian Cup 2019 has already given us some moments to remember. The tournament continues to be exciting as we move ahead, with top players from Asia giving it their all.

Some top players have mixed it up with the very best in Europe, and as a result, have found themselves leading the highest value pile in terms of monetary gain.

Unsurprisingly, some familiar names make our list today:

■ **#5 Matt Ryan, Australia (€8million)**

Aussie goalkeeper Matt Ryan makes the list in fifth place, after making an impression in the Premier League with club side Brighton. The Socceroos will be dependent on him to pull off some big saves as they aim to retain their crown.

■ **#4 Sardar Azmoun, Iran (€9.5million)**

Azmoun has been top class for Iran since his showing at the World Cup in Russia, and the Rubin Kazan star has made his name as a high value player too.

His monetary value is on the rise, and with more top performances for Iran, this number could go much higher very easily.

■ **#3 Yoshinori Muto, Japan (€10million)**

Japan forward Yoshinori Muto is up next on

our list, a cool 10million of his own. The Newcastle United man may be struggling to break into Rafa Benitez's lineup all the time, but his goal against Manchester United earlier in the season will be remembered for a long time to come.

His Asian Cup campaign should be given a head-start through this, and Japan will hope he comes good soon.

■ **#2 Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Iran (€18million)**

Alireza Jahanbakhsh made his name for Iran at the World Cup last year, and hasn't looked back since. Having joined Brighton in the Premier League, his value has gone up immensely, and this tournament is proof of just that.

The Iranians will hope that he picks up his form though, as they have aspirations to reach the top very soon.

■ **#1 Son Heung-min, Korea Republic (€50million)**

Who else but Son Heung-min to top off this list? The Korean has been prolific for Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur, and continues to produce the goods for his country as well.

If Korea Republic are to go all the way in this tournament, their favorite 'son' needs to be at his very best.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Five talking points as Vietnam's hopes diminish after 2-0 defeat to Iran

Vietnam were condemned to a 2-0 defeat to three-time champions Iran in Group D of the AFC Asian Cup 2019 at the Al Nahyan Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

Sardar Azmoun was the two-goal hero finding the back of the net once in each of the halves to take Team Melli to the Round of the 16 of the continental championship. But Vietnam, who have now suffered back-to-back defeats, will need a lot of things to go their way if they are to join opponents in the next round.

Here are FOX Sports Asia's five major talking points from the 90 minutes of action in Abu Dhabi.

■ **1) Dejagah and Taremi ask questions of Vietnam defense**

Ashkan Dejagah and Mehdi Taremi were the two undisputed stars in Iran's 5-0 thrashing of Yemen in their opening match and the duo were once again at their menacing best against the Golden Dragons on Saturday. Dejagah and Taremi were a handful for the left-hand side of the Vietnamese defense, however, Do Hung Dung and Doan Van Hau managed to negate some of the threat while captain Que Ngoc Hai was excellent putting his body on the line on more than once occasion.

■ **2) Azmoun continues his resurgence**

A disaster of a 2018 FIFA World Cup and subsequent retirement from the game seem to be long in the past for Team Melli striker Sardar Azmoun now. It was the Rubin Kazan striker who scored the opener for Iran with a simple header at the far post in the 38th minute. And the 24-year-old has scored two from two now in the AFC Asian Cup 2019 and is a key man as Iran chase their fourth continental championship. It's hard to believe this was the same man who retired from the game citing online abuse and bullying from fans last summer.

■ **3) The Golden Dragons come out with renewed vigor in the second half**

Park Hang-seo seems to have had some strong words for his players in the dressing room at the half-time as the Vietnamese returned to the pitch with renewed intent. The South Korean tactician also replaced Phan Van Duc with 22-year-old HAGL FC winger Nguyen Van Toan during the break. The half-time team talk seemed to have inspired Vietnam who have been trailing by a goal and they create a problem or two for the Asian heavyweights forcing Carlos Queiroz to rethink his strategy.

■ **4) Vietnam left to rue Cong Phuong's miss!**

During that early exchanges, Vietnam had their best

chance to equalize and maybe turn the game around when Nguyen Cong Phuong was played through on goal in the 52nd minute. However, the forward who had scored in Vietnam's opening defeat to Iraq fired his effort straight at Iran custodian Alireza Beiranvand. And it proved to be a costly miss as Azmoun doubled his team's lead in the 69th minute to put the result surely beyond the doubt and to also take the lead as the tournament's top scorer for now with three goals from two.

■ **5) Vietnam's chances to progress as good as over?**

Iran have booked their spot in the knockout stages as they go in search of a first Asian Cup title in 43 years, but things are not looking that good for the Southeast Asian champions. The AFF Suzuki Cup 2018 winners are still to open their account after two group games and now face the group's minnows Yemen in their final game in Al Ain on January 16. They still have a chance to progress as one of the four best third-placed teams, but much will depend on how things will pan out in their group as well as other groups in the coming days.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Jaber Sadeghzadeh named Iran's Pahlevan for third successive year

**S P O R T S   TEHRAN** — Jaber Sadeghzadeh won d e s k Iran's Pahlevani Wrestling Championship for the third year in a row on Friday.

Sadeghzadeh defeated Amir Mohammadi 6-2 in the +100kg weight category and won the Pahlevani armband in the competition held in Karaj, west of Tehran.

The Pahlevani wrestling competition held annually in Iran, in which athletes from across the country participate to achieve the title.

Though the competition has ancient roots, its modern form has been held since 1944.

Winner of this title is called Pahlevan and wears the special Bazouband (Armband).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) registered Pahlevani and Zourkhaneh rituals in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014.

## Iran karatekas to fight at Paris League

**IRNA** — Iranian karatekas are to attend the 2019 World League in Paris, slated to be held on January 25-27.

Iranian fighters will face 12 events to upgrade their ranking in 2019 and to earn 2020 Olympic quota.

Iranian squad is supposed to leave Iran for Italy on January 18 to attend their training camp before Paris league.

The 2019 Karate 1-Premier League will begin in January in Paris (France), in one of Karate's signature events.

The competition will move to Dubai (UAE) in February while Rabat (Morocco) will continue being one of the highlights of the year with the tournament scheduled for April.

## Iranian chess player wins Baku Int'l Chess Champs

**IRNA** — Iranian chess player Arash Tahbaz won Baku International Chess championships after he acquired seven points during nine games.

Baku International Chess Championships attended by 200 chess players from Azerbaijan Republic, Ukraine, Iran, Russia and Georgia was held in three categories on January 5-10.

Iranian chess players Arash Tahbaz, Ariya Omid and Mohammad Sadegh Marzoughi represented Iran in the games which ended by introducing Tahbaz as the winner.

In Group A, Tahbaz made five wins and four draws gaining seven points to stand first in the competitions. Azeri and Ukrainian players came 2nd and 3rd respectively, each gaining five points in this group.

The last game of the competitions between Ariya Omid and Azeri player ended in a draw but Omid stood second in the total rankings.

## Senegalese denies involvement in Japan Olympic chief scandal

**TOKYO (Kyodo)** — A Senegalese man at the center of a French corruption probe into the awarding of the 2020 Olympic Games to Tokyo has denied any wrongdoing.

"Mr. Takeda has never discussed such things with my father, never discussed anything like that with anybody that I know," Papa Massata Diack, son of former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations Lamine Diack, said in a phone interview late Friday night with Kyodo News.

His statement came following the revelation that the president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, has been under formal investigation by French prosecutors for suspected corruption in connection with Tokyo's successful bid to host the Summer Games.

A day after the confirmation by French judicial authorities that they had launched the investigation, the International Olympic Committee on Saturday also started looking into the allegations against Takeda.

On Friday, Takeda, head of the JOC since 2001, acknowledged in a statement that he had been questioned by the French authorities in Paris in December, but he said there was "no unjust act that can be recognized as bribery has taken place."

French investigators suspect that part of 2.8 million Singapore dollars (\$2 million) paid by the Tokyo Games' bid committee to Singaporean consultancy firm Black Tidings in 2013 went to Massata Diack, whose father was a powerful IOC member at the time.

In the interview, Massata Diack said he only met Takeda twice in his life, the first time in 2009 in Berlin during the World Championships in Athletics and the last time in 2013 in Buenos Aires, when Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Olympic Games, defeating Istanbul 60-36 in the final round of secret voting by the IOC.

The 53-year-old said he merely shook hands with Takeda in the first meeting and simply congratulated him on Tokyo's success when he saw him for the second time.

Takeda, also an IOC member who heads the sports governing body's marketing commission, has said the payment to the Singaporean firm was legitimate compensation based on a consultancy agreement and he will continue to cooperate with the French authorities to "dispel his suspicions."

The JOC said that Takeda will hold a press conference on Tuesday in Tokyo.

Massata Diack, who is wanted by French law enforcement authorities, said Tokyo's "victory was very clear" over Istanbul and it is nonsense to think that Japan had to pay money to collect votes.

As with his father, Massata Diack, who has been on Interpol's wanted list on charges including complicity in receiving bribes and aggravated money laundering, is suspected of having been involved in covering up doping by Russian athletes.



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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Shunning a person who is attracted by you is a sign of your misfortune, and your inclination towards another who ignores you is a sign of your abjectness.

Imam Ali (AS)

## VOID festival spotlight Iranian animation cinema

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of 11 Iranian short animations will be reviewed in a special program during the 4th VOID International Animation Film Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark.



A scene from Iranian short animation "Run Rostam Run" by Hossein Molayemi.

"Alphabet" by Kianush Abedi, "Am I a Wolf?" by Amir-Hushang Moein, "Balance" by Barzan Rostami, "Chimney Man" by Meqdad Akhavan and "Empty View" by Ali Zare Qanatnoi will be screened in the program entitled "New Iranian Shorts".

The lineup also includes "Hide and Seek" by Mohsen Shokrtalab, "Maned and Macho" by Shiva Sadeq-Asadi, "Mr. Deer" by Mojtaba Musavi, "Run Rostam Run" by Hossein Molayemi, "The Fox" by Sadeq Javadi Nikjeh and "The Servant" by Farnush Abedi.

"The Last Fiction" by Ashkan Rahgozar, which is based on the classic Iranian tale from Persian poet Ferdowsi's masterpiece Shahnameh, will also compete in the official section of the festival.

The film follows Zahak's treacherous rise to the throne in Jamshid in Persia. The young and naive hero Afaridoun will have to save the kingdom and its people from darkness. But he must first conquer his own demons in this portrayal of Persian mythology that reveals human nature.

The VOID festival will be held from January 24 to February 2.

## Jackson estate slams as "pathetic" abuse claims in new documentary

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Michael Jackson's estate on Thursday condemned on Thursday an upcoming documentary about alleged child sexual abuse by the late singer as another "outrageous and pathetic attempt" to cash in on his fame.

The documentary "Leaving Neverland" will be screened at the Sundance independent film festival later this month and will be shown on cable channel HBO and Britain's Channel 4 television network this spring, festival organizers and HBO said.

It features interviews with two men, now in their 30s, who say they were befriended by the singer and sexually abused by him when they were young boys, according to the filmmakers.

The "Thriller" singer, who died in 2009, was acquitted at a 2005 criminal trial in California on charges of molesting a different, 13 year-old boy, at his Neverland ranch.

The documentary focuses on the experiences of Wade Robson and James Safechuck. Both men filed lawsuits against the Jackson estate alleging sexual misconduct after the singer's death and both cases were dismissed. Robson had testified at Jackson's 2005 trial in the singer's defense.

"This so called 'documentary' is just another rehash of dated and discredited allegations," Jackson's estate said in a statement. "This is yet another lurid production in an outrageous and pathetic attempt to exploit and cash in on Michael Jackson."

Director Dan Reed said he had no question about the validity of the stories of the two men.

"If there's anything we've learned during this time in our history, it's that sexual abuse is complicated, and survivors' voices need to be listened to," he said in a statement.

Jackson's sudden death at age 50 of an overdose of the anesthetic that he was using as a sleep aid triggered worldwide grief and a surge in record sales.

According to an annual Forbes survey, Jackson has been the top earning dead celebrity for the past six years. In 2018, Forbes estimated he earned \$400 million, thanks to the sale of his stake in EMI Music Publishing and other ventures including a television special and the Las Vegas Cirque du Soleil show "One."

# Mosaic by Monir Farmanfarmaian leads Tehran Auction

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — An untitled mirror mosaic by Monir Farmanfarmaian was the most expensive work sold at the 10th Tehran Auction on Friday as it fetched 40 billion rials (over \$950,000) during the sale of Iranian modern art.

"Pi+Rouz+G", a painting by Hossein Zenderudi, took in 35.5 billion rials (over \$845,000) and was the second most expensive artwork sold at the sale, which was organized at the Parsian Azadi Hotel.

Farmanfarmaian's another untitled mirror mosaic sold for 29 billion rials (over \$690,000) was the third most expensive item sold at the auction.

A total of 114 artworks went under the hammer during the auction, which grossed over 344 billion rials (about \$8.2 million).

Only an untitled painting by Hossein Cheraghchi with an estimate of 150 to 200 million rials failed to find a buyer.

Two photographs of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war were also recognized at the auction.

"Conquest of Khorramshahr", a black and white photograph by Saeid Sadeqi that depicts Iranian soldiers celebrating the liberation of Khorramshahr at the Friday Mosque of the city was one of the photos. With an estimate of 300 to 400 million rials, the picture was sold for 750 million rials.

With an estimate of 200 to 250 million rials, "Khordad 3, '61, Khorramshahr",



Auctioneer Hossein Pakdel takes a bid for the sale of Hossein Zenderudi's painting "Pi+Rouz+G" during the 10th Tehran Auction at the Parsian Azadi Hotel in Tehran on January 11, 2019. The artwork was the second top seller, fetching over \$845,000. (Honaronline/Saeid Rabiei)

another black and white photograph by Mohammad Farnud, fetched 700

million rials. The photo shows a sandbag

barricade built in front of the ruins of a building in the southwestern Iranian city of Khorramshahr in 1982.

## Berlinale selects Iran's "Tattoo" for Generation 14plus



"Tattoo" by Iranian director Farhad Delaram.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Farhad Delaram's short film "Tattoo" has been selected to screen in the Generation 14plus section of the 69th Berlin International Film Festival — Berlinale, the organizers announced on Saturday.

The film is about a young girl who wants to renew her driving license but she is sent

to the traffic police center for her tattoos.

The film will compete with 31 other short films from 21 countries, including "Leaking Life" by Shunsaku Hayashi from Japan, "Liberty" by Faren Humes from the U.S., "Crocodile" by Jorge Yudice from Spain and "Kids" by Micheal Frei from Switzerland. The festival will run in the German city from February 7 to 17.

## Top photogs honored at Khayyam Intl. Exhibition of Photography

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 6th Khayyam International Exhibition of Photography honored top entries during its opening ceremony on Friday.

In the Open Monochrome section, Hadi Dehqanpur from Iran received the FIAP Gold Medal for his photo "Zebra" and Holger Buecker from Germany won the Kamal-ol-Molk Gold Trophy for "Above and Below".

Cheng Jungang from China won the FIAP Gold Medal for "Aerial Stunts" in the Open Color category, while Marcel Van Balken from the Netherlands received the Kamal-ol-Molk Gold Trophy for "Polar Bear Pet" in this section.

In the City section, the FIAP Gold Medal was presented to Jun Liu from China for "Dress Up" and the Kamal-ol-Molk Gold Trophy was awarded to Farzin Nazemzadeh from Iran for "From Yesterday".



"Zebra" by Iranian photographer Hadi Dehqanpur won the FIAP Gold Medal at the 6th Khayyam International Exhibition of Photography.

## R. Kelly's attorney denies abuse allegations in documentary

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — An attorney for R. Kelly on Friday called a new documentary series about the R&B singer a "for-profit hit piece," and said the latest accusations of abuse by the Grammy-winning musician were a "complete fabrication."

The six-hour documentary "Surviving R. Kelly", which aired earlier this month on U.S. cable channel Lifetime, includes allegations from multiple women who accuse Kelly of sexual misconduct, sometimes with minors.

Kelly, 52, the Chicago singer and record producer best known for his hit song "I Believe I Can Fly", has for years denied accusations of abuse, including those made in the new documentary.

Steve Greenberg, an attorney for Kelly, said in an interview on Friday that there was no evidence to support the accusations contained in the documentary, calling it a "for-profit hit piece full of falsities, full of mistakes."

The Lifetime series featured interviews with several women making on-camera allegations of sexual, mental and physical abuse by Kelly, as well as interviews with some of his former managers and producers.

The latest accusations echo similar ones

against the singer dating back 25 years. After the documentary aired, Chicago's top prosecutor called on potential victims and witnesses to come forward.

"We cannot seek justice without you," Cook

County State's Attorney Kim Foxx said this week at a news conference.

According to media reports, prosecutors in Georgia have contacted an attorney for an Atlanta-area couple who appeared in the

documentary and accuse Kelly of brainwashing their daughter.

Reuters was unable independently to verify the accusations in the documentary and could not immediately reach prosecutors for comment. In 2008, the singer was tried and acquitted on child pornography charges in Chicago.

"There's women saying things, which is of course their prerogative, but there is no evidence that any of it happened," Greenberg said of the documentary.

Kannie Yu LaPack, a spokeswoman for Lifetime, said: "The women's stories speak for themselves."

Lifetime is part of A&E Networks, which is a joint venture between Hearst Communications and Walt Disney Co (DIS.N).

The series has been a hit for the network, which said the documentary's Jan. 3 premiere attracted 1.9 million viewers and the network's biggest audience in two years among adults 25 to 54 and other age groups.

After the documentary aired, singer Lady Gaga vowed to remove a duet she recorded with Kelly from streaming services and never collaborate with him again.



Singer R. Kelly arrives at the 41st American Music Awards in Los Angeles, California November 24, 2013. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)