



Iran to launch Payam satellite soon **2**



Tehran says still honoring nuclear deal **2**



Three Iranian women among top Asian scientists **12**



Kermanshah exhibit explores history of ties between UN, Iran **16**

High-profile meetings in Baghdad

See page 2



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) met with Iraqi President Barham Salih in Baghdad on Monday, 14 January, 2019.

3rd round of offering oil at IRENEX on Jan. 21

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**—National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will offer one million barrels of light crude oil at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) for the third time on January 21, IRNA reported on Monday.

The set price for this round of oil sale is \$52.42 per barrel, Saeed Khoshrou, director of international affairs at NIOC, announced.

The purchasers can pay both in Iranian rial and in foreign currencies, the rate of which would be estimated at CBI's online Sana system (accessible at sanarate.ir, a website that records daily forex trade from across the domestic exchange bureaus), the official said.

Earlier on November 11, NIOC offered 700,000 barrels of light crude oil at the price of \$76.29 per barrel at IRENEX for the second time. **→4**

Iran talked to Taliban to foil plot by Daesh backers: MP

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh has said that Iran held talks with Taliban to foil plots by Daesh supporters in Afghanistan.

"Iran held talks with Taliban in line with maintaining stability in Afghanistan and foiling Daesh supporters' plot," he told ILNA in an interview

published on Monday.

He noted that holding talks does not mean recognize a group.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran had differences and serious tension with Taliban which have been resolved due to historic reasons," he noted.

The senior lawmaker added that it is a reality that Taliban has gained power in Afghanistan. **→2**

Bomb-packed car blows up near high-security compound in Kabul

A bomb-laden car blew up outside a high-security compound that is home to several international companies and charities in the Afghan capital Kabul Monday, causing a number of casualties, security officials said.

An Afghan government security source said the blast occurred on Jalalabad Road in eastern Kabul near the Green Village compound, which has blast walls and

security checkpoints.

Police spokesman Basir Mujahid said that a vehicle full of explosives had detonated. "The area is cordoned off ... and search operation underway for suspects and attackers," he said.

"It was a powerful car bomb that knocked [down] a wall between Green Village and the [adjacent] customs office," a security source told Reuters. **→13**



EDITORIAL

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Iranians will not forget treason by Poland

In 1939, when World War II began, Poland came under attacks by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The attacks led to starvation, displacement, and mass execution of Polish people.

It was between the years 1941 to 1943 that about 150,000 Poles took refuge in Iran. During their three-year stay in Iran, the Iranians' hospitality toward the Poles won the praise of the international community, especially the Poles themselves.

At the time, Poland's officials had said that the Iranians' kindness toward the Polish refugees will not be forgotten from their memory.

Now, at the beginning of 2019, some Poles who spent their childhood in Iran during the World War II, are still alive. They are narrators of a nation that while themselves were grappling with starvation, they did whatever they could for their guests who had fled the war and punishment. However, today there is an open and secret relationship between the Polish and U.S. governments aimed against Iran.

The point is that Warsaw has not been an independent power player at the international scene in the recent decades. Persons such as Jaroslaw Kaczynski to Donald Tusk and Mateusz Morawiecki have all been turned into submissive politicians who have preferred playing at the U.S. court.

It is not without reason that many analysts view Poland as a country with limited international influence.

Today, at a time when the Iranian nation is struggling with illegal sanctions by the Trump administration, officials in Warsaw have agreed to host an anti-Iran conference. Though this joint Washington-Warsaw measure against the Iranian nation will reach nowhere, the great treason of this European country will not be wiped from the Iranians' minds.

The treasons that the Polish officials are doing against Iranians are not just limited to this move.

In 2018, when Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear agreement, Poland was the only country in Europe that tacitly supported the move. **→7**

Boeing 707 cargo plane crashes near Tehran, claims 16 lives

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — A Boeing 707 cargo plane, with 17 people on board, crashed in Safadasht, near Tehran, on Monday morning, leaving 16 dead and one injured, ISNA news agency reported.

The plane took off from Bishkek Manas International Airport in Kyrgyzstan and was planned to land at Payam international airport, however, it was forced to make an emergency landing and crashed into a residential complex about 8.30 a.m. local time.

According to head of Emergency Medical Services Organization Pir Hossein Kulivand, the residential complex was vacant.

Ambulances and firefighters were sent to the scene immediately.

Nasser Charkhsaz, head of Alborz province Red Crescent Society, explained that the main reason behind the crash is unknown yet.

Army spokesman Brigadier General Taghi Khani told the IRIB that the plane belonged to the Iranian forces.



Turkey responds to Trump Twitter threat

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened Turkey with economic devastation if it attacks a U.S.-allied Kurdish militia in Syria, drawing a sharp rebuke from Ankara Monday and reviving fears of another downturn in ties between the NATO allies.

Relations between the United States and Turkey have long been strained by Washington's support for the Kurdish YPG, which Turkey views as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that is waging a decades-long insurgency in Turkey.

Speaking in Riyadh, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he did not think the threat would change plans to withdraw troops from Syria. Asked what Trump meant by economic devastation, he said: "You'll have to ask the president."

"We have applied economic sanctions in many

places, I assume he is speaking about those kinds of things, Pompeo said, adding he had not spoken with Ankara since Trump's comment.

Trump said Sunday the United States was starting the military pullout from Syria that he announced in December, saying it was continuing to hit Daesh (ISIL) militants there.

"Will attack again from existing nearby base if it reforms. Will devastate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds. Create 20 mile safe zone...Likewise, do not want the Kurds to provoke Turkey," Trump wrote on Twitter.

The lira slid more than 1.6 percent to 5.5450 against the dollar and stood at 1122 GMT Monday.

Turkey's presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin said Trump should respect Washington's alliance with Ankara.

"Mr. @realDonaldTrump It is a fatal mistake

to equate Syrian Kurds with the PKK, which is on the US terrorists list, and its Syria branch PYD/YPG," spokesman Ibrahim Kalin wrote on Twitter.

"Terrorists can't be your partners & allies. Turkey expects the U.S. to honor our strategic partnership and doesn't want it to be shadowed by terrorist propaganda," he said Monday.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Ankara was not against the idea of a "secure zone" along the border, but added that strategic partners and allies should not communicate over social media.

"Nothing can be achieved by threatening Turkey economically. We need to look at how we can coordinate together and how we can solve this," he said in a news conference with Luxembourg's foreign minister. **→13**



Tasnim/ Reza Adeli

Mountain goats in northwestern resort

A pack of nine goats has recently been released into Eynali Mount, which is home to a gigantic recreational resort in northwestern Iran.

Local authorities plan to add tens of goats and to extend the resort, which currently covers an area of 5600 ha.

Eynali is also a place for everyday hiking for the locals. It is equipped with a cable car. There are a range of facilities including ones for staying, eating and camping.

While on the top, the resort offers eye-catching views over Tabriz that was once the capital of Iran.



ARTICLE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Why is Tony Blair so angry?

The former British Prime Minister doesn't have a good time! On the one hand, Tony Blair is witnessing the continuation of the Brexit process, and on the other hand, He's in no way happy with what has happened inside the Labor Party! Tony Blair is one of the main opponents of the British withdrawal from the European Union.

He has repeatedly stated that another referendum could be held, and, if the British citizens vote against the Brexit, the earlier results of the 2016 referendum can be ignored. He's gone a step further, and mentioned that the Brexit can never happen, even despite the public's vote for leaving the EU!

Recently, British Prime Minister, Theresa May, expressed her satisfaction with the positive vote of the House of Commons to her plan for leaving the block. These remarks led to Tony Blair and his entourage taking positions against her. The UK former Prime Minister intended to use the Brexit to return to power in London and the Labor Party. In recent years, he has become the main messenger of the falsification of the Brexit.

However, the London-Brussels agreement on British exit from the EU can once again defeat Blair to in the country's political circles. The truth is that London's soft or hard exit from the EU is of no importance to Blair, but he's after the renewal of 2018's referendum. For the British prime minister, it does not matter that his country will leave Europe in the form of a "joint agreement" or "disagreement"!

UK's former foreign secretary, Boris Johnson and some other senior members of the conservative party, however, believe that the House of Commons shouldn't agree with London's soft withdrawals from the European Union. They believe that the agreement reached between Theresa May and the EU authorities over the Brexit will be heavily imbalanced and will lead to the economic domination of the United Europe on England over the next decade.

On the contrary, EU leaders, including Chancellor Angela Merkel, have said they're not willing to offer British officials more advantages in their negotiations. They have emphasized that there would be no more talks on Brexit. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani to visit Iraq in March

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to visit Iraq on March 11, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced on Sunday night.

Zarif, heading a politico-economic delegation, is currently in Baghdad for talks with the neighboring state's officials, IRNA reported.

The foreign minister mentioned no more details on President Rouhani's trip but said the tour to Iraq is aimed at making efforts to develop relations between the two neighboring countries.

Earlier, Zarif held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi and attended a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammad Ali Hakim.



Prosecutor denies Esmail Bakhshi's torture claims

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, Iran's prosecutor general, has denied rumors that Esmail Bakhshi, spokesman for the independent Workers Union of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro Industrial Company, has been tortured, saying ulterior motives might have been behind the rumors.

"This person has not been an ordinary person.... perhaps he raised the issue of torture in order to cover up his crimes," Mehr on Monday quoted Montazeri as saying.

Earlier in January, Bakhshi wrote an open letter to Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, challenging him to a debate, saying he was tortured to the "brink of death without hearing a single reason."



Iran to continue advisory role in Syria: general

POLITICS TEHRAN — Hassan Firouzabadi, the former chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on Monday that Iran will keep its military advisors in Syria to help Damascus in the war against terrorism.

"Syria has called on Iran to send its military advisors to the country to confront the Takfiri terrorists," General Firouzabadi said in an interview with IRNA.

"We support Syria as far as the Takfiri terrorists continue or spread their activities in the country and as far as the Damascus government requests," he added.



The tide submerging U.S. already begun: commander

POLITICS TEHRAN — Basij Chief Gholamhossein Gheybparvar has said the domino effect that will eventually lead to the collapse of the United States has already been triggered.

Gheybparvar also said since U.S. President Donald Trump came into office, he has divulged the true face of Washington's hostility toward the Iranian nation.

"Based on our religious teachings and the philosophy of the Islamic Revolution, we do not have any doubts about our victory," he stated, adding, "The future belongs to us."

He also warned about the consequences of trusting "Europeans and Americans", saying, "Some knock on that door a lot... There's nothing there."



Approach toward last year's protests 'more mature' than ever

POLITICS TEHRAN — Hesamoddin Ashna, a senior cultural advisor to the president, says the Islamic Republic's approach toward last year's protests was more mature compared to previous protests.

In an interview with ISNA published on Monday, Ashna said the government took a new approach toward last year's protests in comparison with the post-2009 election protests, and succeeded in handling the situation.

Pointing to the potential for protests that still exists, he said political reforms are needed to prevent similar issues.

"We have no choice but to pay attention to political reforms. These political reforms will not be possible unless the people feel involved and feel that they are part of the solution," he remarked.



'UK stance over Zaghari is meddling in Iran's affairs'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's ambassador to the UK has said that London's stance over the imprisonment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe constitutes interference with Iran's internal affairs.

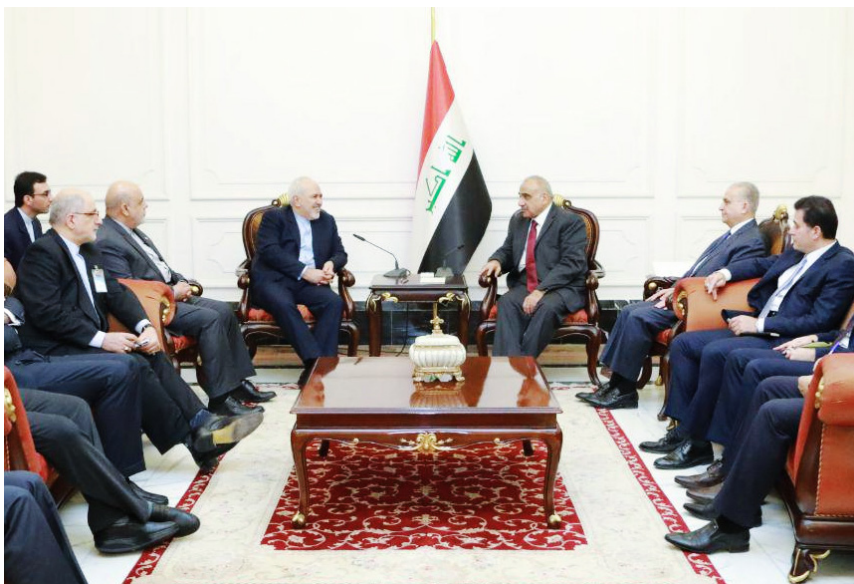
That's because Zaghari-Ratcliffe holds Iranian nationality and according to law, she is an Iranian person and subject to Iranian civil laws, Hamid Baedinejad told the UK Foreign Office as he was summoned on Monday for explanations about Zaghari-Ratcliffe's conditions, IRNA quoted the envoy as saying in an interview later the day.

"This lady is in prison on charges of espionage for that very government which is interfering in the affair," he had told the Foreign Office.

"This meddling will not help her any," Baidinejad said. "The Iranian government refuses any interfering with the case by the UK government."

High-profile meetings in Baghdad

PM Abdul-Mahdi says Iraq seeks best ties with Iran



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his accompanying team (L) meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Muhamadi in Baghdad late Sunday, 13 January, 2019.

on the ISNA website, Zarif for his part, said Iran will stand beside the Iraqi government and people and will expand relations in various spheres.

Zarif held a separate meeting with

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali Alhakim. The officials discussed expansion of ties.

Zarif also held a separate meeting with Speaker of the Council of Representatives

of Iraq Mohamed al-Halbousi and also various Iraqi religious figures.

The foreign minister also addressed a gathering of representatives from hundreds of Iranian and Iraqi companies in Baghdad.

The meeting was held with the purpose of discussing opportunities for investment in Iraq, the participation of Iran's private sector in the reconstruction of Iraq after the defeat of Daesh terrorists and enhancement of trade cooperation.

"In a secure and powerful region, dialog takes the place of war, cooperation replaces arms race and brotherly relations replace trust in foreigners," Iran's top diplomat told the meeting.

Zarif noted that in a strong region, all countries can trust one another and make a better future for themselves. "In this case, bilateral and multilateral relations among countries in this region would be stronger than their relations with other countries."

The Iranian foreign minister stated that in order to achieve this goal, the Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the expansion of cooperation with all regional countries and knows no limit for the development of relations and cooperation with Iraq.

Iran says still honoring nuclear deal

POLITICS TEHRAN — Tehran says its move to design a modern process for 20-percent uranium enrichment does not run against its compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the JCPOA in its English abbreviation and BARJAM in Persian.

"We have been committed to BARJAM so far and we have shown to the world that we are fulfilling our obligations under the deal," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday at his bi-weekly press conference.

He was commenting on remarks by Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), who announced on Sunday that Iran has begun preliminary activities for designing modern nuclear fuel with purity of 20 percent.

"However, how we will decide in the future depends on the role and performance of the other parties to BARJAM," Qassemi remarked.

The spokesman further said the Foreign Ministry

is closely monitoring the developments surrounding the JCPOA, and that any decision about the international pact will be made by the JCPOA Monitoring Board, a committee inside the Supreme National Security Council whose members are appointed by the Leader.

On the prospects of the special purpose vehicle (SPV), a mechanism aimed at facilitating trade with Iran in the face of U.S. sanctions, Qassemi said the European Union (EU) lacks the structures needed to establish the mechanism.

He said although the EU is willing to finalize the SPV, there has been too much delay and the EU is under considerable pressure from the United States.

"The U.S. is trying to prevent this type of cooperation from being materialized through any means," he remarked.

On May 8, 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the JCPOA and ordered the re-imposition of sanctions against Iran, despite strong

opposition from the other signatories to the deal — namely Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany.

Under Trump, the U.S. has been pursuing the strategy of applying maximum pressure on Iran. The latest example of such pressure was seen on Friday, when U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that Poland and the United States are jointly organizing the global conference in Warsaw on February 13-14, with the aim of curbing Iran's influence in the region.

While deploring the move, Qassemi said the U.S. is trying to harm Iran's relations with other countries.

He also criticized the Polish government's decision to host the conference.

"We will not let others move in the direction of destroying Iran's image on false pretexts," he said.

The Foreign Ministry has taken and will take appropriate measures in the face of "wrong", "improper" and maybe "hostile" actions of any country within the framework of maintaining the status of the Iranian people, the spokesman added.

Rouhani says Iran to launch Payam satellite soon

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said on Monday that the Payam satellite will soon be launched into space with an altitude of 600 kilometers.

Addressing a gathering of people in Golestan Province, he said that scientists in Amirkabir University of Technology have built the satellite.

The satellite will observe weather condition, waters and forests, he stated.

Elsewhere, he noted that the Iranians are not scared by the enemies' threats

and will overcome all problems.

"Neither the U.S., nor the Zionists and their allies are able to bring the great Iranian people to knees," he remarked.

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

Pompeo in Mideast to corner Iran but Tehran not cowed

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been touring the Middle East to rally support against Iran, but Tehran is not impressed.

The top U.S. diplomat set out on his much-anticipated trip last week, with a declared goal of forging a unified Arab front against Iran, a dream that has brought together even Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Before landing in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh on Monday morning, Pompeo made important stops in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Perhaps the most important objective of the 9-country tour became clear during his rambling speech in Cairo, the Egyptian capital, where he spoke extensively of the U.S. "campaign to stop Iran's malevolent influence and actions against this region and the world."

He said U.S. economic sanctions against Iran were "the strongest in history, and will keep getting tougher until Iran starts behaving like a normal country."

But the hostile rhetoric didn't end there as he once again repeated longtime U.S. threats of military actions against Iran if all else failed.

In a wide-ranging interview with the CBS News on Sunday, the top U.S. diplomat pointed to President Donald Trump's decision to evacuate Syria from U.S. military personnel.

Asked whether Washington would end up regretting the decision to exit one of the most important conflicts in the region, Pompeo took a rather boastful tone, bragging about how the U.S. military could return to the region in no time.

"Margaret, the United States of America can project military power from lots of places in the world," he told CBS anchor Margaret Brennan.

Pompeo further gloated over the ability of "our amazing armed forces" to accomplish U.S. objectives anywhere in the



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) meets with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the Royal Court in Riyadh on January 14, 2019. (Photo by AFP)

world. "That certainly includes in Syria. It certainly includes into Iran if need be," he said.

Pompeo's remarks came at a time that all U.S. military adventures in the region have turned into quagmires which have haunted several U.S. administrations.

Years of U.S. -led war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan have only strengthened militants and terrorist groups, requiring local governments to ask for help from Iran and other neighbors to help end the crises.

It has been the same story in Syria, where the U.S. has been openly targeting Syrian military forces fighting foreign-backed militancy. And now, after Syria's great victories with help from Iran and Russia, the U.S. has decided to withdraw.

It is no secret that American officials cannot stand Iran's regional influence.

On Sunday, The Wall Street Journal reported that John Bolton, Trump's national security adviser, had

Iraqi MP says Zarif's visit to Baghdad heralds new opportunities'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Forat al-Tamimi, an Iraqi MP, has said that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's visit to Iraq is very important that will create new opportunities for economic cooperation.

"Zarif's visit is very important and will bring developments. Iraq needs its friends' support in reconstructing the country. This trip paves the way for business activities and expansion of cooperation in various areas," ISNA quoted him as saying on Monday in an interview with Dijlah TV.

He added, "The Iranian foreign minister's trip was welcomed by the new Iraqi government, because this government seeks comprehensive ties with all countries, especially its neighbors."

Zarif arrived in Baghdad on Sunday, heading a high ranking political and economic delegation.

CEOs of dozens of entrepreneur companies accompanies the foreign minister.

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

even sought military plans from the Pentagon for a possible strike against Iran last year.

Iraqi foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview published Monday that it was only the U.S. and its allies who kept speaking of war.

"We are not looking for conflict, war and tension," Zarif told the official government daily, Iran. "It is the US and some countries in our region who have pursued policies that escalate tensions."

Pointing to Trump's decision last year to pull out from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Zarif said "it was them [Americans] who abandoned the talks."

One of Pompeo's main objective in the tour was laying the groundwork for the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), a concept similar to an Arab NATO. Trump first floated the idea of forging MESA during his visit to Saudi Arabia in 2017.

■ Iran urges vigilance to foil U.S. divisive policies, plots

Zarif, however, brushed off the threat, advising Arab governments in the region to stop "coying up" to Washington.

"The Islamic Republic's strategy is one of basing policies on cooperation with neighbors," he said.

"It seems like some Arab countries, regardless of what policies Iran is pursuing, are trying to let the world know that they have issues with Tehran," Zarif said, noting that they have been insisting on their "failed policies" against the Islamic Revolution throughout the past 40 years.

"The fact that a few small countries or a number of rulers in this region like to cause tension doesn't mean that we have to change our policies," he said.

"As the region's major power, we determine our policies ourselves and according to our national interests and not others' reactions," Zarif added.

(Source: Press TV)

Iran talked to Taliban to foil plot by Daesh backers: MP

1 → "The Islamic Republic is seeing dangers worse than Taliban in Afghanistan. The U.S. is following a policy of transferring heads of Daesh to this country to create a new situation," he revealed.

He noted that in this situation actions must be taken against empowerment of Daesh in Afghanistan which make it essential to cooperate with Taliban.

He also said Tehran's talks with Taliban are with coordination of the Afghan government.

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.

Araqchi met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in the Arg presidential palace in Kabul on January 5 to brief him about the meeting in Tehran.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami also said on January 7 that Iran's talks with Taliban are aimed at restoring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, a

top military adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Wednesday that Iran can help the Taliban and the Afghan government reach a common understanding for stabilizing the central Asian country.

In an interview with IRNA, Firouzabadi said security in Afghanistan is very important for Iran.

Trump denies he hid details of Putin meetings

President Donald Trump rejected a Washington Post report that he has refused to share details of his conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin with top U.S. government officials. Trump, in a telephone interview late Saturday with Fox News, dismissed as "ridiculous" the Post story that alleged he went to great lengths to hide the content of his talks with Putin, even confiscating the notes of his interpreter and ordering that person to not discuss what was said. Trump said he had "a great conversation" with Putin in Helsinki in July 2018. When asked why not release details of the nearly two-hour conversation, Trump said: "I would, I don't with care."

"I mean, I had a conversation like every president does. You sit with the president of various countries ... We were talking about Israel and securing Israel and lots of other things ... I'm not keeping anything under wraps, I couldn't care less. I mean, it's so ridiculous."

According to the Post there is no detailed record of Trump's personal talks with Putin at five locations over the past two years.

The newspaper quotes unidentified current and former government officials as sources for the story. Trump also told Fox when asked about Putin that "no collusion" has been found between his 2016 campaign and Russia, that he



was a better candidate than Democrat Hillary Clinton, that the U.S. economy "is the strongest in the world," and that The Washington Post is "basically the lobbyist for Amazon," as both are owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos.

Trump also avoided directly answering when asked whether he currently is or has ever worked for Russia after a published report said law enforcement officials, concerned about his behavior after he fired FBI Director James Comey in 2017, had begun

investigating that possibility.

The FBI investigation was later folded into the broader probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and possible collaboration by the Trump campaign.

Fox asked whether he had ever worked for Russia. "I think it's the most insulting thing I've ever been asked," he said, without directly answering the question.

He slammed the story, published over the weekend in the New York Times,

as "the most insulting article I've ever had written and if you read the article, you'd see that they found absolutely nothing." No evidence has emerged that Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian officials, the Times said.

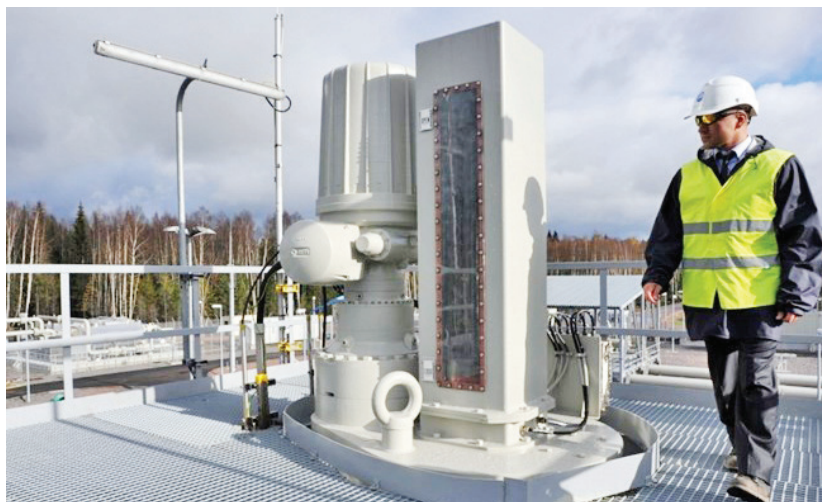
The FBI had been suspicious of Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 campaign, but it held off on opening a probe until the president sacked Comey, who refused to roll back the Russia investigation, the Times said. Mueller has indicted 33 people in the probe and convicted some of Trump's close associates.

Trump's ex-national security advisor, Michael Flynn, has pleaded guilty to lying to investigators about his Moscow ties. Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, has been sentenced to three years in prison for multiple crimes, including felony violations of campaign finance laws that prosecutors allege were carried out under Trump's direction.

And Trump's former presidential campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, has been convicted in one case brought by Mueller and pleaded guilty in another, over financial crimes related to his work in Ukraine before the 2016 campaign, and for witness tampering.

(Source: Daily Star)

Venezuela opposition leader Guaido addresses rally after brief detention



Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido led a rally Sunday after being briefly detained by intelligence agents, days after saying he would be willing to replace the increasingly isolated President Nicolas Maduro.

Guaido's comments Friday spurred some opposition sympathizers to conclude that he had declared himself interim president, and led several government officials to say he should be arrested for treason.

Intelligence agents Sunday pulled him from his car on the way from the capital of Caracas to the coastal town of Caraballeda, his wife and opposition legislators said.

He was released shortly thereafter, they said. "I want to send a message to Miraflores — the game has changed," said Guaido, the head of the opposition-run congress referring to the presidential palace, from a stage surrounded by cheering opposition sympathizers.

"Here we are! We are not afraid!" Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez told state television that the detention was an "irregular procedure" by rogue agents who wanted to help the opposition create a "media show," adding that the agents would face disciplinary action.

Guaido called Rodriguez's comments a

sign that the government had lost control of its own security forces.

Asked whether he should be considered interim president, Guaido responded: "That has been clarified several times."

The U.S. State Department on Saturday had called on Venezuelan security forces to respect the "safety and welfare" of Guaido and other legislators, calling for an "orderly transition to a new government."

Maduro was sworn in to a second term Thursday, defying critics in the United States and Latin America who called him an illegitimate usurper of a nation where economic chaos has wrought a humanitarian crisis.

The once-booming OPEC nation's economy has collapsed following the fall of oil prices in 2014. Inflation is close to 2 million percent and some 10 percent of the population has emigrated since 2015 in search of better living conditions.

Maduro says the country is victim of an "economic war" led by his political adversaries with the help of Washington. He insists the 2018 vote was legitimate and that the opposition boycotted it because it knew it would lose.

(Source: Daily Star)

U.S. threatens sanctions over Russia-Germany gas pipeline



The U.S. ambassador to Germany has warned of sanctions against firms linked to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia, the American embassy in Berlin confirmed Sunday. A letter envoy Richard Grenell sent to several businesses "reminds that any company operating in the Russian energy export pipeline sector ... is in danger under CAATSA of U.S. sanctions," an embassy spokesman told AFP.

The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act adopted in 2017 targets Iran, Russia and North Korea.

The letter by Grenell, a close ally of U.S. President Donald Trump, "is not meant to be a threat, but a clear message of U.S. policy," the spokesman said.

"The only thing that could be considered blackmail in this situation would be the Kremlin having leverage over future gas supplies," he said.

Construction has already begun on Nord Stream 2, set to double the capacity of an existing pipeline across the Baltic Sea.

Combined with the planned TurkStream pipeline across the Black Sea, Nord Stream 2 would do away with the need to transport natural gas to Europe via Ukraine — robbing the country of a factor shielding it from

Russian aggression, Grenell said.

The two countries are in conflict over the eastern part of Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia in 2014.

"Firms supporting the construction of the two pipelines are actively undermining the security of Ukraine and Europe," Grenell wrote.

Washington's fears about the Nord Stream 2 pipeline are shared by a number of eastern European Union countries including Poland, and the European Parliament last month passed a resolution condemning the construction. But German Chancellor Angela Merkel, backed by France and Austria, has so far insisted that it is a "purely economic project" that will ensure cheaper and more reliable gas supplies.

The veteran leader — a key player in Moscow-Kiev peace talks — says Ukrainian interests will be protected as some Russian gas will still be transported via the country once Nord Stream 2 is online.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas also weighed in on the transatlantic row last week, saying "European energy policy should be decided in Europe, not in the United States."

(Source: AFP)

Baghdad backs Syria's return to Arab League

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad al-Hakim says the Baghdad government supports the restoration of Syria's membership in the Arab League, amid promising signs that the incumbent Damascus government led by President Bashar al-Assad is being admitted back into the Arab world after nearly eight years of foreign-sponsored militancy.

"We discussed solutions to eliminate terrorism in Syria and support the Syrian government, its territorial integrity and sovereignty," Hakim said on Monday at a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Mohammed Javad Zarif, who is on an official visit to Baghdad.

"We also discussed supporting Iraq's efforts to restore Syria's (membership) to the Arab League," he added.

On January 8, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the incumbent Damascus government needs to implement a number of measures toward the political settlement of the ongoing Syrian crisis in order for the conflict-plagued country to reinstate its membership in the Arab League.

Speaking at a joint press conference with his Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita in Cairo, Shoukry said such measures are required "in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254," which endorsed a road map for a peace process in Syria, and set out the outlines of a nationwide ceasefire.

"There's a need to get out of the current crisis in Syria through the political framework sponsored by the UN envoy in Geneva," the top Egyptian diplomat pointed out.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011, citing alleged crackdown by Damascus on opposition protests. Syria has denounced the move as "illegal and a violation of the organization's charter."

(Source: Press TV)

Brexit is in peril, UK PM May warns ahead of vote on her deal

Prime Minister Theresa May warned on Monday that Britain's planned exit from the EU could be derailed, a last-ditch effort to win over Brexit-supporting lawmakers who have repeatedly said they will vote down her divorce deal.

The fate of the United Kingdom's March 29 exit from the EU is deeply uncertain as parliament is likely to reject May's deal on Tuesday evening, opening up outcomes ranging from a disorderly divorce to reversing Brexit altogether.

Amid the deepest crisis in British politics for at least half a century, May and EU leaders exchanged letters giving assurances on her withdrawal agreement, though there was little sign of a change of heart among rebel lawmakers.

May used a speech at a china factory in the leave-supporting city of Stoke-on-Trent in central England to say that lawmakers blocking Brexit altogether was now a more likely outcome than Britain leaving without a deal.

"There are some in Westminster who would wish to delay or even stop Brexit and who will use every device available to them to do so," May said.

"While no-deal remains a serious risk, having observed the events at Westminster over the last seven days, it's now my judgment that the more likely outcome is a paralysis in parliament that risks there being no Brexit."

As the world's biggest trading bloc tried to brace for an unpredictable ride, Spain said the EU could agree to extend the deadline for Brexit, but not beyond elections for the European Parliament due in May. May warned lawmakers on Sunday that failing to deliver Brexit would be "catastrophic" for democracy, and her ministers said that thwarting the outcome of the 2016 referendum could lead to rise in far-right populism.

■ Letter from EU

As part of the effort to get the deal approved by the British parliament, the EU and May set out some assurances in a choreographed exchange of letters on Monday.

The EU told May that it stood by commitments to find ways to avoid triggering the controversial "Irish backstop" in their Brexit deal and that this pledge had legal weight.

In a joint reply to questions from May, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk said the EU stood by its commitment to try and reach a post-Brexit trade deal by the end of next year in order to avoid using the unpopular backstop.

While stressing that nothing in their letter could be seen as changing or being inconsistent with the draft treaty agreed with May last month, they said a commitment to speedy trade deal made by EU leaders had "legal value" which committed the Union "in the most solemn manner".

However, even if the target date were not met, they wrote, Britain would have the option to extend a status-quo transition period to avoid triggering the backstop, which is meant to avoid a hard customs border for Northern Ireland.

"If the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would only apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement that ensures that a hard border is avoided," they said. May said the assurances might not go far enough for some lawmakers and the small Northern Irish party that props up her government said it was insufficient.

"The letter isn't legally binding," Democratic Unionist Party deputy leader Nigel Dodds told BBC radio.

May will make a statement to parliament at about 1530 GMT. But with her deal facing opposition from all sides in the lower house of parliament, the House of Commons, the letters are unlikely to change the fundamental outcome of the vote.

■ "Parliament plot"

With no-deal Brexit the default option if May's deal is defeated, some lawmakers are planning to pull control of Brexit from the government. Though May is weakened, the executive has significant powers, especially during times of crisis, so it was unclear how parliament would be able to take control of Brexit. If May's deal is defeated and the government is unable to have any amended version passed in the next three weeks, one suggestion is for senior lawmakers who chair parliamentary committees to come up with an alternative Brexit plan.

"We're in the very, very final stages of the end-game here," said Nick Boles, one of the Conservative lawmakers behind the plan, who said he would vote for May's deal.

"What we need to do is find the solution, and if the government can't find the solution — and we want the government to find the solution, and we'll be voting for her solution — but if it can't then parliament needs to," he told BBC radio.

(Source: Reuters)

France's Le Pen launches EU campaign with appeal to 'yellow vests'

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen launched her campaign for the May 26 European Parliament election Sunday with an appeal to the broad "yellow vest" protest movement that has rattled the government.

Le Pen urged the tens of thousands of protesters who have staged weekly protests against President Emmanuel Macron since November to make the EU vote a referendum on his policies.

"In the context of the healthy popular revolt of the yellow vests, this election offers a chance to end this crisis born of the intransigence and contempt ... of an incompetent president whose behavior is disturbing," Le Pen told an election rally for her National Rally ("Rassemblement National") party.

Born from a grassroots protest against high fuel prices, the yellow vests have become a broad and sometimes violent movement demanding more social justice for low-skilled workers left behind by globalization, deregulation and EU integration.

Although independent of parties and unions, the movement shares many of the RN's demands: proportional representation in parliament, direct democracy through Swiss-style referendums, less European integration and — above all — Macron's resignation.

"If Macron does not have the wisdom to go back to the people by dissolving parliament, then let the political arbitrage come from European elections," said Le Pen, as



her supporters repeatedly shouted "Macron, demission!" ("Macron, resignation!").

Both Le Pen and far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon have publicly sympathized with the yellow vests — named after the high-visibility jackets they wear — and asked for their support.

Le Pen hopes the EU vote will advance a redrawing of France's political map. The process began with the first round of the 2017 presidential election, when Macron's

upstart centrist movement and her own National Front, since renamed, eliminated the traditional big parties — the conservative Les Republicains and the Socialists.

"The battle is now between nationalists and globalists," she said.

Since the start of the yellow vest protests, Le Pen's RN has gained in the polls. A mid-December Ifop poll gave it 24 percent support against 18 percent for Macron's LREM.

The conservatives had 11 percent, Melenchon's La France Insoumise ("France Unbowed") 9 percent, the movement of former Le Pen ally Nicolas Dupont-Aignan 8 percent and the Socialists just 4.5 percent.

Le Pen herself is not running in the European election as she wants to remain in the French parliament, and on Sunday presented 23-year-old Jordan Bardella as the NR's leading candidate.

"In Italy and Austria, our allies are governing," Bardella said. "A better tomorrow is within our grasp."

Macron himself will launch three months of national debate this week to air yellow-vest grievances in the hope of appeasing the movement.

An RN supporter at Sunday's rally, Sebastien Lefevre, told Reuters he fully supports the yellow vests as does his party.

"And from what I understand from the polls, most of the yellow vests would vote for us," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	164696.4
IFX	1949.54

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,186 rials
GBP	53,937 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$51.59/b
Brent	\$60.37/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.48/b
Gold	\$1,292.20 /oz
Silver	\$15.66/oz
Platinum	\$810.10/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

3rd round of offering oil at IRENEX on Jan. 21

1 → On October 28, just few days before new U.S. sanctions on Iran's petroleum sector took effect (November 4), NIOC could sell some 280,000 barrels of crude oil at \$74.85 per barrel on the first day of offering crude oil for export at the international ring of IRENEX. With the daily supply amount of one million barrels per day, the market wrapped up by selling eight 35,000-barrel-cargos of oil on the day.



Establishment of IRENEX, which is considered as a turning point in Iran's strategic oil industry and capital market and also a platform for producers and consumers to be in touch and pay lower trade costs in a transparent business environment, can be translated into creation of a new energy stock market that results in economic development.

The energy market is basically exports-oriented and has the capacity to increase Iranian oil customers both domestically and internationally. Price setting relies on the base price determined by NIOC according to global prices. Receiving a trading code, foreign companies can purchase oil cargos from IRENEX.

China says its 2018 trade surplus with the U.S. was \$323b

Despite U.S. President Donald Trump launching a high-stakes trade war against Beijing last year, China on Monday announced that its 2018 trade surplus with Washington was its largest in more than a decade.

China's surplus with the U.S. grew 17 percent from a year ago to hit \$323.32 billion in 2018, according to government data. It was the highest on record dating back to 2006, according to Reuters.

Exports to the U.S. rose 11.3 percent on-year in 2018, while imports from the U.S. to China rose a meager 0.7 percent over the same period.

China's overall trade surplus for 2018 was \$351.76 billion, the government said. Exports in the whole of 2018 rose 9.9 percent from 2017 while imports grew 15.8 percent over the same period, official dollar-denominated data showed.

While the surplus with the U.S. may have risen, last year's overall Chinese trade surplus was the lowest since 2013, even though export growth was the highest since 2011, according to Reuters' records.

China's General Administration of Customs said on Monday that the biggest worry in trade this year is external uncertainty and protectionism, forecasting the country's trade growth may slow in 2019.

Asia's largest economy is still growing steadily in 2019, but it faces external headwinds, said customs spokesman Li Kuiwen at a scheduled briefing, Reuters reported.

Economic data from China are being closely watched for signs of damage inflicted by the trade war between Washington and Beijing.

While official data indicated China's economy held up for much of last year, it now appears to be slowing as production metrics and export orders fall as the country's trade dispute with the U.S., its largest trading partner, drags on.

China's overall December exports unexpectedly fell 4.4 percent from a year earlier, the biggest monthly drop in two years, the customs data showed on Monday.

Imports also unexpectedly contracted in December — falling 7.6 percent, marking the biggest decline since July 2016.

That left the country with a trade surplus of \$57.06 billion for the month, compared with analysts' expectations for a surplus of \$51.53 billion, up from \$44.71 billion in November.

Analysts polled by Reuters had expected December shipments from the world's largest exporter to have risen 3.0 percent, slowing from 5.4 percent in November.

Import growth had been expected to pick up slightly to 5.0 percent, after cooling to 3.0 percent in the previous month.

Exports fell due to softening global growth and as the drag from U.S. tariffs intensified, while imports also fell due to cooling domestic demand, said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics.

China's December trade surplus with the U.S. fell to \$29.87 billion from \$35.54 billion in November.

Beyond the tariffs battle with the U.S., China's economy has been facing its own domestic headwinds. Even before Trump kicked off the latest escalation in trade tensions, Beijing was already trying to manage a slowdown in its economy after decades of breakneck growth. *(Source: CNBC)*

India's monthly oil imports from Iran up 9.4% in Dec.

E N E R G Y **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — India imported 302,000 barrel per day (bpd) of oil from Iran in December 2018, an increase of 9.4 percent from November, ship tracking data reviewed by Reuters showed.

India is restricted to buying 1.25 million tons per month, some 300,000 bpd. December imports from Iran were 9.4 percent higher than November when some

cargoes were delayed due to lack of ships, the tanker arrival data showed.

Iran was the sixth biggest oil supplier to India in December compared to third position it held a year ago and last month Tehran's share of India's overall imports declined to 6.2 percent from 11.7 percent a year ago, the data showed.

As reported by Sputnik on Friday, India's Ministry of External Affairs announced

Hydroelectric power plants' capacity to hit 10,500 GWh by March 20

E N E R G Y **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Electricity generation capacity of the hydroelectric power plants in the country will reach 10,500 gigawatt hours (GWh) by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), the director of Iran's Hydroelectric Power Plants Management Center announced.

Farbod Estiri further said that the capacity of these power plants has reached 8,751 GWh since the beginning of current Iranian year which shows a 37-percent rise compared to the same period of time in the past year, ILNA reported on Monday.

According to Iran's Energy Ministry, the country's current power generation capacity stands at near 80,000 MW.

Currently, of the total nominal capacity



of Iran's power plants, the share of hydroelectric power plants is 19.87 percent while gas power plants generate 31.41 percent of the country's total electricity, the share of combined cycle power plants is 29.48 percent, and finally the renewable power plants account only for 0.79 percent of Iran's total power generation capacity.

S. Korea to receive Iranian condensate cargoes in Jan. after 4-month gap

A South Korean oil buyer is set to receive about 2 million barrels of Iranian condensate in January, a source familiar with the matter said on Monday.

The cargo marks the first Iranian oil import by South Korea in four months after the world's fifth-largest oil buyer halted imports before the U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran in November.

The first cargo of about 960,000 barrels of condensate, a type of light crude oil typically produced in association with natural gas, is expected to arrive this week at the port of Incheon, said the source, who declined to be named due

to sensitivity of the matter.

The Silvia 1, a vessel carrying 955,000 barrels of Iranian oil, is set to arrive in South Korea on Jan. 15, trade flow data from Refinitiv Eikon showed.

A second cargo of 990,000 barrels will arrive later this month, the source said.

In November, South Korea won a temporary waiver from the United States to purchase a limited amount of Iranian oil. The U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran's oil sector in November.

South Korea can buy up to 200,000 barrels per day (bpd)

of Iranian oil under the sanctions waiver, mainly condensate, according to industry sources.

South Korean oil buyers were expected to restart oil purchases from Iran in late January or early February, the head of SK Innovation, owner of South Korea's top refiner SK Energy, told Reuters last week.

South Korean buyers of Iranian crude and condensate include SK Energy and SK Incheon Petrochemical, owned by SK Innovation, Hyundai Oilbank Corp and Hanwha Total Petrochemical Co.

(Source: Reuters)

China's exports shrink most in 2 years, raising risks to global economy

China's exports unexpectedly fell the most in two years in December, while imports also contracted, pointing to further weakness in the world's second-largest economy in 2019 and deteriorating global demand.

Adding to policymakers' worries, data on Monday also showed China posted its biggest trade surplus with the United States on record in 2018, which could prompt President Donald Trump to turn up the heat on Beijing in their bitter trade dispute.

Softening demand in China is being felt around the world, with slowing sales of goods from iPhones to automobiles, prompting warnings from the likes of Apple and from Jaguar Land Rover, which last week announced sweeping job cuts mostly in Britain.

The dismal December trade readings suggest China's economy may have cooled faster than expected late in the year, despite a slew of growth-boosting measures in recent months ranging from higher infrastructure spending to tax cuts.

Some analysts had already speculated that Beijing may have to speed up and intensify its policy easing and stimulus measures this year after factory activity shrank in December.

China's December exports unexpectedly fell 4.4 percent from a year earlier, with demand in most of its major markets weakening. Imports also saw a shock drop, falling 7.6 percent in their biggest decline since July 2016.

"Today's data reflect an end to export front-loading and the start of payback effects, while the global slowdown could also weigh on China's exports," Nomura economists wrote in a note, referring to a surge in shipments to the U.S. over much of last year as companies rushed to beat further tariffs.

"The export growth print also suggests that the recent strength of the yuan might be short-lived; Beijing will perhaps be more eager to strike a trade deal with the U.S.; and that policymakers will need to take more aggressive measures to stabilize GDP growth."

Net exports had already been a drag on China's economic growth in the first three



quarters of last year, after giving it a boost in 2017.

Asian shares and U.S. stock market futures fell as the surprisingly weak Chinese data added to fears of weaker corporate profits and investment, while the yuan currency gave up some of its early gains.

China's politically-sensitive surplus with the U.S. widened by 17.2 percent to \$323.32 billion last year, the highest on record going back to 2006, according to Reuters calculations based on customs data.

China's large trade surplus with the United States has long been a sore point with Washington, which has demanded Beijing take steps to sharply reduce it.

Washington imposed import tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese goods last year and has threatened further action if Beijing does not change its practices on issues ranging from industrial subsidies to intellectual property. China has retaliated with tariffs of its own.

However, Beijing's export data had been surprisingly resilient to tariffs for much of 2018, possibly because companies ramped up shipments before broader and stiffer U.S.



that the country will continue importing Iranian oil using the U.S. granted waiver.

"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.

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

Also on January 8, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif 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.

Export guarantee issuance up 62% in 9 months on year

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The issuance of export guarantees in the country increased by 62 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2018) compared to the figure for last year's same period, IRIB reported on Monday quoting head of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI).

According to Afroz Bahrami, EGFI has issued export guarantees worth \$1.7 billion since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year and the figure is expected to reach \$2 billion by the yearend (March 20, 2019).

Mentioning the hardships resulted from reimposition of U.S. sanctions the

official noted that EGFI is determined to protect the country's exporters against the probable risks and keep the non-oil exports at the current levels.

As IRNA reported on Sunday, Bahrami also noted that EGFI is ready to issue guarantees for the private companies which are willing to export oil.

"EGFI has access to a huge database of renowned businesses worldwide through which millions of unknown but valid buyers can also be introduced to the Iranian exporters," The official added.

She also stated that an especial guarantee package is provided for the exporters of petrochemical products. In this packages EGFI guarantees the exports of such products for one year.

adding that exports and imports of electronic parts and goods will likely shrink this year.

The higher tariffs China levied on U.S. supplies also hit overall import growth. For all of 2018, soybeans, the second largest imports from the U.S., fell for the first time since 2011.

Even if Washington and Beijing reach a trade deal in their current round of talks, it would be no panacea for China's slowing economy, analysts say.

"The import slowdown is consistent with other signs that growth in China's domestic economy continued to weaken," said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics.

"Overall economic growth slowed further in the fourth quarter and remains under pressure from weaker exports, slow credit growth and cooling real estate activity."

Chinese policymakers are widely expected to roll out more support measures in coming months if domestic and external conditions continue to deteriorate.

Early this month, the central bank said it would slash banks' reserve requirements -- the fifth such cut in a year -- as it tries to encourage more lending and reduce the risk of a sharp slowdown.

"If pressure on the economy is still relatively large in the first half, a cut every quarter should be highly likely," said Xu Gao, chief economist at Everbright Securities.

In an annual meeting of top leaders last month, China said it will boost support for the economy in 2019 by cutting taxes and stepping up policy adjustments.

A few analysts believe interest rate cuts are a possibility, but most expect Beijing will refrain from massive stimulus measures like those deployed in the past, due to worries that it could add to a mountain of debt and weaken the yuan.

Sources told Reuters last week that Beijing is planning to lower its economic growth target to 6-6.5 percent this year after an expected 6.6 percent in 2018, the slowest pace in 28 years.

(Source: Economic Times)

Germany leads sharp fall in Eurozone industrial production

Industrial production in the Eurozone fell sharply in November on the back of a slowdown in the region's largest economy, Germany.

Eurostat, the European Commission's statistics bureau, said on Monday that industrial production fell by 1.7 percent between October and November,

highlighting the pressures facing the region's manufacturers. The fall was the sharpest since February 2016. Economists polled by Reuters forecast a 1.5 percent fall.

The decline comes after the German authorities said production in the region's economic powerhouse

had fallen by 1.9 percent. Industrial production also fell sharply in Ireland and Portugal.

Production fell across the board — for capital goods, durable and non-durable consumer goods, intermediate goods and energy.

(Source: Financial Times)

Oil falls back to \$60 on concerns about China slowdown

Oil slipped to around \$60 a barrel on Monday after data showed weakening imports and exports in China, the world's second-largest oil consumer, raising the prospect of a slowdown in fuel demand.

China's exports fell by the most in two years in December while imports contracted, official figures showed, pointing to further weakness in what is also the world's second-largest economy.

Brent crude, the international benchmark, fell 50 cents to \$59.98 a barrel by 0932 GMT, trading as low as \$59.37 intraday. U.S. crude slipped 41 cents to \$51.18.

"Both imports and exports disappointed expectations and are set to revive fears about a global growth slowdown," said Norbert Ruecker, head of macro and commodity research at Swiss bank Julius Baer.

Crude gave up an earlier gain following the release on Monday of the Chinese figures, the latest to point to an economic slowdown since the second half of 2018. Asian stock markets also slipped and European equities fell in early trade.



"Oil prices are getting weighted down by the prospects of weaker economic growth in China," Stephen Innes of futures brokerage

Oanda said in a report.

"This data drives home just how negative of an impact trade war is having on the Chinese

and perhaps global economy."

Despite concern about the outlook, there is little sign that Chinese oil demand has weakened yet. China's crude imports in December surged nearly 30 percent from a year earlier, Reuters calculations of customs data showed.

Oil is drawing support from supply cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-OPEC allies, including Russia.

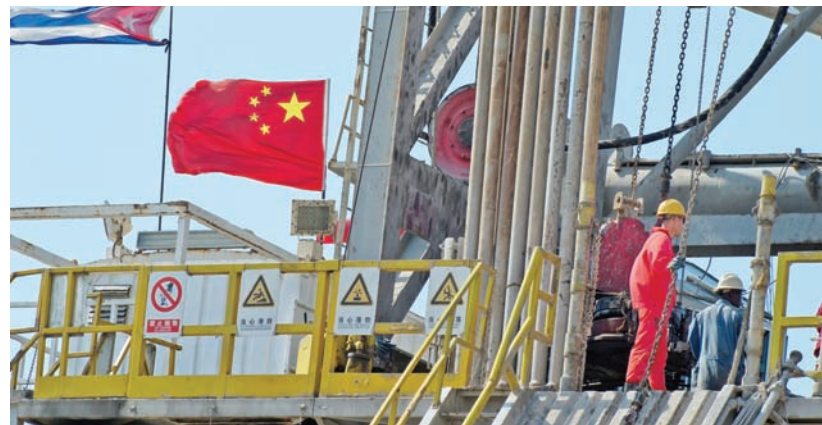
The group of producers, known as OPEC+, agreed in December to cut oil output by 1.2 million barrels per day starting in January to prevent a supply glut and boost prices.

With the rise in Brent from a dip below \$50 in December, OPEC officials appear more confident that prices will be supported by output declines in January as producers implement the deal.

Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said on Sunday the oil market was "on the right track" and there was no need for an extraordinary OPEC meeting before its next planned gathering in April.

(Source: Reuters)

China's 2018 crude oil imports rise 10% to 9.28m bpd



China's crude oil imports surged 29.9 percent year on year to 10.35 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, bringing total imports to 9.28 million bpd in 2018, up 10.1 percent year on year, preliminary data from the General Administration of Customs showed Monday.

This was the second time China's monthly crude imports breached 10 million bpd, and was 1.2 percent lower than the record high of 10.48 million bpd in November 2018.

GAC releases data in metric tons, which S&P Global Platts converts to barrels using a 7.33 conversion factor.

The country's crude imports in December totaled 43.78 million mt, up 2.1 percent

from 42.87 million mt in November, the preliminary GAC data showed.

Fuel oil imports stood at 1.51 million mt in December, increasing 13.6 percent year on year. This pushed the country's total fuel oil imports higher by 23.3 percent from 2017 to 16.61 million mt in 2018.

China's oil product exports reached 5.86 million mt in December, GAC data showed.

Exports had fallen 5 percent year on year despite new export quotas being issued for December.

Over January-December, China's oil product exports totaled 58.64 million mt, up 12.4 percent year on year, the data showed.

(Source: Platts)

Premier Oil confirms interest in North Sea deals after report on cash call



Britain's Premier Oil Plc said on Monday it was looking to buy UK North Sea assets, after the Sunday Times reported that it was preparing to tap shareholders for cash to help it buy about \$1.5 billion worth of oil fields.

The company's shares fell as much as 12.5 percent following the report and was the top loser on the UK mid-cap index.

Premier Oil was in the running to pick up fields being sold by US oil giant Chevron Corp and is considering a rights issue or share placing to help pay for them should it win the auction, according to the Sunday Times report.

The British oil and gas company said on Monday it was looking at opportunities to buy UK North Sea assets, but no decision had been taken to bid for assets currently being marketed by Chevron and how any deal would be financed.

Premier Oil could sell all or part of its Latin American business to help pay for the deal — and minimize the size of any share sale, the Sunday Times said, citing industry sources.

The company cut debt to \$2.3 billion at the end of last year, below a previous forecast of \$2.4 billion, according to a trading update last week.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC secretary general worried about trade war effect on China and India, oil demand's 'bright spots'

OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo is largely optimistic over prospects of achieving a balanced oil market in 2019. But if one thing keeps him awake at night, it's the U.S.-China trade war's potential to disrupt growth in major Asian markets that import the highest proportion of the world's crude.

"We are concerned with the lingering trade disputes," Barkindo told CNBC's Hadley Gamble while at the Atlantic Council Global Energy Forum in Abu Dhabi Sunday. "The synchronized growth that we have witnessed since the last global financial crisis that has taken this long was also due largely to the growth in international trade."

"Any measures that may impact or constrain trade may likely impact on growth

and by extension on demand for energy. At the moment, outside the U.S., China and India remain the brightest spots in terms of demand for energy. So you can imagine our concern of the lingering negotiations."

China is the world's largest importer of crude, and its purchases constituted 18.6 percent of total crude imports in 2017. India's booming growth is set to see it overtake China as the country with the world's largest demand for oil by 2024, according to a recent report by energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie. But if a trade war severely hit China's growth, it would send shockwaves through the rest of Asia and threaten crucial sources of income for OPEC's producers.

Already, U.S. tariff pressure and dampened

domestic demand have started to manifest themselves in China's economic forecasts. Reuters reported last week, citing sources with knowledge of China's economic policy, that the country is planning to set a lower growth target of 6 percent to 6.5 percent in 2019, compared with last year's target of "around" 6.5 percent.

"We remain cautiously optimistic that they'll be able to overcome some of the difficulties, on the premise that both the U.S. and China want these issues resolved."

Three days of trade talks between President Donald Trump administration officials and their Chinese counterparts in Beijing wrapped up last week, resulting in improved sentiment across Asian markets on increased

hopes of a deal. Tensions between the world's two largest economies escalated last year, putting global stock markets on edge. The U.S. announced tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods, while Beijing countered with its own.

At the end of last year, the Asian Development Bank said that developing Asia would meet its growth forecasts for 2019, but warned of the downside risks from rising trade protectionism. Despite the worries, Barkindo struck a hopeful tone.

"We remain cautiously optimistic that they'll be able to overcome some of the difficulties, on the premise that both the U.S. and China want these issues resolved," he said.

(Source: CNBC)

Bearish news mounts for LNG spot markets

What a difference just one year can make. This time last year energy planners in Beijing were caught in an embarrassing situation when they moved too quickly to replace both residential and commercial coal usage with cleaner-burning natural gas. Beijing's move came just months before a colder than expected winter season slammed much of the country, particularly its northern provinces. The result was gas shortages that forced temporary shutdowns of key industries and the diversion of gas to residential end-users to make up for the lack of gas supply. The increased demand coming from China at the time also caused prices for LNG on the spot market to increase, exacerbating the problem for the country's gas suppliers that were trying to keep a lid on prices.

Yet, over the ensuing year not only did China prepare better than the previous season, including earlier procurement of LNG and filling more storage tanks but warmer weather this winter has helped, also causing the country to procure less LNG on the spot markets via short term contracts. China also ramped up its domestic gas production to multi-year levels last year, increasing production by 7.5 percent on the year in October 2018 and by 6.3 percent between January and October, compared to the same period last year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China.

Warmer temperatures have also been putting downward pressure on LNG spot prices in the Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for 72 percent of LNG demand with that demand forecasted to increase soon to as much as 75 percent, amid



increased usage from China and South Asia (Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh). Spot prices this winter have been hovering around six-month lows. For February delivery to Asia LNG-AS were assessed at \$8.75/MMBtu compared to \$9.10/MMBtu last week, industry sources said, also citing low liquidity as the reason for the fall.

Meanwhile, industry sources recently said that Chinese appetite for spot cargoes between November 2018 and March 2019 will not be as strong as the same period in 2018, with traders having started preparing to meet a spike in winter

gas demand early last year. They are understood to have arranged enough supplies via long-term contracts. The sources added that Chinese buyers had lined up delivery of 3.4 million tons of LNG either from the spot market or via short-term supply contracts this winter, down from 5.1 million tons during the colder 2017-18 winter season.

Traders have also prepared for softer gas demand growth in anticipation of the warm winter. By securing enough long-term supply, buyers have shielded themselves from spot market price fluctuations. Yet, China's continued efforts to shift industrial facilities, commercial outlets and residential heating from coal to gas is anticipated to lift gas demand this winter by 8 percent year on year to 29 bcm. China's total winter LNG supply, however, is predicted to climb to 20 million tons, up from last winter's 17.9 million tons. In November 2018, China imported 5.9 million tons of LNG.

Media in China has reported that industry officials are not worried about capacity constraints at LNG terminals, claiming that the country's 21 receiving terminals are operating well below their capacity. The plants have a combined import capacity of 64.7 mtpa. China has not experienced any supply shortages so far this year, partially thanks to the relatively warm winter, they added. China's northern cities can now access multiple gas supply sources, including PetroChina's West-East Pipeline network, LNG imports as well as locally produced gas from on and offshore fields.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Australia could hit 100% renewables sooner than most people think

Not since the invention of the steam engine have we seen the pace of change occurring in energy systems around the world. In Australia our electricity system is changing rapidly, from new technologies and business models to changes in policy and perhaps even regulation. As the year begins, here are five energy trends you should expect to see in 2019.

1. More action towards 100 percent renewable energy

Last year was a boom year for renewables. Despite rhetoric from some political quarters talking up coal and talking down renewable energy, we installed more solar panels and wind turbines than ever before. There are at least 40 large-scale wind and solar projects in construction in Australia, totaling over 6000MWs of new generation capacity. This means renewables will continue on a steep growth curve as analysis by the Melbourne University Climate and Energy College shows.

This rapid growth in renewables and soon battery storage is at least in part driven by a corresponding reduction in cost. Bloomberg New Energy Finance analysis reveals a compound annual reduction in cost of battery storage of 21 percent over eight years. Facts such as these are the engine driving us towards 100 percent renewables at a pace much faster than most pundits think.

At a political level California has just legislated a move to 100 percent renewables, while at home South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT are on track to be net 100 percent renewables in the next few years. With everyone from tech billionaires to school students demanding 100 percent renewables, pressure for a more rapid shift to renewables is likely to continue to build.

Many still think that 100 percent renewables can't be done. In 2017 ANU, Energy Networks Australia and CSIRO joined the ranks of Australia's leading institutions on energy that have now done their own plans to show Australia can reliably achieve 100 percent renewables. This takes the number of 100 percent renewables plans for Australia to more than 10.

In the corporate sector, global initiative The RE100 has arrived in Australia. This initiative which encourages companies to commit to 100 percent renewables has seen global companies headquartered outside of Australia such as Carlton United Breweries and Ikea lead the way. In late 2018 Commonwealth Bank became the first Australian company to join, signing a large power purchase agreement in the process.

2. Solar for renters and other locked-out energy users

The coverage of rooftop solar hit two million roofs in 2018 — a huge achievement considering a decade ago there were less than 100,000 roofs with solar panels on them. However, while households and businesses that own a sunny roof can now benefit from greater energy independence, lower electricity bills and that good feeling of lessening their climate pollution, there are at least 30 percent of households that cannot put solar on their roof. These households rent, live in apartments, cannot afford the upfront cost or have shaded roofs. Research by startup incubator Energy Lab found that only 4 percent of rental properties and 4 percent of apartments have solar on the roof, compared with 29 percent of owner-occupied households and 38 percent of owner-occupied standalone houses.

For a long time these households have been in the too-hard basket for policymakers and industry alike. However, there are signs that in 2019 this could be changing. The Victorian and South Australian governments have announced policies to support 50,000 rental properties to access solar, and for South Australia, batteries also. In NSW the government is trialing a program of solar for 15,000 low-income energy rebate customers. These are small steps, but if scaled could start to change the current trend towards solar energy haves and have-nots.

3. Community energy going gangbusters

Communities are also taking matters into their own hands, developing innovative community-owned clean energy projects and implementing plans to move to 100 percent renewables. Despite a lack of interest from mainstream energy players and little policy support, Australia's community energy sector has grown to more than 105 groups and 174 operating projects. Most famously the communities of Yackandandah and Daylesford.

Last year Totally Renewable Yackandandah in independent Cathy McGowan's electorate of Indi set up a community retailer Indigo Power to help it on its way to 100 percent. In Daylesford, flagship community energy enterprise Hepburn Wind is planning a solar farm and received a Victorian government grant to help them progress.

4. A battle between good and bad hydrogen

Hydrogen fuel is not a new idea, yet in 2019 hydrogen is likely to make significant strides towards becoming a major part of our global energy ecosystem. Last September, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency funded 16 renewable hydrogen projects to the tune of \$22m, aimed at helping to drive down costs and create a supply chain. Renewable hydrogen could be huge, using excess wind and solar to split water, create hydrogen and export it to sunshine- and land-constrained countries like Japan and South Korea as a renewable fuel for industry and heavy transport.

However, hydrogen has also been latched on to by the coal and gas industries. Hydrogen fuel can be created from coal, but generates carbon pollution in the process. Hydrogen can also be injected into the gas grid, up to a certain level (with upgrades), which could help prevent gas pipelines become stranded assets as households and industry increasingly electrify.

The question is will hydrogen become yet another lifeline for the polluting coal and gas industries or will it become something that is genuinely used to expand renewables and reduce climate pollution?

5. Clean energy elections

No 2019 trend article is complete without mentioning the upcoming elections. According to researcher Rebecca Huntly climate change is a top issue with the electorate and as such both the NSW and federal elections are going to have a focus on climate and energy policy whether politicians like it or not.

The federal ALP recently announced its energy policy. Their plan does just enough to show they want to do something, but no more than they have to, given they are so far ahead in the polls. At this point, future announcements are likely to focus on climate and clean transport rather than clean energy. It's true that sectors other than electricity do need attention to reduce climate pollution. That said, refraining from further renewables commitments would be a missed opportunity to capitalize on the popularity of clean energy in the electorate.

The federal Coalition meanwhile looks like it will double down on coal and an electricity price scare campaign if Barnaby Joyce's diatribe this month is anything to go by. It remains to be seen whether increasing public pressure on the government and the popularity of acting on climate and renewables will lead to a last-ditch course correction as the federal election gets closer; it's possible, but don't hold your breath.

(Source: The Guardian)

It's time for Congress to curb the powers of the president

By Fareed Zakaria
political analyst

Watching the struggle over funding for a border wall, I am struck by the way in which, in one sense, Donald Trump has already achieved success. He has been able to conjure up a crisis out of thin air, elevate this manufactured emergency to national attention, paralyze the government and perhaps even invoke war-like authority and bypass Congress.



He may still fail, but it should worry us that a president - any president - can do what Trump has done.

Let's be clear: There is no crisis. The number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has been declining for a decade.

The number of people caught trying to sneak across the southern border has been on a downward trend for almost 20 years and is lower than it was in 1973.

As has often been pointed out, far more people are coming to the U.S. legally and then overstaying their visas than are crossing the southern border illegally.

But it's important to put these numbers in context. Over 52 million foreigners entered the U.S. legally in 2017. Of this cohort, 98.7 percent left on time and in accordance with their visas. A large portion of those remaining left after a brief overstay, and the best government estimate is that maybe 0.8 percent of those who entered the country in 2017 had stayed on by mid-2018.

As for terrorism, the Cato Institute has found that, from 1975 to 2017, "there have been zero people murdered or injured in terror attacks committed by illegal border crossers on U.S. soil."

As for drugs, the greatest danger comes from fentanyl and fentanyl-like substances, which are at the heart of the opioid crisis.

Most of this smuggled through Canada or Mexico. Trump has addressed the root of this problem by building a physical barrier along the Mexican border.

Even the DEA acknowledged in a report last year that while the southern border is the conduit for most of the heroin entering the United States, the drug typically comes through legal points of entry, hidden in cars or mixed in with other goods in tractor-trailers.

In other words, a wall would do little to stanch the flow.

And yet, the power of the presidency is such that Trump has been able to place this issue center-stage, shut down the government, force television networks to run an error-ridden, scaremongering Oval Office address, and now perhaps invoke emergency powers.

This sounds like something that would be done by presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan or Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, not the head of the world's leading constitutional republic.

When the U.S. government has created this sense of emergency and crisis in the past, it has almost always been to frighten people, expand presidential powers and muzzle opposition. From the Alien and Sedition Acts to the Red Scare to warnings about Saddam Hussein's arsenal, America has experienced periods of paranoia and foolishness.

We look back on them and recognize that the problems were not nearly as grave, the enemy was not nearly as strong and the United States was actually far more secure.

The actions taken - suspending civil rights, interning Japanese-Americans, taking the nation to war - were almost always terrible mistakes, often with disastrous long-term consequences.

And yet, presidential powers have kept expanding. Modern media culture has made it easier for presidents to set the agenda, since the White House is a central and perpetual point of focus and now receives far more attention than it ever did. Trump has managed to use this reality and turn good news into bad, security into danger and almost single-handedly fabricate a national crisis where there is none.

This whole episode highlights a problem that has become apparent in these last two years. The American president has too many powers, formal and informal.

This was not intended by the Founders, who made Congress the dominant branch of government, and it is not how the country has been governed for much of its history. But over the last nine decades, the presidency has grown in formal and informal authority.

I have been an advocate of a strong executive for most of my life. I don't much like how Congress operates.

I now realize that my views were premised on the assumption that the president would operate within the bounds of laws, norms and ethics.

I now believe that an urgent task for the next few years is for Congress to write laws that explicitly limit and check the powers of the president.

(Source: The Daily Star)

100 Days after the Khashoggi murder: The alliance of criminals unmasked by his death

By Yasin Aktay

As of today, it has been 102 days since Jamal Khashoggi was viciously murdered after entering his country's consulate in Istanbul. Two days ago, the 100th day after this sad incident, commemoration ceremonies were held in different locations. Not only a journalist commemorated in these ceremonies but also people contemplated the meaning of this murder which has been occupying the world's agenda for 100 days.

Khashoggi has become the symbol of the awakening of human consciousness and rebelling against a rotten, corrupt order. Although our noses pick up the stench of this disgusting rotten order, humanity gets used to any foul stench in time. The Khashoggi murder reminded us of that stench with all its intensity.

Otherwise the order represented by those who took part in this murder has the blood of all those people unrightfully shed from Egypt to Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya on their hands. The order left those people be led by petro-dollars, the biggest enemy of the honor of the people, the biggest obstacle to the dream of leading a humane life, the biggest handicap for democratic developments. It doesn't hurt to use terrorism and extremism as instruments to implement their own plans on the international level. But it doesn't use these instruments for the favor of the people living in the regions they intervene in, it does so only to strangle their most legitimate and rightful demands.

An order which creates terrorist organizations like Daesh, Boko Haram, al-Shabab, al-Qaeda in Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Kenya who base their ideologies off their mindset, which finances them and their leaders and which is also tarnishing Islam's image in the world by using them and at the end of the day recklessly use the privilege to decide who is terrorist and who is not.

The players of this order don't even bother to label those whom they placed in the field as terrorists and sell them out. They are only instruments for them anyway, they don't even consider them as human beings, they feed them and protect them so long as they can use them but when they have to sell them out they don't even hesitate for a moment. When they do, they also enjoy the honor of being the "heroes who are fearlessly fighting against terrorism." With this honor they bought, they find a way to label opposition groups and sell them out too. The serious murder



The Khashoggi murder is cracking the code of this dirty alliance with the way it was carried out, with the cruelty of the murderers, lies told and its terrorist characteristic.

they committed within the boundaries of the consulate revealed whose legitimate rights they abused for their filthy aims.

Those who carried out the Khashoggi murder massacred thousands of people viciously in Egypt and strangled the free will of the people and a democracy, good or bad, in its bud. They left the faith of the entire nation into the hands of a red-handed dictator like Sisi. Because of the coups they orchestrated against the will of people in Libya, the country has been swept by chaos which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people for four years. It cannot even be known how many children are dying of hunger in Yemen every day.

The starvation problem in Yemen can be resolved only with one day's worth of food wasted in the palaces of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The fact that the most shared visual regarding the intervention in Yemen is the children dying because of hunger doesn't even embarrass them. Yet, each child dying is a source of dishonor for them.

All the developments are happening be-

cause those who murdered Khashoggi meddled in their affairs and these are only their usual actions. The real face of this order has been covered with the lobbying and PR activities funded by Petro-dollars. The Khashoggi murder suddenly unmasked their faces. Now, even if they put the mask back on, we have already seen their faces behind that mask.

For 100 days, what Khashoggi told us with his death has been discussed endlessly, so did what it revealed about the faces of the psychopaths hiding behind their masks which were caught red-handed.

Although those psychopaths are in a rot, they are still trying to cover their misdeeds, to make people forget about them and that when people forget about it they falsely claim that they are going to avenge the murder by going after those who revealed this disgraceful act. They are defying because they think that this order will go on forever.

Who do they trust? Obviously their American friends, their power they think is infinite, their money which they think will never run out, and of course they trust the desperate obedience of their own people and the thought

that no one will ever be able to get them in the end. We will see none of this will save them when the winds of justice sweep them.

Members of the Congress are asking: Is the U.S. ruled by Saudi Arabia?

Because of the 100th day commemoration ceremony which was attended by both the Democrat and the Republican senators in the U.S. Congress. In a meeting the chairwoman of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi also attended, the participants stated that this murder committed is not only against Khashoggi but also against the entirety of humanity. Members of congress stated that if this murder is seen through the lens of money and interests, they are going to do just as Trump did, that will hit the image of the U.S. very badly as a country of values and democracy. It seems that members of congress who think that the fact that this murder is still ignored because of those concerns actually present an embarrassing image of a U.S. is ruled by Saudi Arabia and promised that they are going to continue to pursue this case.

Khashoggi's murderers see Turkey as a threat

While there are those people who demand justice for Khashoggi, let's also analyze what Khashoggi's murderers are doing lately. According to a recent new report by the Middle East Monitor, the things discussed in a meeting attended by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Israel and its participants show what type of alliance and malevolence was behind the Khashoggi murder. Because, although the concept of security continues to single out Iran as the enemy, it was also stated that Turkey is seen as a bigger threat than Iran, the country that did not accept the offer to cover up the murder.

Why Turkey is a threat and for whom? The Khashoggi murder is cracking the code of this dirty alliance with the way it was carried out, with the cruelty of the murderers, lies told and its terrorist characteristic. When you take a look at the actions committed by this alliance of criminals you already see who Turkey is and where it stands more clearly.

Turkey facing the alliance of criminals represents justice, human rights and honor, democracy, freedom of expression, peace and welfare in the region, and it doesn't even fazed by the fact that this scares the murderers of Khashoggi.

Let those who backed this alliance of criminals worry about what is going to happen in the future.

(Source: The Middle East Observer)

Japan accelerates its defense buildup

By Milton Ezrati

Long pacifist, Japan has decided to accelerate its military spending and effectively begin to gear up. It should hardly come as a surprise. Though Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has long sought to shift Japan from pacifism to what he calls a "normal country". Spending has stepped up dramatically, as has planning. The nature of the buildup responds to other pressures from its great ally, the United States, which wants Japan to buy more U.S. equipment, as well as from the demographic and technological imperatives facing that nation.

Even now, some seventy-two years after Douglas MacArthur directed the writing of the then defeated Japan's constitution, the document still limits the country's room to maneuver. Spending cannot exceed 1.0 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Though clever accounting allows wiggle room, this rule nonetheless imposes a severe constraint especially next to the United States, which spend more than 3.0 percent of their much larger GDPs on defense. Because the constitution stresses defense exclusively, it naturally questions any preparation to project power, not the least the Ministry of Defense's (MoD) intention to construct two aircraft carriers and possibly base Japanese ground forces outside the country. The constitution also forbids Japan entering any mutual defense pact. Despite Japan's long-term alliance with the United States, it cannot go to America's aid if, for instance, a U.S. base in Asia was attacked. Prime Minister Abe has strived to change the constitution and has won concessions, but it remains a constraint.

The MoD budget requests for 2019 nonetheless make clear the new military emphasis. According to documents published in September, the MoD is asking for ¥5.3 trillion (\$48 billion) in overall defense outlays, which is 7.2 percent above the 2018 budgeted amount. A jump like that would be noteworthy in any country, but especially so in Japan, where heretofore defense spending grows by fractions of a percent per year. Five-year plans would sustain this heightened level of spending. Still more interesting is the proposed allocation of these funds. Here, each point reflects the various pressures on Japan.

The budget document emphasizes on "deterrence," which no doubt lies behind the decision to upgrade the electronic warfare capability of Japan's existing F-15 fighter jets and purchase six F-35A fighters from Lockheed Martin. New plans call for purchases of 147 of these new fighters over the next few years, well above the original plan to buy forty-two of them. U.S. pressure is also clearly evident in this



Tokyo will begin to alter the security equation in the Western Pacific in the not-too-distant future.

decision, as it will preclude purchase of the domestically developed F-2 fighter. In the words of one Japanese security analyst, Masahiro Matsumura, Japan's "defense industry is being sacrificed for the political goal of maintaining good Japan-U.S. relations." Less controversial, the budget calls for Japan to upgrade its airborne early warning capability and spend nearly ¥300 billion (\$2.7 billion) to deploy two land-based Aegis missile defense systems ("Aegis Ashore") and other U.S. manufactured missile interceptors.

Measures to counter China, at sea mostly, make a longer list. Of course, the F-15 upgrades and the new F-35s constitute something of an answer to China. More pointed are MoD plans to procure RQ-40 Global Hawk long distance drones, fund research to develop a long-distance undersea unmanned surveillance device, and otherwise enhance naval heft by procuring more anti-air missile and anti-torpedo ammunition as well as more standoff missiles. Plans also call for the construction of a new submarine, aimed, in the words of MoD budget documents, at "detections, etc." (The etcetera no doubt refers to offensive capabilities that might raise constitutional questions.) Japan also has plans to construct two new multipurpose, compact destroyers that can also sweep mines. They will bring the fleet escort force to a total of fifty-four vessels—a

considerable upgrade from the past.

More controversial from a constitutional standpoint are other efforts that would: 1) enable the military to project power and 2) obligate Japan to its allies. The MoD seeks to procure a tanker to support the navy at sea, a clear statement that Japanese naval power has gone beyond coastal defense. The ministry also seeks two new C-2 transport aircraft and six more UH-X helicopters specifically aimed at rapid deployments. Also, it seeks a training budget to ready Japanese ground forces for more distant deployments. The ministry also seeks to refit an existing helicopter carrier over the next few years to carry some of the new F-35 fighters and then build a second carrier. In some interpretations, this clearly violates the self-defense strictures in Japan's constitution, though the prime minister and the MoD have couched the requests in defensive terms. In what also might constitute a further violation of the constitution, the ministry has asked for concessions to allow greater integration of Japanese command, control, and planning with allies, the United States, obviously, but also India, Australia, and ASEAN, in other words those nations trying to check Chinese expansion.

Beyond these obvious countermeasures to North Korea and China, the MoD has also emphasized the need for modernization. It has set aside funds to establish what in the United States might describe as a cyber-defense command and to investigate the military use of artificial intelligence (AI). In a similar vein, the ministry has dedicated development funds to eventually install protections for Japan's satellites, including an optical telescope with which to identify objects flying nearby. It has further dedicated a not insignificant ¥2.7 billion (\$24 million) to work with the United States on what it calls "deep space international awareness." Not only do these efforts capture further needs, but the budget document emphasizes that the military will help Japan cope with its long-prevailing low birth rate and the resulting shortfall in people who meet the military's age requirements. One other aspect of this effort is the ministry's remarkably un-Japanese push to put more women into uniform.

Even if not every yen makes it to its designated place, it is apparent that Japan will begin to alter the security equation in the Western Pacific in the not-too-distant future. If Abe manages to alter the constitution as planned, then the change will no doubt occur at an accelerated pace. It will alter Washington's calculations. Beijing surely will also take note.

(Source: The National Interest)

Pompeo in Cairo: Anti-Obama, anti-Iran, and little else

By Paul R. Pillar

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a campaign speech in Cairo that seemed written to please an audience of one—President Donald Trump—along with the domestic political base to which Trump's own rhetoric is designed to appeal. The main theme was the familiar one that U.S. policy before the Trump presidency was uniformly awful and, since then, the current administration has spectacularly turned everything around for the good. Another familiar theme is that nearly everything in U.S. foreign policy ought to be subordinated to confronting Iran. Whatever the speech may have accomplished for Pompeo back home, as a statement to Middle Eastern listeners it was remarkably tone-deaf.

The speech invited comparison with the speech Barack Obama delivered in the same city during the first year of his presidency and that was carefully crafted for Middle Eastern ears. Obama's main message was that the Muslim world and the West can enjoy better relations than their history would suggest, but that improvement will require frank recognition of both the positive attributes and the shortcomings that each side brings to the relationship.

While respectful toward Islam, Obama, as veteran Al-Arabiya journalist Hisham Melhem observed at the time, "boldly discussed some thorny, tough, sensitive issues that sometimes Muslim leaders and Arab leaders don't like to hear." Obama made a strong statement of the positive values that America has brought to Middle Eastern affairs while honestly acknowledging mistakes the West has made in its encounter with the Muslim world, from conduct during the Crusades to present-day Islamophobia.

He also laid out a comprehensive positive agenda for a better relationship, covering topics from control of nuclear weapons to expansion of democracy, religious freedom, women's rights, and economic development. Obama's speech was favorably received and widely recognized as an important statement.

Pompeo himself explicitly invited comparison with the Obama speech—evidently

believing that 10 years is enough time for people to have forgotten what Obama said—and denigrated it as filled with "fundamental misunderstandings" that have had "dire" results. According to Pompeo, Obama "told you that radical Islamist terrorism does not stem from an ideology." No, Obama didn't say that. He did discuss the main factors, such as political oppression and some of the economic consequences of globalization, that help to build an audience for such ideologies. As Bruce Riedel of the Brookings Institution commented after Obama's address, one of the most important aspects of the speech was "to attack directly the narrative and ideology of al Qaeda. For too long the war of ideas was ceded to al Qaeda. By explaining his view of Islam, his vision of Arab-Israeli peace and other key issues the President took on al Qaeda's argument for terror."

Also, according to Pompeo, before the current administration took office the United States "grossly underestimated the tenacity and viciousness of radical Islamism." That assertion certainly does not reflect the Obama speech in Cairo, in which Obama expressed determination to "relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security."

■ Erroneous Claims

Like typical campaign rhetoric, Pompeo's speech baselessly claimed credit for any positive result that has been achieved by anyone, even before the current administration took office. Referring to the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS or IS), for example, Pompeo talked about what has been done "just last year" in the same breath as a reference to 99 percent of IS territory having been liberated, without mentioning that most of that liberation occurred during the previous administration.

Pompeo made multiple references to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons, contrasting a previous approach of doing "nothing" in response with how "President Trump unleashed the fury of the U.S. military not once, but twice, with allied support. And he's willing to do it again, although we do hope that he does not have to." The secretary will need to keep hoping, because

the very fact that the Assad regime has kept doing what it was doing despite the U.S. military strikes indicates that the strikes are not working. By the measure of how much time transpires between chemical weapons incidents, the strikes have worked less well than the diplomacy-centered approach used earlier.

The speech's lengthy exhortation of Iran also was written in a tone suggesting great accomplishment, even though nothing has been accomplished in the last two years. Despite all the pressure the Trump administration has exerted on Iran, there is still no sign of any "better deal" on nuclear matters or anything else to replace the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and Security Council Resolution 2231, of which the United States is in material breach following Trump's reneging on U.S. obligations. Pompeo tried to claim accomplishment by asserting that the pressure campaign had "cut off the revenues the regime uses to spread terror and destruction throughout the world," but such assertions do not reflect any positive results. As recent analyses by both the International Crisis Group and the Congressional Research Service have concluded, there has been no correlation between more sanctions being imposed on Iran and any retrenchment in Iran's regional activities.

Some passages of Pompeo's speech that supposedly describe past policies can only be met with a bemused shaking of the head and the question, "Where did he get this?" One such passage is "Our eagerness to address only Muslims and not nations ignored the rich diversity of the Middle East and frayed old bonds. It undermined the concept of the nation-state, the building block of international stability." Previous administrations did not "address nations"?

There will be similar head-shaking among most Arabs and most Muslims who heard or read the speech. They will see almost nothing positive in it, from the standpoint of undercutting radical agendas, resolving conflicts within the region, or anything else. It is almost all negative and all about conflict and confrontation, especially with a military emphasis. Many will interpret the speech as a

combination of domestic U.S. political combat overlaid on the Trump administration's penchant for drawing rigid lines of conflict within the Middle East, of which the obsession with stoking hostility to Iran is a part.

■ Significant Omissions

Most listeners in the Middle East will be struck by the omission of some major current regional concerns. Yemen, for example, is mentioned primarily as a supposed front for confronting Iran, with no mention of how the Saudi-led war has generated the humanitarian disaster there.

Or consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obama's speech included a significant and carefully balanced segment on this subject, which paired a strong defense of the "unbreakable" U.S. bonds with Israel (and a review of the history of persecution of Jews) with a recognition that Palestinians "have suffered in pursuit of a homeland."

Pompeo offered just a single line promising to "press for a real and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians" and made no reference at all to any rights for Palestinians. He instead spent several lines defending the moving of the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, saying that this honored "a bipartisan congressional resolution from more than two decades ago," not addressing why several presidents of both parties wisely did not try to implement this congressional gesture.

In an even lengthier passage, Pompeo talked about how an Israeli judo champion was crowned the winner of a tournament in the United Arab Emirates and how the Israeli sports and culture minister shed tears of joy over Israeli participation in the meet. Don't expect the average Middle Eastern man in the street to get as overcome with emotion about this as the minister did.

Pompeo referred to "truth" at both the beginning and end of his speech, which is enough to raise eyebrows coming from a senior official working for a president as truth-challenged as Donald Trump. A major credibility deficit exists for this administration on the issues the speech addressed, and the speech itself did nothing to reduce the deficit.

(Source: Lobelog)

Iranians will not forget treason by Poland

➔ The Polish officials claimed that Trump's concerns about the JCPOA (the official name for the nuclear agreement) was understandable and called on fellow European countries to consider these concerns. Moreover, Poland announced that it is ready to bring the views of Europeans and the U.S. closer together over the JCPOA after Washington's pullout from the nuclear pact.

Now, Poland has the illusion that it has received the benefits of its subservience to the U.S. and the selection of Warsaw as a venue for anti-Iran conference is a positive signal that has been sent to Poland by Mike Pompeo and other U.S. officials.

Polish officials have closed their eyes to the realities of international relations. They still do not know that at the end of this game Warsaw will lose its international prestige and respect and the U.S. will finally abandon them.

Why is Tony Blair so angry?

➔ Furthermore, the equation is much more complicated inside the Labor Party! Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labor Party and Leader of the Opposition, has emphasized that by holding early elections and changing the government in London, it is possible to re-start the negotiations on Brexit with Brussels.

Beyond the debates that have raised among the conservatives and the Labor Party, Tony Blair is thinking about his own personal and political goals in the Labor Party and the Britain and international equations. Blair believes that if he can provide the ground for another referendum (and to prevent the realization of the Brexit), then his position will be restored among European politicians. It's obvious that Tony Blair is very dissatisfied with the current agreements reached between the British and EU authorities.

Jeremy Corbyn is trying to make an investigation into Tony Blair for alleged war crimes during the Iraq War, and this issue is seriously threatening Blair's political future. When Corbyn was elected as the leader of the Labor Party, Blair could not hide his deep discontent in this regard. He has said Labor Party has undergone a "profound change" since Jeremy Corbyn became leader and he is not sure it will be possible for "moderates" to regain control of the party. "It is a different type of Labour party. Can it be taken back? I don't know," Blair said before.

It should be noted that Jeremy Corbyn had previously called for the trial of George W. Bush and Tony Blair for committing war crimes during the invasion to Iraq. The main question is, what would be Tony Blair's next step in confronting his failures in the UK's political scene? Is he willing to use the Brexit as a means to revitalize his already-lost position? This question will be soon answered, but probably the stream of events won't be to Blair's benefit in the future.

CEO of EMSCO:

Accelerating Indigenized Approach & Supporting Knowledge-based Firms, ESCO's Top Priority

Chief Executive of Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company (EMSCO) Hamid-Reza Azimian said that accelerating indigenized-production approach and supporting knowledge-based companies have been prioritized in the company.

He made the above remark in a specialized and expert-level meeting of operation of domestic technologies in steel industry of the country on the sidelines of the 1st Iran National Steel Exhibition, held in Tehran's MILAD TOWER International Conferences Hall and said, "with the coordination made in this regard, effective steps have been taken in line with localizing production of steel as well as supporting knowledge-based companies have been put atop agenda at the company."

He pointed to the brilliant scientific and cultural history of the Iranian nation and added, "the noble nation of the Islamic Iran has always has shown with scientific and cultural personalities in the international arena."

Today, the country benefits from the most experienced, talented and competent manpower who took giant strides in Olympiads and international competitions, he said, adding, "under such circumstances, the country has played an important share in the field of production of science and technology."

Under such circumstances, it is expected that the country should move towards attaining scientific and technological achievements more than before, he maintained.

■ Cooperating with Knowledge-based Companies, Top Priority of EMSCO

Elsewhere in his remarks, the chief executive of the company termed cooperating and concluding long-term contracts with knowledge-based companies and taking advantage of their achievements in this industrial and production complex as 'important and significant'.

Outsourcing and indigenizing production of products has been put atop agenda of the company, he reiterated.



He further explained, "in the new approach of the company, proposals for producing goods and consumables have thoroughly been studied in the Technology Department of the company. Once proposals are finalized, contracts would be concluded with companies in the long period."

■ EMSCO's Supportive Approach, Salient Capacities of Country's Scientific Sector

He went on to say that Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company solely produces half of steel needs of the country, so that conclusion of long-term contracts with knowledge-based companies is the company's supportive approach from the high capacities and capabilities of scientific sector of the country."

He added, "benefited from the most experienced and talented manpower, the company is ready to conclude long-term contracts with knowledge-based companies."

■ Starting 3rd Phase of Knowledge-based Economy in Country

In this specialized meeting, Deputy President for Science and Technology Mehdi Elyasi pointed to the 15-year history of

knowledge-based economy in the country and added, "today, we have started the 3rd phase of knowledge-based economy in the country that its first phase was launched in Isfahan Scientific-Research Township, PARDIS Park and IT parks in different cities. The second phase also happened approx. the past 5 to 6 years, so that knowledge-based companies developed qualitatively and quantitatively."

He put the number of knowledge-based companies registered in the country at about 3,000 to 6,000 while some of them have not yet attended in this process."

This year, the third phase of knowledge-based economy has started in the country which is defined as competitive economy, he said, adding, "this phase is known as scientific economy in the world."

■ Formation of Economic Ecosystem along with Large Companies Such as Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Co.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy president for science and technology said, "firstly, there are a network of active companies in this field. If economic demand and interaction are

injected to them, giant steps can be taken in this regard."

Also, models of large companies like Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company can form considerable economic ecosystem, he said, adding, "upon launch of third phase of knowledge-based economy, giant steps will be taken in the country within the next years."

In knowledge-based and technological companies, an equipped ecosystem should be formed with economic logic and companies should receive a percentage of risk from the development and innovation resources, he opined.

Therefore, industrial companies, especially the companies that are correlated with the government typically, can play a leading role in this field, Elyasi opined.

Knowledge-based companies are subject to research, the issue of which will provide an opportunity available to development-oriented managers, he said, adding, "a series of other motivations should be set up for these companies."

■ Other Companies and Industries Should Take EMSCO as Role Model

Deputy President for Science and Technol-

ogy said that other industrial and production companies should take Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company as role model in line with attaining most of their objectives especially in the field of water and recycling water.

He pointed to the specific attention to use of water in industrial and production unit and said, "effective steps have been taken in the company in the field of reusing water in the production cycle."

The deputy president believes that steel industry enjoys high capacity and potential, so that other industries should take steel industry as role model in this regard, he opined.

Elyasi reiterated, "fortunately, we share a common view with Esfahan's Mobarakeh Steel Company and we express our readiness to back this industrial and production unit wholeheartedly."

In conclusion, the deputy president for science and technology said, "we try our utmost efforts to remove unnecessary barriers facing ahead of this industrial and production unit. Moreover, we attempt to pave necessary infrastructures and support this industry in the best form possible in line with materializing its objectives fully."



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Organ donation in Iran has potential to be quadrupled: expert

HEALTH TEHRAN — By the end of 2017 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 11.43 which can be increased by 4 times, CEO of the Iranian Society of Organ Donation has said.

World Health Organization explains that organ transplantation is often the only treatment for end state organ failure, such as liver and heart failure. Kidney transplantation is by far the most frequently carried out transplantation globally.

According to the figures revealed by International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT) Spain leads the world in organ donation.

With regard to the high number of brain death in the country the number of organ donation in the country can increase, ISNA news agency quoted Katayoun Najafizadeh as saying on Saturday.

Organ donation is a social and national issue and it should be promoted in the country, she said, adding that, the public should know that brain dead people are actually dead people whose hearts might beat for a short period of time.

Brain dead constitute one percent of the total number of deaths in Iran, and brain



dead people can save many lives with their organ, she suggested.

According to the data published on IRODaT in 1996 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 0.1, which compared to the current per million people in the population (pmp) shows a great increase.

Nonetheless, there are some 25,000 patients in the country needing organ transplant and sadly some lose their lives on a daily basis, Najafizadeh regretted.

Figures published for 2017 reveal that 2,183 people in Spain became organ donors last year after they died. That's 46.9 pmp — a standard way of measuring the rate of

donation in a country, The Independent reported in July 2018.

Spain's closest contender is Croatia, with 38.6 pmp (2016). It has maintained its position as the clear leader for the past 26 years. In a press release, Spain's National Transplant Organization confidently describes the country as unbeatable.

Head of transplantation and treatment affairs department at the Ministry of Health Mehdi Shadnough also said that Iran ranks 26th regarding organ donation.

Unfortunately the organs donated in Iran only corresponds to the 15 percent of the organ transplant needs, Shadnough added. 16,000 accidents occur in Iran annually and some 5,000 to 6,000 of such accidents result in brain death of which 2,500 to 4,000 are viable for transplant, he explained.

Every three hours one lose their live waiting on transplant lists, he regretted, adding that, less than 1,000 people donate their organs in Iran.

However, some 5 million people have organ donor cars, he said.

From the year 1379 (March 2000-March 2001) to 1396 (March 2017-March 2018) some 53,715 organ transplantation have been performed in the country, he concluded.

Have researchers found a new risk factor for schizophrenia?

Scientists have located an intriguing link between schizophrenia and the Epstein-Barr virus, a type of herpes virus. Now, they need to determine which way the risk lies.

Schizophrenia, a condition characterized by a confused perception of reality, delusions, and altered behavior, affects more than 21 million people globally.

In a new study, specialists from Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore, MD, and the Sheppard Pratt Health System in Towson, MD, found evidence that links schizophrenia with the Epstein-Barr virus.

This is a herpes virus that causes infectious mononucleosis, or glandular fever.

As the scientists report in a paper published in the Schizophrenia Bulletin, they saw higher levels of antibodies against the Epstein-Barr virus in the bodies of those with schizophrenia than in those of people without any mental health conditions.

The higher level of antibodies suggests exposure to the virus, but it is unclear which way the risk runs — that is,

whether infection with the Epstein-Barr virus renders people more vulnerable to schizophrenia, or whether schizophrenia impacts the immune system and exposes people to infections.

"We are interested in the role of infectious agents such as Epstein-Barr virus in schizophrenia and other serious psychiatric disorders, so we did this study to look at the associations," says senior study author Dr. Robert Yolken.

■ A link between schizophrenia and infection?

Research has identified certain genetic risk factors for schizophrenia, but it has also recognized the possibility that some environmental factors — including exposure to infections — can raise schizophrenia risk.

In the new study, the scientists worked with 743 participants, of whom 432 had schizophrenia and 311 had no mental health problems (the control group). Around 55 percent of the cohort was male.

Dr. Yolken and colleagues compared the levels of antibodies against the Epstein-Barr virus in the participants with schizophrenia with those of participants in the control group.

They saw that people with schizophrenia were 1.7–2.3 times more likely than controls to have higher antibody levels against this herpes virus.

These participants did not have higher antibody levels against other types of infections, such as varicella (or chickenpox) or the herpes simplex type 1 virus, which is mainly transmitted orally.

■ 'Unusual response to Epstein-Barr virus'

However, the researchers found that people with high genetic risk of schizophrenia and who also presented high levels of Epstein-Barr virus antibodies had an increased probability to pertain to the schizophrenia group — more than eight times higher, to be precise.

Also, among participants with schizophrenia, around 10 percent had both high levels of antibodies against this type of herpes virus and a higher genetic risk for schizophrenia, compared with only a little over 1 percent of the participants in the control group.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Lack of deep sleep and more day time naps could be early sign of Alzheimer's, study suggests

Doctors have warned that decreases in restful, deep sleep in old age could be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease before signs of memory impairment show.

U.S. neurologists found volunteers who had less restful sleep had higher levels of the toxic substance tau, an abnormal protein molecule found clumped together in the brains of patients with Alzheimer's.

Previous research has found links between sleeping less and Alzheimer's but it is "deep" slow-brainwave sleep that is thought to be most important as this is the period where the brain consolidates memories.

"The key is that it wasn't the total amount of sleep that was linked to tau, it was the slow-wave sleep, which reflects quality of sleep," said Dr Brendan Lucey, director of the Washington University Sleep Medicine Centre.

"The people with increased tau pathology were actually sleeping more at night and napping more in the day, but they weren't getting as good quality sleep."

The study, published in the journal Neurology, recruited 119 people and 80 per cent of them showed no sign of cognitive decline.

It used electroencephalograms to monitor the volunteers' brain activity while they slept then measured levels of tau, and another abnormal protein, amyloid beta, using brain scans and spinal taps to draw cerebrospinal fluid.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia — the progressive collective term for the loss of memory and thinking skills — and affects 520,000 people in the UK.

The research cannot tell whether reduced sleep is contributing to Alzheimer's, or if it's an early symptom, but if the link is verified in larger trials then questions about sleep patterns could help guide GPs to spot signs early.

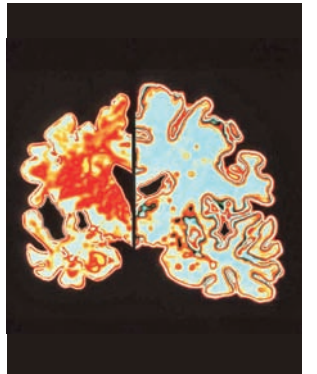
Earlier studies have shown that levels amyloid beta begin building up in the brain as much as two decades before signs of cognitive impairment show, while tau tangles appear at a later stage.

While there are no treatments to stop or slow dementia, being able to detect it before symptoms manifest would be a vital step to identifying people for testing future drugs.

"We know there's a link between sleep and dementia, but there's still a lot to learn about this relationship," said Dr James Pickett, head of research at the Alzheimer's Society.

"It's too soon to say if trying to change our sleep habits might affect our chances of developing dementia, but there's good evidence that being physically active and eating healthily can reduce the risk. So try to choose an apple over the packet of crisps, and get out as much as possible."

(Source: The Independent)



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Foreign arrivals in Iran reaches six million in nine months

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Over six million foreign nationals visited Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018), a remarkable rise from the same period last year, tourism chief has said.



“More than six million foreign travelers arrived in the country during the first nine months of the year,” Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan said Saturday, CHTN reported.

The official, however, didn’t mention a figure for the year-on-year growth.

Based on previous CHHTO statistics, Iran hosted over five million foreign nationals during the first eight months of the year, up 57 percent year on year.

Iran has launched extensive plans to bolster its tourism sector. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million.

Ardebil hosting national festival of tribes

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A national festival of tribes is currently underway in the city of Sareyn, northwestern province of Ardebil.

The five-day festival opened to the public on Monday with the aim of turning the spotlight on tourism, traditions and culture of various Iranian ethnic communities, CHTN reported.



It also features regional arts, handicrafts, souvenirs, culinary traditions and tourist-attraction exhibits, as well as crafts workshops and live performances.

Dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence during the past couple of years.

Sprawling on a high, windswept plateau, Ardebil is well-known for having lush natural beauties, hospitable people and its silk and carpet trade tradition, it is also home to the UNESCO-registered Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Medieval city of Rhodes

From 1309 to 1523 Rhodes, the largest island of the Dodecanese, was occupied by the Knights of St John of Jerusalem who had lost their last stronghold in Palestine, in Acre, in 1291.

They transformed the island capital into a fortified city able to withstand sieges as terrible as those led by the Sultan of Egypt in 1444 and Mehmet II in 1480. Rhodes finally fell in 1522 after a six-month siege carried out by Suleyman II.

The medieval city is located within a 4 km-long wall. It is divided with the high town to the north and the lower town south-southwest.



A view of Rhodes in Greece

Originally separated from the lower town by a fortified wall, the high town was entirely built by the Knights. The Order was organized into seven “tongues”, each having its own seat, or “inn”.

The inns of the tongues of Italy, France, Spain and Provence lined the principal east-west axis, the famous Street of the Knights, on both sides, one of the finest testimonies to Gothic urbanism. To the north, close to the site of the Knights’ first hospice, stands the Inn of Auvergne, whose facade bears the arms of Guy de Blanchefort, Grand Master from 1512 to 1513.

The original hospice was replaced in the 15th century by the Great Hospital, built between 1440 and 1489, on the south side of the Street of the Knights.

The ramparts of the medieval city, partially erected on the foundations of the Byzantine enclosure, were constantly maintained and remodelled between the 14th and 16th centuries under the Grand Masters.

(Source: UNESCO)

Discover Rayen on the margins of Iranian desert

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Under the glare of blazing sun and on the margins of a harsh desert lies the ancient city of Rayen.

The history of life in Rayen goes back to the times of Sasanian dynasty (226-651) and even deeper.

Situated in southeastern Kerman province, Rayen is home to a centuries-old mudbrick castle of the same name (Arg-e-Rayen or Rayen Castle), which is a tourist destination.

The adobe castle is still standing tall after tolerating several earthquakes and other natural disasters, which have been flattened similar nearby structures.

Covering an area of about 20,000 square meters, the castle was inhabited until 150 years ago and some experts believe it is at least 1,000 years old.

According to rayen.ir, marble mines, which are scattered near the city, have a worldwide reputation. Such marbles have



People visit the ruins of Rayen Castle in Kerman province

5-star hotel being built in Tehran



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — A five-star hotel is being constructed in western Tehran, which will add 752 beds to the hospitality sector of the Iranian capital.

“Taking advantage of modern technologies, the 15-storey hotel is being built in an area of 42,500 square meters with 150,091 square meters superstructure,” CHTN quoted a tourism official on Monday.

The hotel will have 376 rooms and to date about 15 percent of construction work has been completed, the report added.

Pre-Islamic potteries unearthed in central Iran



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A total of 22 pieces of pottery have recently been unearthed in Khaveh rural district, central Iran.

The objects were found by accident during an earth excavation, IRIB reported.

“The relics certainly date from pre-Islamic times but giving an exact date needs further research work,” Shahn Ilbeygi, a cultural heritage expert, said.

The Muslim conquest of Persia (633–654) put an end to the mighty Sasanian Empire and is a turning point in Iranian history.

Before they disappear: Treasured UNESCO sites at risk from climate change

From the sinking city of Venice to the mass bleaching of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, climate change is drastically impacting some of the world’s most treasured heritage sites.

To date, over 1,000 bucket-list locations have earned a spot on UNESCO’s World Heritage list on account of their “outstanding universal value” to humanity.

But, if the world continues to warm -- driven predominately by human activity through greenhouse gas emissions -- many of these landmarks may lose some of those “outstanding” values or even cease to exist at all.

Perhaps the starkest example is Greenland’s impressive Ilulissat Icefjord, a World Heritage site where the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier is literally melting before our eyes, partly because of global warming.

The fjord is even marketed by the Government of Greenland as an opportunity to witness climate change in action, and a destination to see “before it’s too late.”

“Virtually every World Heritage site has some level of threat from climate change,” said Adam Markham, deputy director of the Climate and Energy Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a science advocacy NGO based in the United States.

At some locations the threat is obvious and imminent.

Yellowstone National Park in the U.S., for example, is experiencing shorter winters with less snowfall, warmer rivers, shrinking lakes and wetlands, and longer fire seasons, according to a joint report by the United Nations Environment Program, UNESCO and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Scientists estimate that nearly half of the wetlands in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosys-



Icebergs that broke off from the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier in Ilulissat, Greenland.

tem could be lost, and more frequent fires will likely lead to its dense forest becoming a more open woodland, over time.

Elsewhere, El Nino events are warming waters around the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador and disrupting food supplies on which many Galapagos species rely.

Rising sea levels and higher waves during storms are threatening to topple the mysterious moai statues on remote Rapa Nui -- also known as Easter Island -- in the southeastern Pacific Ocean.

■ ‘Fastest growing threat’

One in four natural World Heritage sites is highly threatened by climate change, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) global assessment of 241 natural sites.

This trend doubled from 2014 to 2017, according to the report, making climate change the “fastest growing threat.”

Rising sea temperatures have affected coral reefs, such as the Aldabra Atoll in the Indian Ocean, the Belize Barrier Reef in the Atlantic and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, in recent years.

In 2016 and 2017, marine heat waves caused by climate change killed about half of the corals on the Great Barrier Reef, along with many others around the world.

And if climate change doesn’t slow down, IUCN predicts more sites will likely suffer in the near future.

Mechtild Rossler, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, said they have been continuously monitoring the effects of climate change on heritage.

“If we cannot protect those sites from these threats -- and they have multiple threats -- how will the future look?” she told CNN.

“The (World Heritage) Convention says

been used to decorate the holy shrine of Imam Ali (AS) and to build the monument Taj Mahal.

Agriculturally speaking, Rayen is a rich area in producing various fruits such as pistachios, walnuts, pomegranates, grapes, pears, strawberries, cherries, peaches and apricots.

Rayen is also famous for its handicrafts. Some natives of Rayen are very skillful at crafting metal works particularly making knives.

Paleontologists believe that Rayen is the undetected treasure which can divulge untold secrets of the past. Rayen requires and deserves more exploration and examination.

The big and sprawling Kerman province has been a cultural melting pot since antiquity, blending Persians with subcontinental tribe dwellers. It is home to myriad historical sites and scenic landscapes such as Bazaar-e Sartasari, Jabalieh Dome, Ganjali Khan Bathhouse, Malek Jameh Mosque and Shahdad Desert to name a few.

Ancient Egyptian artefact returned



An ancient Egyptian artefact has been returned after being illegally smuggled out of the country and displayed in an unnamed London auction house.

In a statement on Tuesday, Egypt’s Ministry of Antiquities confirmed that the relic -- a tablet carved with the cartouche of King Amenhotep I -- had been recovered, after the ministry scoured the websites of international auction halls.

It had previously been displayed at the Karnak Open Air Museum in the Egyptian city of Luxor.

(Source: CNBC)

you have to identify those unique sites and transmit it to future generations. If we have nothing left to transmit, this is a dramatic situation.”

■ Can we save them?

One solution could be to develop a climate vulnerability index, explained Markham. This would enable countries managing heritage sites to better understand, monitor and address the risk of climate change.

Rossler stressed the need for strategies to adapt to extreme weather events and extreme environments, often tapping into knowledge and traditions of local communities.

For example, in the fragile environment of World Heritage-listed Serra de Tramuntana, in Mallorca, where water resources are scarce, people have successfully revived traditional watering systems, she explained.

“If a site is well managed the chances that it addresses climate change better is high,” said Rossler.

But Markham concedes that it might not be possible to protect every site, particularly in less developed parts of the world.

While Markham is optimistic that heritage site managers are considering how to deal with climate change, he is not convinced that national governments are taking the actions needed to slow it down.

With climate change it always comes back to meeting the Paris Agreement goal -- that is limiting global warming to significantly less than two degrees, he said.

“We’re not on track to do that right now unfortunately,” Markham added.

“Without meeting the Paris Agreement we are going to lose a lot of World Heritage sites.”

(Source: CNN)

Flight secrets: Pilot reveals when you should worry about turbulence

Flights can cause many fliers a lot of anxiety as there seems to be a lot of potential for things to go very, very wrong. One common problem for passengers is turbulence. It can feel as though a crash is imminent - but how bad is it really?

Flights and how planes work is a mystery for many plane passengers and one simply has to put faith in the pilots’ capabilities. Turbulence is the most common concern for fliers.

It can vary from mild disturbance to being jolted violently in your seat. It is caused by different masses of air colliding at different speeds and directions. But how much should it actually concern passengers? Is there a time when it really does signal bad news?

A pilot revealed to Express.co.uk that turbulence should, in fact, never concern fliers.

“In all honesty, passengers should never worry about turbulence,” he said.

“The aircraft is designed to take the stress and strain of turbulence. For example, it’s like designing a car with good enough suspension to drive over a rough surface road with potholes.”

In short, pilots are not worried about turbulence - avoiding it is for convenience and comfort rather than safety.

In the best circumstances, pilots can forecast where tur-



bulence is and steer clear of it.

“We use met data and forecasts for jet streams to avoid potential areas,” the pilot said.

As airline pilot Patrick Smith explained in his book Cockpit Confidential: “A plane cannot be flipped upside down, thrown into a tailspin or otherwise flung from the sky by even the mightiest gust or air pocket.

“Conditions might be annoying and uncomfortable, but the plane is not going to crash.”

Turbulence is graded on a scale of severity: light, moderate, severe and extreme.

Extreme is rare but still not dangerous, although the plane will subsequently be examined by maintenance staff.

Turbulence does still cause some injuries, however. “Each year, worldwide, about a hundred people, half of them flight attendants, are hurt by turbulence seriously enough to require medical attention - head, neck, shoulder and ankle injuries being the most common.

“That works out to about 50 passengers. Fifty out of the two billion or so who fly each year.”

It’s key to follow crew’s orders and wear a seatbelt when turbulence hits as the majority of injuries are caused by people who fall or are thrown about because they weren’t strapped in properly.

If you want to limit the effects of turbulence the smoothest place to sit is over the wings, said Smith, it’s “nearest to the plane’s center of lift and gravity.

Steer clear of the rows of seats at the back closest to the tail as “the knocking and swaying is more pronounced.”

(Source: express.co.uk)

Bioengineered rice delivers significant increases in grain yields, new research finds

New research from China has demonstrated that a novel technique to enhance photosynthetic efficiency in rice crops can increase grain yields by up to 27 percent.

The study follows other recent demonstrations of food bioengineering designed to enhance worldwide food productivity by improving the photosynthesis process in crops.

A big focus for scientists working to increase crop yields is finding ways to enhance the efficiency of photosynthesis.

Anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of the energy a plant produces through photosynthesis can be diverted into a process called photorespiration.

One scientist recently described photorespiration as “anti-photosynthesis.”

Plants generate the chemical energy they need to grow by grabbing carbon dioxide molecules from the surrounding environment.

■ Plant-toxic byproduct

However, around 25 percent of the time the plant incorrectly collects oxygen molecules, creating a plant-toxic byproduct that disrupts the entire photosynthesis process, and ultimately releases carbon dioxide.

Photorespiration is the process plants use to remove these problematic byproducts.

One recent strategy developed to increase photosynthetic efficiency focused on engineering more efficient photorespiration pathways within a plant.



These techniques essentially engineered alternate routes within a plant cell so the toxic byproducts could be removed using less energy.

The latest study, from a team of scientists in China, demonstrates a different strategy

to increase a plant's energy efficiency.

This technique diverts carbon dioxide produced during photorespiration to photosynthesis. The process is named GOC bypass, and utilizes three enzymes to convert a molecule called glycolate into carbon dioxide.

The new research says around 25 percent of the time the plant incorrectly collects oxygen molecules, creating a plant-toxic byproduct that disrupts the entire photosynthesis process, and ultimately releases carbon dioxide.

In field tests using rice crops the results were impressive, with the GOC bypass plants displaying overall grain yield improvements of between 7 and 27 percent.

Photorespiratory rates were suppressed by up to 31 percent, and net photosynthetic rates increased up to 22 percent.

■ Different rice varieties

The researchers suggest these results can be further optimized through larger field testing and experimenting with different rice varieties.

Future work will also investigate whether the technique applies to other food crops such as potatoes. Of course, there are plenty of questions that need to be resolved before these kinds of engineered crops can be widely deployed.

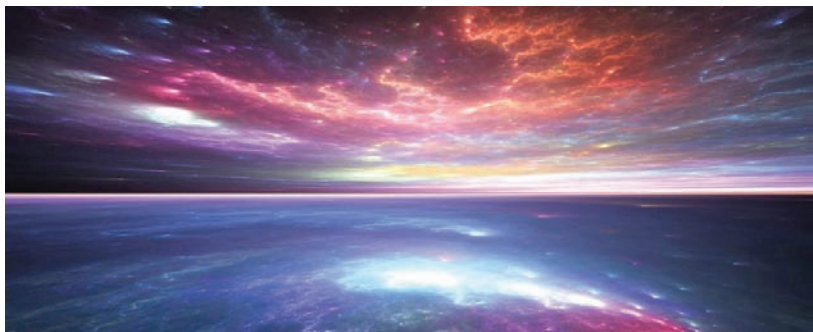
“Although we don't expect this approach would affect the taste of these plants, both the nutritional quality and taste are yet to be comprehensively evaluated by independent labs and governmental agencies,” says Xin-Xiang Pen, senior author on the new research.

Optimizing rice, the world's third-largest crop after wheat and maize, is a major focus for many scientists around the globe.

Recent innovations have revealed new techniques to make rice more drought-resistant and environmentally friendly, however this is the first demonstration of a more photosynthetically efficient form of the crop.

(Source: newatlas.com)

A mirror image of our universe may have existed before the Big Bang



Like a mountain looming over a calm lake, it seems the universe may once have had a perfect mirror image. That's the conclusion a team of Canadian scientists reached after extrapolating the laws of the universe both before and after the Big Bang.

Physicists have a pretty good idea of the structure of the universe just a couple of seconds after the Big Bang, moving forward to today. In many ways, fundamental physics then worked as it does today. But experts have argued for decades about what happened in that first moment — when the tiny, infinitely dense speck of matter first expanded outward — often presuming that basic physics were somehow altered.

Researchers Latham Boyle, Kieran Finn and Neil Turok at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo, Ontario, have turned this idea on its head by assuming the universe has always been fundamentally symmetrical and simple, then mathematically extrapolating into that first moment after the Big Bang.

■ A previous universe

That led them to propose a previous universe that was a mirror image of our current one, except with everything reversed. Time went backward and particles were antiparticles. It's not the first time physicists have envisioned another universe before the Big Bang, but those were always seen as separate universes much like our own.

“Instead of saying there was a different universe before the bang,” Turok told Live Science, “we're saying that the universe before the bang is actually, in some sense, an image of the universe after the bang.”

“It's like our universe today were

reflected through the Big Bang. The period before the universe was really the reflection through the bang,” Boyle said.

Imagine cracking an egg in this anti-universe. First, it would be made entirely of negatively charged antiprotons and positively charged anti-electrons. Secondly, from our perspective in time, it would seem to go from a puddle of yolk to a cracked egg to an uncracked egg to inside the chicken. Similarly, the universe would go from exploding outward to a Big Bang singularity and then exploding into our universe.

But seen another way, both universes were created at the Big Bang and exploded simultaneously backward and forward in time. This dichotomy allows for some creative explanations to problems that have stumped physicists for years.

■ Bizarre multiverses and dimensions

For one, it would make the first second of the universe fairly simple, removing the necessity for the bizarre multiverses and dimensions experts have used for three decades to explain some of the stickier aspects of quantum physics and the Standard Model, which describes the zoo of subatomic particles that make up our universe.

“Theorists invented grand unified theories, which had hundreds of new particles, which have never been observed — supersymmetry, string theory with extra dimensions, multiverse theories. People just basically kept on going inventing stuff.

No observational evidence has emerged for any of it,” Turok said

(Source: livescience.com)

Consider the birds: why crows are so clever



Mango the crow faces a tantalizing problem. The box in front of him contains a morsel of food, which he cannot extract through the container's narrow opening. The solution lies in the cylinders arrayed on a tray beside him, some with hollow ends and some solid. Within minutes, Mango works out how to fit three pieces together to create a pole long enough to push the treat out of the box.

This feat, reported in October 2018 by researchers from the University of Oxford and the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, near Munich, represents the first recorded instance of any non-human animal putting together a compound tool with more than two parts.

Birdbrained, once an insult, is becoming a compliment. Avian brains, which scientists once assumed were hard-wired by evolution to respond instinctively to different situations, are capable of flexible and even imaginative thinking.

Alex Kacelnik, head of the Behavioral Ecology Research Group at Oxford, who pioneered the study of New Caledonian crows such as Mango, says: “To put together a compound tool, the bird has to anticipate the properties of something that it hasn't seen before.”

As artificial intelligence becomes ever more important as a research theme, scientists are looking for clues from non-human animals about new ways to develop AI. Kacelnik, for example, has begun to work with technologists at the Technical University of Berlin to model some of his insights from crows in computers and robots.

■ The mental abilities

The “mental abilities of corvids (the crow family) and parrots are as sophisticated and diverse as those of apes,” says Onur Güntürkün, a neuroscientist specializing in animal cognition at Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany.

Corvids and parrots, the two most intelligent bird groups, match apes, the most intelligent non-human mammals, in standard measures of cognition, including memory, numerical ability, self-recognition, distinguishing simple words, planning ahead and keeping hidden objects in mind. Even pigeons, a less brainy family, can perform at primate level in several tests, including learning hundreds of abstract symbols.

According to Dora Biro, associate professor of animal behavior at Oxford, who works both with chimpanzees and birds, there is no simple answer to the question: which is more intelligent? “Many very social species of birds show high levels of intelligence, including an ability to manipulate others and avoid being manipulated themselves.”

Flying the flag for parrots is Irene Pepperberg, a psychologist at Brandeis and Harvard universities. Her work with African grey parrots — particularly a talking bird called Alex that she studied intensively for 30 years — showed they could learn more than 100 English words and demonstrably understand their meaning. Alex distinguished previously unseen objects according to their color, texture and shape. He could count and even carry out simple additions of low numbers up to eight.

(Source: ft.com)

How microbial communities thrive in hydraulically fractured shale wells

In survival game shows, contestants are whisked away to a foreign location, where they face unfamiliar stresses. To stay in the game, they must adapt to the surroundings and often need to work together with fellow competitors.

As it turns out, the same is true on the microscopic level for microbes, such as bacteria and viruses, residing in fluids from hydraulic fracturing or fracking processes. The conditions in these deep underground environments are so constrained scientists didn't think life could survive there, let alone thrive.

But a few years ago, a small team of researchers began looking closely at these engineered worlds. The team's findings are not only surprising, but also informative to the fracking industry. Such worlds could even be considered as a model system for understanding how microbial community members interact within their ecosystems.

Some of the research team's work is part of a 2015 Facilities Integrating Collaborations for User Science, or FICUS, project called “Microbial Controls on Biogeochemical Cycling in Deep Subsurface Shale Carbon Reservoirs” led by researchers then at The Ohio State University.

■ A collaborative effort

The FICUS initiative resulted from a collaborative effort between two Department of Energy Office of Science user facilities: the Environmental Molecular Science Laboratory, or EMSL, located at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory



(PNNL) in Richland, Wash., and the Joint Genome Institute, or JGI, in Walnut Creek, Calif., managed by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

The multidisciplinary team also includes researchers from Colorado State University (CSU), the University of New Hampshire, West Virginia University, and The University of Maine. Since the initial proposal, the researchers have shifted their direction as the science takes them along, publishing a handful of high-profile papers.

“It's a novel system,” says team member David Hoyt, a biochemist at EMSL. “And the nice thing about this particular set-up is that for the microbes that do survive this harsh envi-

ronment, we get a lot of testable relationships that can tell us what types of molecular strategies the organisms have to use.”

■ Unlocking natural gas

Fracking is a decades-old industrial technique applied to deep wells to unlock natural gas and petroleum from rock formations, such as shale, for extraction. Recent years have seen a rise in using the technique due to improvements in horizontal drilling.

The one-time disturbance uses high-pressure fluids to create hairline cracks, or fractures, in the subsurface rocks. The fluid is a mixture primarily of water with chemical additives and sand materials to keep the fractures open, so the desired components can continue to flow out.

The research team looked at “pristine” shales — those not subjected to fracking — and found no detectable evidence of active microbial life, according to team member Michael Wilkins, a former PNNL scientist, now a geomicrobiology professor at CSU.

At this point, often more than a mile and a half underground, the conditions are harsh.

The temperatures are around 65 degrees Celsius, and the salt levels are four times that of normal seawater. The pressures are roughly 500 atmospheres — 15 times the amount of pressure felt by a human in the deepest recorded SCUBA dive.

(Source: phys.org)

MIT scientists score breakthrough in finding bacteria that produce electricity

Deep in mines, at the bottom of lakes, and even in your own gut, bacteria are hard at work producing electricity in order to survive in environments low in oxygen.

These potent little power producers have been used in speculative experiments and one day may power everything from batteries to “biohomes”.

There are many types of bacteria capable of producing electricity, but some are better at it than others. The trouble with these bacteria is that they are difficult and expensive to grow in a lab setting, slowing down our ability to develop new technologies with them.

A new technique developed by MIT engineers makes sorting and identifying electricity-producing bacteria easier than ever before which may make them more readily available for us in technological applications.

Electricity-producing bacteria are able to pull off the trick by producing electrons within their cells and releasing them through tiny channels in their cell membranes in a process called extracellular electron transfer, or EET.

Current processes for identifying the electricity producing capabilities of bacteria involved measuring the activity of EET proteins but this is a daunting and time consuming process.

Researchers sometimes use a process called dielectrophoresis to separate two kinds of bacteria based on their electrical properties. They can use this process to differentiate between two different kinds of cells, such as cells from a frog and cells from a bird.

But the MIT team's study separated cells based on a much more minute difference, their ability to produce electricity.

By applying small voltages to bacteria strains in an hourglass-shaped microfluidic channel the team was able to separate and measure the different kinds of closely related cells.

By noting the voltage required to manipulate bacteria and recording the cell's size researchers were able to calculate each bacteria's polarizability — how easy it is for a cell to produce electricity in an electric field.

Their study concluded that bacteria with a higher polarizability were also more active electricity producers.

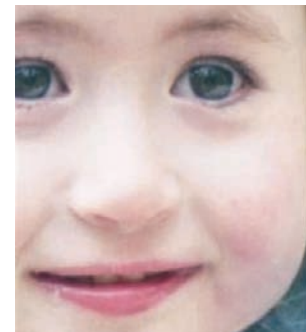
(Source: sciencealert.com)

AI can identify rare genetic disorders by the shape of someone's face

People with genetic syndromes sometimes have telltale facial features, but using them to make a quick and cheap diagnosis can be tricky given there are hundreds of possible conditions they may have. A new neural network that analyses photographs of faces can help doctors narrow down the possibilities.

Yaron Gurovich at biotechnology firm FDNA in Boston and his team built a neural network to look at the gestalt — or overall impression — of faces and return a list of the 10 genetic syndromes a person is most likely to have.

They trained the neural network, called DeepGestalt, on 17,000 images correctly labelled to correspond to more than 200 genetic syndromes. The team then asked the AI to identify potential genetic disorders from a further 502 photographs of people with such conditions. It included the correct answer among its list of 10 responses 91 per cent of the time.



Gurovich and his team also tested the AI's ability to distinguish between different genetic mutations that can lead to the same syndrome. They used images of people with Noonan syndrome, which can result from mutations in one of five genes. DeepGestalt accurately identified the genetic source of the physical appearance 64 per cent of the time.

The fact that the diagnosis is based on a simple photograph raises questions of privacy. If faces can reveal details about genetics, then employers and insurance providers could, in principle, surreptitiously use such techniques to discriminate against people with a high probability of having certain disorders.

The “real value here is that for some of these ultra-rare diseases, the process of diagnosis can be many, many years. This kind of technology can help narrow down the search space and then be verified through checking genetic markers,” he says.

(Source: newscientist.com)

Researchers get to the bottom of Easter Island mystery

A new study found that the locations of the megalithic platforms or ahu at Eastern Island in Chile are tied to the community's basic needs for survival. Whenever there are giant statues in an area, there are massive amounts of freshwater.

Easter Island's indigenous people known as the Rapanui had built around 1,000 anthropomorphic statues from the 13th century until Europeans arrived in the 18th century. Researchers have long been puzzled for centuries now about the purpose of the statues.

A new study published on Jan. 10 in an open access journal PLOS One revealed that these were placed to point the direction to drinkable water.

The researchers believe that the locations of the megalithic platforms, or ahu, and where many of the statues known as moai sit, are tied to the community's basic needs for survival.

The giant statues, which are typically located close to sources of freshwater, back up the idea that their construction is tied to the available resources.

“What is important about it is that it demonstrates the statue locations themselves are not a weird ritual place — (the ahu and moai) represent ritual in a sense of there is symbolic meaning to them, but they are integrated into the lives of the community,” said Prof Carl Lipo, of the Binghamton University in New York, who is a co-author of the study.

Professor Lipo's team has examined 93 ahu, along with the theory that their “spatial distribution” may be linked to “resources thought to be the focus of competition in precontact times.”

(Source: techtimes.com)

Three Iranian women among top Asian scientists

W O M E N **TEHRAN** — The book of “Biography of Asian Female Scientists” has placed three Iranian scientist among top 50 Asian female scientists.

The book is published by the Association of Academies and Societies of Sciences in Asia (AASSA), IRNA reported.

Tahereh Kaghazchi, a chemical engineering educator and a member of the Iranian Academy of Sciences, Iranian Petroleum Society, is one of the top scientists in AASSA list.



Zahra Emam-Djomeh, a PhD in Food Engineering and Technology is also one of the top scientists. She is an educator in Department of Food Science and Technology, Faculty of Agronomy Engineering and Technology, as well as College of Agriculture and Natural Resources in University of Tehran.

AASSA list also included Mahshid Firouzi, residing in Australia. She is an Advance Queensland Research Fellow in the School of Chemical Engineering at the University of Queensland.

AASSA is a non-profit international organization with interests in science and technology. The principal objective of AASSA is to build a society in Asia and Australasia in which science and technology play a major role in the development of the region.

The book of “Biography of Asian Female Scientists”, which includes the answers of 50 great Asian scientists to nine questions, was published with the purpose of presenting successful examples for girls and women and encouraging them to improve and pursuing education in scientific majors.

Girls’ schools to be equipped with sports halls

W O M E N **TEHRAN** — The Ministry of Education has developed a plan to build small sports halls in girls’ schools, Deputy Education Minister Rezvan Hakimzadeh said here on Saturday.



Constructing sports halls, in an area of 250sqm, follows the goal of fulfilling national “document on fundamental transformation of education and physical education”, IRNA quoted Hakimzadeh as saying.

The measure helps physical education enjoy its significance, especially for girl students, who are much restricted, the official added.

The whole society will benefit from girl students’ sports, because today’s healthy girl students will become tomorrow’s happy mothers, Hakimzadeh noted.

Suitable sports areas, good teachers and proper contexts are the three complementary elements to be considered in improving physical activities of girl students, she stated.

LEARN ENGLISH

At The Car Dealership

A: Hi there! I am looking for a new car. I have this old Ford Pinto that I would like to **trade in**.

B: I see. You are in luck this month because all of our models are on sale! It is a perfect time to buy a new car since it’s the end of the year.

A: Perfect! I like this one.

B: That is the Ford Focus. A very light but powerful vehicle. It comes with dual side airbags, power steering and power windows, tinted windows and your choice of either automatic or manual transmission.

A: Sounds like a good car! How many **miles** to the gallon?

B: It is a very **fuel** efficient vehicle giving you about 34 miles in the city and 40 on the highway.

A: That is really convenient. Especially now that fuel prices are so high! What’s under the hood?

B: A very powerful 2.5-liter turbocharged engine, trust me, this car is fast!

A: Now for the most difficult question. What is the price tag for this lovely vehicle?

B: Very affordable sir. You can take it out of this lot today with 0% **down payment** and no **interest** for the first year! You can test drive it now and we can sign the papers when we get back.

A: Great! Let’s do it!

■ **Key vocabulary**
trade in: something that you sell as part of payment for new **miles:** unit measuring distance

fuel: something that can be turned into energy

down payment: first payment that you pay when buy something
interest: money paid by a borrower for the borrowed money

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
lemon: something that is sold, that seems like a good deal but actually does not work the way it should

warranty: a guarantee on something sold, that would pay for a certain amount of damage

limited time offer: a promotion that is only available for a certain amount of time

rip off: to give someone a bad deal

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Lady Zeinab (A.S): An icon and a role model to the women

By Sâdeq Ali Musa

TEHRAN — Lady zeinab (A.S) proved that the woman is not in the peripheries of history, but in the core of it. She humiliated and mortified, in his place, the enemy who had apparently gained victory on the battlefield. _Ayatollah khamene’i_

It’s well known and accepted, most of famous and great leaders of human kind are AHLUL-BAYT or people from the lineage or from their school of thought.

Lady zeinab is one of Ahlul bait (A.S), she was born in the house of prophet hood, and she is one of greatest women of all human kind such as Lady Fatemah bint Muhammad(prophet Muhammad’s daughter), Lady Khadija bint khuwailid (Prophet Muhammad’s wife), Lady Asiya (wife of pharaoh), and Lady Maryam (Prophet Isah’s Mother).

History will not forget the great bravery and leadership of Lady Zeinab (A.S), she is an Icon and a role model to the women as well as human kind. There are a lot of lesson in her life, but before we go further, we will like to go through her profile.

Name: Zainab/ Title: al-Aqilah/ Kunya: al-Hawraa’/ Father: Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S)/ Mother: Sayyida Fatimah bint Muhammad (A.S)/ Born: 5 Jamadi al-Awwal, 5 A.H/ Death: 15 Rajab, 62 AH/ Age at Death: 57

Buried: Damascus, Syria (per most historians), however, it is also said that she was buried in Madinah, in the Arabian Peninsula, or Cairo, Egypt.

Every child is representing his parent, you don’t need to surprise how strong soul lady zeinab (A.S) has

With parents such as Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S) and Sayyida Fatima (A.S) and grandparents such as Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and Lady Khadija (A.S), there is no doubt that the upbringing of Lady Zeinab (A.S) would be beyond exemplary.

She grew up in Medina, where she was married to Abdullah ibn Jafar al-Tayyar (A.S), who was brought up under the direct care of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H). Together they had five children, four of whom were sons, Ali, Aun, Muhammad, and Abbas, and one daughter, Umm Kulthum(A.S).

Lady Zeinab (A.S) was no stranger to death or oppression. Through her life she face most of difficult and tough times, which if it was not her, none of human being can survive. I will like to mention her difficult and tough time of her life, and there are five in number, she survives in it and continue struggling in the path of god and her parents.

1-Lady zeinab was there when her noble grandfather Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was poisoned, and he was about to demise (martyr). Can you imagine how strong soul she has, although she was kid, but she start experiencing the Bitterness of life.

2-All the difficulties that her Beloved Mother Lady Zahra was, she was Also there with her to the last moment of her life. And we should know it was less than 70 days after the departure of her noble Grand Father (P.B.U.H).

3-After she witnessed and had the most painful memories, her Noble Father just left her House, Ibn Muljam (may Allah curse him) Strike Imam Ali (A.S) on his great forehead, she just heard a news about the event. Can you imagine how pain she feels?

4-Imagine how relation is between brother and a sister, at the same time like a Father. Imam Hassan (A.S) also was poisoned to the extent that his body turns into green color. Lady zeinab she witnessed this painful event.

5-The last event she survived into was the event of KARBALA, she faces the most difficult and painful time in her life, after the event of karbala she said “it’s today i lost My Grandfather muhammad (P.B.U.H), My Father Ali (A.S), My Mother Fatemah (A.S), and My Brother Hassan (A.S) with the lost of My Brother Hussein (A.S)”.

We know her best for the crucial role she played during the events of Karbala in 61 A.H. when she was 55 years old. She witnessed the martyrdom of her own children, her nephews, companions, and most significantly her beloved brothers Abbas ibn Ali Talib (A.S) and Imam al-Hussain (A.S). Sayyida Zainab’s (A.S) strong upbringing, piety, and nobility ensured she was not weak in the face of adversity. Therefore, after Imam Hussain (A.S) was mercilessly martyred, she became the pillar for the other women and children. She, therefore, serves as an example of steadfastness, courage, humility, and strength for all of us.

The following is an excerpt of the sermon Lady Zainab (A.S) gave in the courtyard of Yazid’s (L.A) palace in Damascus after they were brought as prisoners:

“Whatever you consider today, as a bounty would turn into reparation for tomorrow, whatever you have sent in advance would be received by you. Allah does not like oppression toward his servants. I complained to Him and put my trust upon Him; thus whatever deceit you want to practice, go ahead and do it; whatever endeavors and efforts you can make, try them. By Allah you would never be able to remove our remembrance from the hearts [of the believers], nor would you ever be able to destroy our revelations; you would never reach our splendor and majesty; you would never be able to wash this ugly spot of tyranny from your [dress]; your opinion and suggestions are invalid and unstable. The duration of your rein is very short, and your assembly would soon be scattered; on that day when the heavenly crier would announce: ‘Praise be upon the Lord of the Worlds, and our beginning- with prosperity and salvation-and our end-with martyrdom and blessing. I beseech the Almighty to bestow upon them [Imam Hussain (A.S), his family (pbut), and his loyal companions] His best recompense and may [He] increase their rewards. O You, Who is just and righteous toward us, and who is the most compassionate among all the compassionate ones, we put our trust only upon you.”

Lady Zeinab (A.S), in particular, holds a special place in many of our hearts due to the hardships she faced during the tragic events of Karbala and while she was taken captive to Damascus. What do we know about the qualities she possessed that enabled her to conduct herself with strength and conviction of faith? And how can we do our best to embody the characteristics she manifested to improve our lives today?



Some of us may feel we cannot live up to these ideals, that they are unattainable and beyond our reach. Having ideals or high moral standards to look up to give us helpful guidelines as we develop who we are and how to conduct ourselves. When we think about who we should look up to, God has provided us with role models such as Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S).

Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) has several attributes and titles associated with her such as, Al-Aqilah means noble woman, Al-Aalimah or the most knowledgeable woman, and Aminatu al-Allah means the faithful of God.

■ Noble Woman (al-Aqilah) of her time

We know that Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) was of the purest lineage. After all, her grandfather was the Messenger of God, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), and her parents were the Lady of Light, Fatimah al-Zahra (A.S) and the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S). However, Lady Zainab bint Ali’s (A.S) nobility was also rooted in her own moral excellence. She was so trustworthy that Imam Hussain ibn Ali (A.S) entrusted her with his will. Someone once asked Hakimah bint Muhammad ibn Ali (A.S) if a woman was capable of being entrusted with someone’s will. She referred to Imam al-Hussain (A.S) who entrusted his sister Lady Zainab bin Ali (A.S) with his will.

Imam Hussain (A.S) would not have trusted her with guarding his secrets or looking after the remaining family members if she was not an honorable and noble human being. Her decision to accompany Imam Hussain ibn Ali (A.S) with her sons to Karbala also required the highest strength of character and trust in the Almighty. She knew that to protect the religion of Islam, a great sacrifice would be made.

■ The Most Knowledgeable Woman (al-Aalimah) of her time

Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) had her grandfather, parents, and brothers (A.S) as her teachers. When you have such magnanimous guides sharing and imparting their knowledge to you there is little doubt that you will become illustrious yourself. Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) thus served as the source of knowledge for Muslim women regarding religious affairs and other matters.

The Messenger of God (P.B.U.H) has said, “Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim. (People should) know that God loves those who seek knowledge.”

Whether you are a man or woman, seeking and acquiring knowledge is a duty. Seeking knowledge is a gift that you benefit from without expiration or diminished

value. Lady Zainab bint Ali’s (A.S) possessing such a high level of knowledge and being fully supported by her family is a true inspiration to us all.

■ The Faithful of God (Aminatu al-Allah) of her time

Aminatu al-Allah is the faithful of God, which is a testament to Lady Zainab bint Ali’s (A.S) unyielding devotion to the Lord of the worlds. Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) was recognized among Muslim believers as being a devout and committed worshipper. Her worship was so sincere and distinguished that even her brother Imam Hussain ibn Ali (A.S) asked her to pray for him in her night prayers.

It was narrated that Imam Hussain ibn Ali (A.S) said to his sister Lady Zainab (A.S): “Oh sister do not forget to pray for me in your night prayer”

This kind of devotion to God is also what gave Lady Zainab bint Ali (A.S) the strength and firm conviction she needed to endure the merciless slaughter of her children, brothers, and other family members (A.S). This is what gave her composure and conviction of faith when she and the remaining family members were taken as prisoner. And finally, it is why she remained composed and eloquent while delivering her speech in the courtyard of Yazid (L.A) to the accomplices and bystanders of the events of Ashoor.

Worship strengthens the connection and relationship we have with the Almighty. And it is with this connection that we are able to endure life’s many challenges. Although it is a very private practice, it exhibits itself by making the worshiper grounded and mindful of themselves and their surroundings. It is what builds our resilience to life’s challenges and gives us peace through our conviction and trust in the Lord of the universe.

Although we know that as human beings we are bound to make mistakes, we should strive to be the best version of ourselves using the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) as our guides. Their lives were not without a multitude of difficulties and challenges, yet they never compromised on their morals, ethics, principles, and belief in God. Although we do not face the same challenges as they did, we can still derive the same lessons. Their illustrious lives serve as a ‘how to’ manual to navigate life’s many obstacles. Reflecting on the epithets or titles of Lady Zeinab bint Ali (A.S) allows us to appreciate her life, understand the challenges she faced, and learn from the way she conducted herself. This provides the blueprint we need to seek nobility, knowledge, and complete devotion to and worship of God in our own lives. ➔13

N.I.O.C

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First Announcement

Call for public tender (First/Second publish)

One -Stages (semi compressed) tender

National Iranian Drilling Company

Subject of Tender: PARTS FOR AIR WRENCH VARCO SSW10 for Drilling Rig

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3,188,217	Tender No.: FP/17-97/013 Indent No.: 48-22-9622041	16,404,622,000 Rial

Qualitative evaluation of tenderers

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

Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof. <div>Distribution Place</div> Hall No.113, 1 st floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN 061-34148656 - 06134148615 <div>Submitting Method</div> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 510,000 Iranian Rial under account number 400111400623691 (Shaba No. IR 520100004001114006202991) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents
Documents Receiving Method	<div>Closing date</div> Days after the last time of Purchasing 14 <div>Address</div> Hall No. 107, 1 st floor, Tender Committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel. +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569

Tender Guarantee

Value of guarantee	821,000,000 Rial/ 16,695 Euro
Type of guarantee	✓*-Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. ✓*-Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee & quotation should be valid for 90 days, and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration

(Foreign Procurement Dept.)
More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on:
www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr
تهران تایمز نوبت اول ۱۳۹۷/۱۰/۲۶ نوبت دوم ۱۳۹۷/۱۰/۲۶

Jordan monarch visits Iraq for first time since 2008

Jordanian King Abdullah II has made his first trip to Baghdad in more than a decade, meeting Iraqi President Barham Saleh.

The Jordanian monarch's last trip to Iraq was in 2008, when he became the first Arab leader to visit Baghdad after former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003.

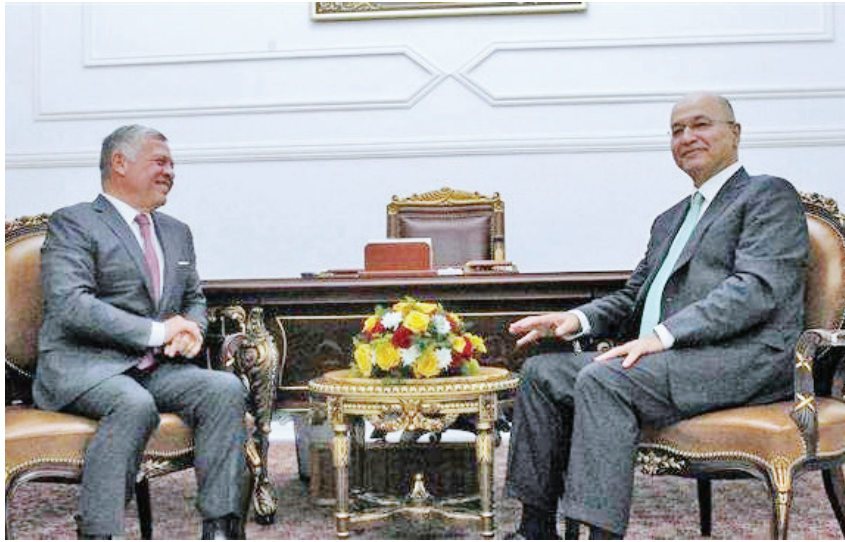
The Iraqi leader traveled to Amman in November. The two states share a 179-kilometer (111-mile) border, and Jordan is a major importer of Iraqi crude oil.

Jordan had its best special ties with Iraq under former dictator Saddam Hussein who provided the kingdom with cheap oil in return for access to Aqaba which became a lifeline for Iraq's oil revenues as the war with Iran rendered shipping through the Persian Gulf impossible.

Relations between Iraq and Jordan deteriorated after Jordan had given sanctuary to Saddam's eldest daughter, Raghad.

Raghad has been living in Jordan under the protection of King Abdullah II since leaving Iraq in 2003, when US and British forces invaded Iraq and ousted Saddam.

The Jordanian royal family has already rejected the Iraqi government's demand to



extradite the 47-year-old Raghad.

Baghdad wants the former Iraqi dictator's daughter to be tried for financing terror movements and supporting militant groups fighting to topple the Iraqi government. Raghad, who is also known as Little Saddam

for her similarities to her father, has openly pledged her support for the Daesh terror group.

In 2010, international police body Interpol issued an arrest warrant for Raghad for funding terrorism in Iraq.

She reportedly has an extravagant lifestyle

in Jordan and established a jewelry line, which she said is inspired by her father and her husband Hussein Kamel al-Majid who was murdered by Saddam.

The Iraqi government also accused veterans of Saddam's Ba'athist party who live in Jordan of supporting terrorist groups and being involved in money laundering.

In 2018, Jordan approved a framework to revive a 1,700-kilometer pipeline linking Iraq's oil-rich Basra province to Jordan's Aqaba port that has been halted after Daesh began a terror campaign in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks.

Amman, however, did not give a time-frame for the line's construction. The two countries have also discussed plans for Iraq to import about 300 megawatts of electricity from Jordan to cope with widespread power shortages.

Iraq has been importing electricity from Iran for many years after its power infrastructure was destroyed by decades of war and blockade following the US invasion.

The country needs more than 23,000 megawatts of additional electricity to meet domestic demand.

(Source: Press TV)

Damascus welcomes Kurds' call for talks, seeks to reunite Syria

The Syrian government has welcomed talks with Kurdish groups aimed at maintaining the country's unity after the Kurds called for a Russian-mediated deal with Damascus.

Syrian Kurdish leaders have sought a Russian-mediated deal with President Bashar al-Assad's government after U.S. President Donald Trump decided to withdraw American troops from the war-ravaged Arab country.

"We hope for the intensification of the dialogue. Many of the Kurdish statements were positive regarding their concern for the unity of Syria," Syria's Assistant Foreign Minister Ayman Sousan told reporters in Damascus on Sunday.

"We are confident that through dialogue we can deal with some of the demands ... and this dialogue guarantees that, as long as it is based on a commitment to Syria's unity," he added.

Syrian Kurds are rattled by Turkey's threats of an invasion to eliminate U.S.-backed YPG militants whom Ankara regards as terrorists.

The deal would mark perhaps the most important milestone because the two biggest chunks of Syria splintered by eight years of war would be rejoined, leaving only a corner in the northwest in the hands of militants.

Senior Kurdish official Badran Jia Kurd told Reuters earlier this month that the Kurdish-led administration that runs much of northern Syria presented a roadmap for an agreement with Assad during recent meetings in Russia, and would pursue one regardless of U.S. plans.

The Syrian minister said intensified dialogue was significant when set against challenges, "especially the expansionist ambitions that lead the policies of the Turkish regime."

On Friday, Moscow said it was important for Syria's Kurds and the Damascus government to begin talking in light of U.S. plans.

Trump said last month that he was bringing home the American troops deployed in Syria -- some 2,000 -- alleging that they had succeeded in their mission to defeat the Daesh terrorist group.



The U.S. said on Friday that it had begun the pullout process, but officials later clarified that the Pentagon was withdrawing only equipment, not forces.

(Source: al Alam)

Pompeo hopes for imminent end to U.S. govt. shutdown

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hopes for an imminent end to the longest government shutdown in American history, he said Sunday during a whistle-stop Middle East tour.

"I hope it ends tomorrow," Pompeo said to applause as he addressed U.S. diplomats in Doha, the latest stop on his eight-day regional tour.

The partial U.S. government shutdown entered its 23rd day Sunday and has seen 800,000 federal employees go without wages being paid -- including embassy staff.

"As I travel these days with the shutdown underway, you all get that we still have a mission," Pompeo told the gathering of diplomats and their families.

U.S. President Donald Trump has refused

to back away from his demand that lawmakers approve funding to build a Mexico border wall.

As the shutdown drags on, Trump said Saturday he was holding off on declaring a state of emergency that would allow him to bypass Democrats' opposition and secure billions of dollars for the proposed wall.

"I hope we get it resolved and get every-

body back to work and get [their] paycheck," Pompeo told diplomats.

Despite the ongoing crisis, he told journalists Saturday that morale was good among U.S. staff abroad.

"We're doing our best to make sure it doesn't impact our diplomacy," he said while in Abu Dhabi.

(Source: AFP)

Angry Zimbabweans riot after 150 percent fuel price rise imposed

Protesters in Zimbabwe barricaded the main roads into major cities on Monday to protest a fuel price rise announced by President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

In the southern city of Bulawayo, commuter bus drivers and activists blocked thoroughfares with burning tyres, tree branches, and blocks of stone. Riot police tried to quell demonstrations in the western suburbs of Emakhandeni and Luveve, firing warning shots and tear gas, but the protesters remained defiant.

Demonstrator Glen Ncube, 25, expressed anger at the president's announcement on Saturday of a 150 percent fuel price increase and the police actions.

"What kind of a man does this? Can Mnangagwa even be called a president? He's making life hard for us and these police are trying to stop us as if they don't know our pain," said Ncube.

The government has vowed it "will not hesitate to take action" against protesters who threaten to destabilise the country and the military was deployed to assist police.

Zimbabwe is going through its worst economic crisis in a decade.

The government announced an increase from \$1.34 for a litre of petrol to \$3.31 with diesel surging to \$3.11 per litre, igniting widespread discontent. Workers' trade unions have called for a three-day nationwide shutdown in protest. The action comes shortly after junior doctors ended a 40-day strike demanding salaries in US dollars and better working conditions.

Since the crash of the hyperinflated Zimbabwe dollar in 2008, the country uses several currencies including the US dollar and its unpopular local surrogate called the "bond note". Because of a severe shortage of foreign exchange, most daily transactions are done in bond notes with the US dollar and South African rand trading on the black market at inflated rates.

Morrisson Nxulmalo, an unemployed 33-year-old Zimbabwean, told Al Jazeera he was prepared to protest until the government reversed the price increase.

"The fuel prices must come down, we are not going anywhere until they bring it down. This government is trying to play with us. They can bring their tear gas and police but we're here to fight for this country; I'm not going anywhere," he said.

A shopping complex in neighbouring Entumbane was looted with people carrying out crates of food and drinks and bottles of cooking oil while police battled to stop them from entering the shops.

In Bulawayo's city centre, people marched to the court and disrupted proceedings. Crowds swelled as ordinary citizens joined with protesting activists to add their voices to the anti-fuel price demonstrations.

The commuter fares have doubled due to the price rise since Saturday's announcement while some businesses shut their doors to protect stocks from potential looters.

The government of Zimbabwe issued a statement con-

demning the riots as Western-sponsored acts.

"This brazenly unconstitutional plan which has sought financial support from some regime change organisations based in America and Germany, among other countries, represents a serious threat to our consolidating democracy, to the rule of law in our country, and to the authority of government and the state," the statement said.

In Epworth, a low income area outside the capital Harare, four people were reportedly shot by security officers while eight people were arrested. Media reports from Harare also said police conducted house-to-house searches looking for protesters.

The headquarters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance was under police surveillance. Party leader Nelson Chamisa - who narrowly lost to Mnangagwa in July's disputed election - has called on the president for dialogue to find ways to resolve the country's crippling economic crisis.

Following a de facto coup in November 2017 long-time ruler Robert Mugabe stepped down, and after a disputed election in July that saw Mnangagwa elected into office, the leader has promised an economic turnaround for the impoverished African nation.

However, since the government's introduction of a two percent transaction tax in October, Zimbabwe's money woes have worsened and inflation has soared to double-digit figures since then.

Mnangagwa is currently in Moscow, Russia, as part of a tour of Eastern Europe where he hopes to solicit investors and strike deals in a bid to help Zimbabwe's ailing economy.

Late on Monday, Fastjet, a low-cost African airline, cancelled its remaining flights to and from Zimbabwe on due to the unrest.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

'PGCC is toothless, needs new management principles'

Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani says the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) has no executive power left, calling for change to the structure of the six-member regional intergovernmental political and economic union.

During a meeting with visiting PGCC Secretary General Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani and his Omani counterpart Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah in the Qatari capital

Doha on Saturday evening, Al Thani said the Riyadh-based council, which comprises of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is in need of new principles of management, Russia's RT Arabic television news network reported.

On December 15, 2018, the top Qatari diplomat described the PGCC as a "toothless" organization, incapable of holding its members to account. "They have mechanisms in place and never trigger them, because some countries believe they are

non-binding," he said at the time.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017, after officially accusing it of "sponsoring terrorism."

The administration of the Saudi-backed and former Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Libya, the Maldives, Djibouti, Senegal and the Comoros later joined the camp in ending diplomatic ties with Doha. Jordan downgraded its dip-

lomatic relations as well.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry later announced that the decision to cut diplomatic ties was unjustified and based on false claims and assumptions.

On June 9, 2017, Qatar strongly dismissed allegations of supporting terrorism after the Saudi regime and its allies blacklisted dozens of individuals and entities purportedly associated with Doha.

(Source: Press TV)

Turkey responds to Trump Twitter threat

➡ Trump gave no details about the safe zone proposal, but Pompeo said Washington wanted to provide security for those who have fought against Daesh (ISIL) and to prevent any attack on Turkey from Syria.

"If we can get the space and the security arrangements right it would be a good thing for everyone in the region," Pompeo added said.

Trump announced last month he would withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, declaring they had succeeded in their mission to defeat Daesh and were no longer needed.

However, U.S. officials have given mixed messages since then. The U.S.-led coalition said Friday it had started the pullout but officials said later it involved only equipment, not troops.

The Kurdish YPG has been a U.S. ally in the fight against Daesh and it controls swathes of northern Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to crush it in the wake of Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of the region.

Erdogan's communications director Fahrettin Altun said "Turkey will continue its anti-terror fight decisively" and that it was a protector of the Kurds, not their enemy.

"Terror is terror and it must be eradicated at its source. This is exactly what Turkey is doing in Syria," he wrote on Twitter.

Relations between the two NATO allies have been strained over U.S. backing for the Kurdish YPG, which Turkey views as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that is waging a decades-long insurgency on Turkish soil.

(Source: Reuters)

Bomb-packed car blows up near high-security compound in Kabul

➡ The attack caused at least several casualties who were taken to hospital, he said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing. Green Village has come under Islamist militant attack in the past.

(Source: Reuters)

Pompeo presses Saudis for accountability on Khashoggi murder

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has told Saudi Arabia's king and crown prince that "every single person responsible" for the murder of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi needs to be held accountable.

King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MBS, "both acknowledge that this accountability needs to take place", Pompeo said in Riyadh following talks with the two men on Monday.

"They reiterated their commitment to achieving the objective, the expectations we set for them," Pompeo added.

The secretary of state told reporters he had also raised a number of human rights issues with the king and MBS, including women's rights activists who have been detained for months and some allegedly tortured.

Khashoggi, a longtime royal insider who had become a critic of Prince Mohammed, was killed in October in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, prompting a global outcry, including treasury sanctions on 17 individuals and a U.S. Senate resolution blaming MBS.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Pompeo, however, have so far been reluctant to directly implicate the royal or issue any punitive measures.

A CIA assessment has blamed Prince Mohammed for ordering the killing, which Saudi officials deny.

At least 21 Saudis have been arrested in the case, with five facing the death penalty. Five officials were also fired, including a senior royal adviser.

The outcry over Khashoggi's murder has strained ties with Western allies and focussed attention on Saudi Arabia's domestic crackdown on dissent and the nearly four-year-old war in Yemen.

During meetings that lasted about 80 minutes total, Pompeo said he had spoken with Saudi leaders about women's rights activists arrested last summer and accused of treason.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Lady Zeinab (A.S): An icon and a role model to the women

➡

➡ **Lady Zeinab (A.S) was a visionary**

To be a visionary, you should think beyond the here and now and be a forward thinker. The preservation of the Imamate was paramount to the survival of the religion of Islam. Lady Zeinab (A.S) knew that she had to protect her nephew, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A.S) and did so as best she could with God's Divine protection and help. She remained steadfast, protected him physically when necessary, and publicly spoke out when the truth was distorted and covered.

Lady Zeinab (A.S) also knew that to safeguard the future of her grandfather's religion and its believers people must always remember the sacrifice of Imam Hussain (A.S), his family, and companions. Women became the flagbearers of the message of Imam Hussain (A.S). From one majlis (gathering of sorrow) to the next, they have passed the baton of guidance that contained the true message of Islam up until this day.

➡ **WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY**

Lady Zeinab's (A.S) strength, leadership, and vision are a lesson for men and women alike in today's world. Women have an important role to play in all aspects of life: at home, at work, in the community, at the university, at our centers, and mosques. Taking the lessons we learn throughout the months of Muharram and Safar, we can strive to build a better community of inclusion and appreciation of one another. We can create more opportunities and positions for women to take on leadership roles to help our communities continue to grow.

Peace And Mercy be upon Lady Zeinabs from the Day she was Born, The Day she was Departed, and to The Day that she will Rise as a Trustworthy Lady.

Nottingham Forest to appoint O'Neill as new manager

Nottingham Forest are set to appoint their former player Martin O'Neill as manager to succeed Aitor Karanka, British media reported on Monday.

The Championship club parted company with Spaniard Karanka last week after just 12 months in charge at the City Ground.

O'Neill, who made 371 appearances and won two European Cups under Brian Clough at Forest between 1971-1981, ended his spell as Ireland manager last November.

The 66-year-old will arrive at Forest with the club sitting ninth in the second division, four points outside the playoff places.

According to the reports, O'Neill could be joined by his former Ireland assistant Roy Keane, who made his breakthrough as a midfielder at Forest between 1990 and 1993 before moving on to Manchester United.

(Source: Reuters)

Champion Wozniacki through to second round with comfortable win

Caroline Wozniacki launched her title defence at the Australian Open with a comfortable 6-3 6-4 win against Belgian Alison Van Uytvanck in the first round on Monday.

The third-seeded Dane broke Van Uytvanck once in each set and kept down her unforced errors to win the baseline battle in an hour and 33 minutes in the first match of the evening session at the Rod Laver Arena.

Van Uytvanck began well to set up a break point in the first game of the opening set but Wozniacki saved it with some big serving.

Wozniacki converted her fifth break point of the sixth game to take a 4-2 lead and took the first set when her opponent sent a service return into the net. In the second set, the break came in the third game for Wozniacki and it proved to be enough.

"I think it was a good match in general. I was surprised of the consistency that she had. I think she played extremely well," Wozniacki told reporters.

"She really stepped it up with her serves I feel like in the second set. I was just happy I got the win. It was not an easy one."

The 24-year-old Van Uytvanck, ranked 52, troubled Wozniacki with some well-disguised drop shots in the beginning but did not have enough to register her maiden win at Melbourne Park in her fifth appearance in both singles and doubles.

Former world number one Wozniacki, who is battling rheumatoid arthritis, was pleased she could reach the drop shots as the match progressed. "She surprised me in the beginning with a couple of dropshots, especially when she was standing behind the baseline and I wasn't expecting it," Wozniacki added. "Then I was more alert on it."

(Source: Reuters)

Arsenal's inconsistency could hurt top-four chances, says Emery

Arsenal's inconsistency has dealt a blow to their hopes of a top-four finish in the Premier League, manager Unai Emery said following a 1-0 defeat by West Ham United on Saturday.

Arsenal, who failed to finish in the top four in the last two seasons to miss out on Champions League qualification, have 41 points, six behind fourth-placed Chelsea.

"Now it's more difficult, it's clear," Emery told reporters after Arsenal's third defeat in six league games following a 14-match unbeaten run earlier in the season. "I think the most important thing for us is to recover our confidence and be more competitive. We need consistency over 38 matches. Now it isn't enough at the moment." Arsenal have the opportunity to close the gap with Chelsea, who defeated Newcastle United last time out, when they host Maurizio Sarri's team on Saturday. "The big opportunity for us is that we can take in our hands the possibility to be closer to them," Emery added.

"This (Saturday's) result makes that more difficult."

Emery will also keep an eye on a resurgent Manchester United who drew level with them on 41 points following their fifth Premier League win in a row under caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

(Source: Goal)

Hillsborough disaster police chief in court as trial opens

The police commander at the Hillsborough football stadium disaster appeared in court on Monday for the first day of his trial over the deaths of 95 Liverpool supporters, 30 years on from the tragedy.

David Duckenfield was the match-day commander at the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough ground on April 15, 1989.

Duckenfield, 74, has pleaded not guilty to 95 counts of gross negligence manslaughter following the fatal crush in the Leppings Lane end. The trial is taking place at Preston Crown Court in north-west England. The city is 25 miles (40 kilometres) from Liverpool.

There is no manslaughter charge over the death of a 96th casualty, Anthony Bland, as he died almost four years later, and under the law in 1989 his death is now "out of time" to be prosecuted.

Duckenfield sat next to co-defendant, former Sheffield Wednesday club secretary Graham Mackrell, who is charged with an offence involving the stadium safety certificate and a health and safety offence.

The trial began with the whittling down of 100 potential jurors to the final panel of 12, with candidates asked if they supported any of the clubs involved or knew either of the men on trial.

It is unknown how long the trial is expected to last.

Families of the Hillsborough victims fought a long campaign for events surrounding the disaster to be re-investigated, and around a dozen family members were in court for the start of proceedings.

The Crown Prosecution Service, England's state prosecutors, announced the decision to press charges in June 2017.

"We will allege that David Duckenfield's failures to discharge his personal responsibility were extraordinarily bad and contributed substantially to the deaths," the CPS said at the time.

(Source: AFP)

Gutsy Murray out of Australian Open after five-set epic

Gutsy Andy Murray fought to the end before losing an epic Australian Open farewell match 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (4/7) at the hands of Roberto Bautista Agut Monday.

The Scot, who said he will retire this season because of chronic hip pain, seemed finished at two sets and a break down to the 22nd seeded Spaniard in the first round but somehow battled back to force a fifth set.

"Amazing. That was incredible, thank you so so much to everyone that came out tonight," Murray said after being swept along on a wave of vociferous support.

"Honestly I've loved playing here over the years. If this was my last match, an amazing way to end. I gave everything I had and it wasn't enough tonight."

Murray announced at an emotional press conference on Friday that he would retire at Wimbledon this year, but conceded the Australian Open could be his last tournament, so great have been his injury problems.

But he seemed to have a change of heart after a match in which he showed his fighting spirit had not been diminished.

"Maybe I'll see you again," he said.

"I'll do everything possible to try. If I want to go again I'll need to have a big operation which there's no guarantees I'll come back



from. But I'll give it my best shot."

Murray had entered the packed Melbourne Arena to a huge ovation as Scottish Saltires and British Union flags were flown while one banner proclaimed: "There will only ever be one Andy Murray".

The outpouring of support seemed to lift him and despite grimacing with pain after some rallies he was nevertheless moving relatively freely as the Spaniard took the

opening set in 50 minutes.

The in-form Bautista Agut had beaten world number one Novak Djokovic on his way to winning the Qatar Open at the start of the month and he broke again for 4-2 in the second as a hampered Murray began to struggle.

■ **'Right, let's go'**

But Murray would not lie down. Watched by mum Judy Murray and brother Jamie

he pulled off some vintage magic to win the opening point of the third set with an outrageous half-volley lob over the advancing Spaniard, followed by a deft drop-volley winner at the net.

Bautista Agut broke for 2-1 and just as the end looked like it would come quickly, Murray dug deep and had the crowd on their feet after a winner down the line at the end of long rally to break back.

"Right, let's go," Murray shouted and held to love with an searing ace to nudge ahead 3-2 and bring another mighty roar from the crowd.

Murray forced a tiebreak and was never behind, securing it 7-5 with a scream of "come on" and a huge fist pump.

Suddenly the comeback was on.

The fourth set went with serve and Murray again prevailed in a tie-break on the fourth of his five set points -- but not before being interrupted as he served to stay in the match at 5-6 by fireworks going off at the nearby Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Once Bautista Agut broke in the fifth, Murray's resolve finally crumbled and the Spaniard took it 6-2. He will face unseeded Australian John Millman in the second round.

(Source: AFP)

'His goat-ness': Lionel Messi scores 400th league goal for Barcelona



He just can't stop scoring. He just can't stop setting new records.

Lionel Messi notched his 400th Spanish league goal in Sunday's game against Eibar to extend his record as La Liga's all-time top scorer. Those 400 goals have come in 435 matches -- an astonishing goal-to-game ratio.

Cristiano Ronaldo, who now plays for Juventus in Italy, is La Liga's second best scorer with 311 goals in 292 games while Spain's Telmo Zarra is third with 251 goals in 278 matches.

Barcelona's posted a tweet on the club's Twitter account with emojis of a crown and a goat, describing the Argentine as "His goat-ness."

Messi's landmark moment came when he notched Barca's second goal against Eibar at the Camp Nou, with Luis Suarez bagging a brace. "It would be an astonishing statistic if he were just a goal scorer, but he's so much more than that. We're blessed to live in his time," tweeted former Barcelona striker Gary Lineker.

Messi is the first player to score 400 times in any of Europe's "big five" leagues and given the Barca star is still only 31 years-old he's arguably got a reasonable chance of surpassing Josef Bican's record of 500 goals in the Czech league.

"His numbers are stratospheric, incredible," said Barcelona coach Ernesto

Valverde of Messi after the win over Eibar. "He is from another galaxy."

Messi ranked fifth in the Ballon d'Or vote in 2018, with Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric picking up the coveted award as well as the FIFA men's best player award for last year.

However, sports scientist Simon Brundish told CNN Sport on Friday that it was 'insanity' that there's even a debate as to who is currently the world's best player. "There's only one person. While he's alive, there's only Messi, there's no discussion," said Brundish.

"If you're saying anyone else, then Messi has had a broken leg for a year, or he is dead, or you are lying. It can't be true.

"Messi has currently a goal or assist every 48 minutes. A game typically lasts 95 minutes so that's almost two every single game. Last season it was 58 minutes.

"Normally you're doing well if you get a goal every two games."

Messi has finished as La Liga's top scorer five times and this season he's leading the goalscoring table with 17 league goals. Suarez is the second highest scorer with 14 goals.

The Argentine's first goal for Barca came on May 1 in 2005 against Albacete when he was aged just 17. His 400 goals have included 83 braces and 31 hat-tricks.

(Source: CNN)

Solskjaer basks in win against Spurs but has work to do at Man Utd

Manchester United's victory against Tottenham is a statement win for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer but the team's reliance on David de Gea's heroics in goal show the interim boss still has work to do.

Solskjaer had won all five of his games as interim United boss before Sunday's Premier League match at Wembley, seen as the first major test of his reign.

The Norwegian got his tactics spot on in the first half of a match billed as a face-off between the two favourites for the full-time job at Old Trafford, with Mauricio Pochettino in the opposition dugout.

Spurs dominated possession in the opening minutes but United's fleet-footed trio of Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard looked to counter-attack at every opportunity.

The approach paid off just before half-time when the impressive Paul Pogba delivered a raking cross-field ball for Rashford to run onto and the England man drove the ball emphatically past Hugo Lloris, leading to wild scenes of celebration on the bench.

But the second half was a different story as Spurs came forward in relentless waves, only to find De Gea in unbeatable form.

Former United defender Gary Neville hailed the impact his former Old Trafford teammate Solskjaer has had since he replaced the sacked Jose Mourinho last month.

"Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is picking the profile of player Manchester United need and that's players who have the energy to get from box to box quickly and counter-attack with quality," the Sky Sports pundit said on his podcast.

"You've seen that in the last few weeks. At Wembley,



it was the acid test. It was the moment where people said could he live in a big game and could he live against the big managers. Second half I thought it was about spirit, desire and hanging on a little bit. The players were playing for the manager."

■ **Solskjaer favourite?**

The hard-fought victory at Wembley certainly boosts Solskjaer's chances of staying at Old Trafford beyond the end of this season and some British bookmakers now make him the favourite ahead of Pochettino.

The Norwegian has done little wrong since he took over an unhappy club from Mourinho, reinvigorating Pogba and Rashford and tightening a leaky defence -- the clean sheet against Spurs was just United's fourth of the Premier League campaign.

Solskjaer hailed De Gea as "the best goalkeeper in the world" after the Spaniard's 11 saves and praised his defence but he acknowledged it was tough going after the break.

"Second half, we made hard work of it," he said. "Maybe because of ourselves they created many, many chances but first half I thought it was spot on."

The former United striker will not be happy at how many times the Spurs attack breached his defence and found themselves with only De Gea standing in their way.

Result aside, the Wembley match also showed Pochettino at his best, with his rejigged side cutting through United's backline at will in the second half.

"After four and a half years, the second half was the best performance I have seen Tottenham play," he said. "It was amazing. In football sometimes you deserves to win and don't and other times, you do not and you win. That is why we love football."

United are now level on points with fifth-placed Arsenal after trailing them by eight points when Solskjaer replaced Mourinho on December 19 and their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League is gathering pace.

Spurs remain in third place, nine points behind leaders Liverpool.

But Neville is warning the United hierarchy not to get carried away by one result.

"It's such a huge win for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and this group of Manchester United players," he said. "It feels like a million miles away from where this club was a month ago.

"Before the game, I said if Manchester United lost the game, the result should not determine the outcome of the next United manager. One thing I will say is because Manchester won, it shouldn't determine the outcome of the Manchester United manager."

(Source: France24)

Ghoddos not yet dreaming of glory despite flying start

Saman Ghoddos insists Iran are not allowing themselves to think of lifting the Asian Cup even after their sensational start to the tournament.

Carlos Queiroz's men - the highest-ranked of the 24 nations involved in the competition - face Iraq on Wednesday on the back of a 5-0 thrashing of Yemen and 2-0 win over Vietnam in their Group D fixtures.

Amiens forward Ghoddos rounded off the scoring in that rout as Iran delivered a performance to underline their credentials in many people's eyes as favorites to add to their three titles.

That trio of crowns arrived in successive tournaments in the 1960s and 70s, but Ghoddos believes it is far too early in this year's event to start dreaming of possible glory for the current generation.

"That's not a thought in our minds right now, because it's a long tournament and it's tough games," Ghoddos said.

"We're just looking forward to the next game, and right now that's Iraq. That's important for us, to just think about the next game and not think too many steps in front.

"To be honest I haven't watched the other games, just to keep focused on my own game, so I don't know the level yet.

"The coach and his team have analyzed them and we have watched some videos. It's a good team, all respect to them. However, we are going to play our game and we are not thinking so much about the other team."

Iran sit top of the table after beating Yemen 5-0 and Vietnam 2-0 in Group D. Iraq are second thanks to a 3-2 late win over Vietnam and 3-0 victory over Yemen.

Iran last won the Cup in 1976 and the Persians are looking forward to end their 43-year trophy drought in the UAE.

(Source: Besoccer)



Ravshan Irmatov to take charge of Iran, Iraq match



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Uzbek referee Ravshan Irmatov will officiate the match between Iran and Iraq in Group D of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. The match has been scheduled for Wednesday at the Al-Maktoum Stadium in Dubai, the UAE.

An international official since 2003, the 42-year-old ref has officiated in three World Cups in a row.

He was also involved in the London 2012 Olympics, the FIFA Club World

Cup on three occasions and the Confederations Cup.

Irmatov has been named the Best Referee in Asia in four consecutive years (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014).

Already-qualified Iran and Iraq, both on six points, will play for the chance to be group winners.

Iran lost to Iraqi team in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup quarterfinals in penalty shootout and look to avenge the loss after four years.

Team Melli members send condolences over Iran plane crash



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team players and coaching staff offered condolences over Monday's plane crash in Karaj, province of Alborz.

A Boeing 707 military cargo plane crashed in bad weather west of Tehran, killing 15 out of the 16 people on board.

A flight engineer survived and was taken to the hospital.

The plane took off from Bishkek Manas International Airport in Kyrgyzstan and

planned to land at Payam international airport, however, it was forced to make an emergency landing and crashed into a residential complex about 8.30 a.m. local time.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who lost their lives, and their families and friends suffering," Carlos Queiroz post on his Instagram account on behalf of Iran national football team.

Iran national football team currently are in the UAE for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

AFC Asian Cup 2019 Match Day 2: The Top 10

FOX Sports Asia football editor Gabriel Tan picks the ten best performers from Match Day 2 of the AFC Asian Cup 2019 group stage.

■ 1) Chanathip Songkrasin (Thailand)

After a woeful start, Thailand finally got up and running at AFC Asian Cup 2019 on Thursday with a 1-0 triumph over Bahrain.

As all good players tend to do, Chanathip Songkrasin rose to the occasion when his team needed him most with a fine display that culminated in him netting the only goal of the game in the 58th minute.

Making a late run into the box, the Consadole Sapporo playmaker was picked out by a right-wing delivery from Tristan Do and showed great technique to meet it with a cushioned volley on his weaker left foot into the roof of the net.

■ 2) Khalfan Mubarak (United Arab Emirates)

With star playmaker Omar Abdulrahman ruled out through injury, United Arab Emirates showed a distinctive lack of flair in their opening 1-1 draw against Bahrain.

However, they bounced back on Thursday with a 2-0 triumph over India and it was Khalfan Mubarak – the man who started the tournament with just five caps to his name – who rose to the occasion.

Despite starting out on the right, the 23-year-old regularly drifted infield to be his side's creative fulcrum and got them on their way with a well-taken goal in the 41st minute.

■ 3) Chris Ikonomidis (Australia)

As if things were not already bad enough for oft-criticised Australia forward Robbie Kruse as he was dropped for Friday's game against Palestine, it only got worse as he watched on from the bench as his replacement Chris Ikonomidis played a key role in helping the Socceroos to a much-needed 3-0 triumph.

The Perth Glory man played a glorious visionary pass for Awer Mabil to net the second of the game and repeated the trick again at the death to put a goal on a platter for substitute Apostolos Giannou.

With a crunch tie against Syria coming up on Tuesday, Australia coach Graham Arnold will now have the decide between the more-recognised Kruse or the in-form Ikonomidis, although it would not be too much of a surprise if he opts to keep his faith in the latter.

■ 4) Wu Lei (China PR)

Wu Lei finished 2018 by becoming the first local in 11 years to claim the Chinese Super League Golden Boot after a prolific 27-goal haul, and is showing no signs of letting up following a brace in China PR's 3-0 victory over Philippines.

He broke the deadlock in brilliant fashion as he received possession just inside the box before lofting a glorious shot into the far corner, and matched the feat in the second half by meeting Hao Junmin's freekick with a sumptuous first-time volley that had Michael Falkegaard beaten all ends up.



Wu may not be the archetypal No. 9 especially considering he has made much of his career as a wide forward but, with his skill, speed and finishing ability, the decision to deploy him as the main man of China's attack could just prove to be a masterstroke by Marcello Lippi.

■ 5) Sardar Azmoun (Iran)

Iran have made a storming start to the tournament with seven goals scored and none conceded in their opening two games, although they did meet some resistance against Vietnam on Saturday.

While Mehdi Taremi led the way in the opening 5-0 win over Yemen, it was Sardar Azmoun who stood tallest when the going got tough against a stubborn opposition defense.

He opened the scoring in the 38th minute when he was picked out at the far post by Saman Ghoddos' excellent cross and made no mistake in heading home, but his second was a piece of individual brilliance as he effortlessly barged off two defenders after receiving possession outside the box before neatly finishing past Dang Van Lam.

■ 6) Que Ngoc Hai (Vietnam)

Although he may have finished on the losing side, Que Ngoc Hai was able to walk out of the Al Nahyan Stadium with his head held high after a brave display which saw him lead Vietnam to conceding just two goals against a dominant Iran outfit.

Once a temperamental and inconsistent youngster, the defender has evolved into a real leader in the dressing room for coach Park Hang-seo and was never afraid to put his body on the line.

Vietnam can still dream of reaching the Round of 16 with victory over Yemen in their final Group D match and – in Ngoc Hai – they have the perfect man to rally the troops for the monumental tie.

■ 7) Bashar Resan (Iraq)

Just two matches into Asian Cup 2019, there has been no shortage of stars emerging for Iraq, including 18-year-old wonderkid Mohanad Ali, Serie A-based left-back Ali

Adnan, and playmaker Humam Tariq.

But, having identified a lack of energy in his engine room, Iraq coach Srecko Katanec introduced Bashar Resan to his starting XI against Yemen and it was a move which worked wonders.

The Persepolis man may have found the back of the net with a deflected strike, but it was his constant movement and distribution in helping link defence to attack that made him a standout.

■ 8) Hattan Bahebri (Saudi Arabia)

Saudi Arabia have been impressive so far putting a combined six goals past DPR Korea and Lebanon, but perhaps the most pleasing aspect for coach Juan Antonio Pizzi would have been the fact that the two victories have come as a result of well-rounded team performances rather than being inspired by an individual virtuoso display.

Nonetheless, if there was really one player that has to be singled out, it would arguably be Hattan Bahebri.

Having been one of the Green Falcons' few positives from the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Hattan has now been handed a starting role and has not looked out of place as part of a fluid front three with Salem Al-Dawsari and Fahad Al-Muwallad, weighing in with an assist for Housain Al-Mogahwi on Saturday after some nifty footwork.

■ 9) Almoez Ali (Qatar)

Almoez Ali became only the fifth player in Asian Cup history to net four goals in a game, putting on a masterclass in finishing as Qatar thrashed DPR Korea 6-0 on Sunday.

He was aided by some woeful defending from the North Koreans but that should not take nothing away from his dominant display in the final third, highlighted by a cheeky back-flick at the near post for his second goal after just 11 minutes.

Almoez, who only turns 23 in August, has spent time in Europe and – although he seems to be enjoying life back in Qatar with giants Al Duhail – could just be ready to try his luck once more in Europe, where he should have no shortage of suitors once the Asian Cup comes to a close.

■ 10) Eldor Shomurodov (Uzbekistan)

Standing at 1.9-metres tall, Eldor Shomurodov provides the perfect focal point for a Uzbekistan side that like to attack down the wings before playing crosses into the box.

The FC Rostov man initially had to bide his time but came off the bench to score an 85th-minute winner against Oman, which earned him a place in the starting XI on Sunday at the expense of Marat Bikmaev.

And Shomurodov took his chance with both hands as he proved to be a real nightmare for the Turkmenistan defence, netting two goals to help the White Wolves to a 4-0 rout that saw them overtake Japan in top spot in Group F.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Iran's Saeid Mollaei joins Hamburger Judo Team

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian judo practitioner Saeid Mollaei has joined Hamburger Judo Team.

Mollaei will represent the German club at the Deutscher Judo-Bund.

The 27-year-old judoka competed at the 2016 Summer Olympics in the men's 81 kg event, but was eliminated in the first bout by Russian judoka Khasan Magometovich Khalmurzaev.

Mollaei is the current World Championships gold medalist and also a bronze medalist from 2017.

The judo practitioner claimed a gold medal at the 2018 World Championships in Baku in September after defeating Japan's Sotaro Fujiwara in the men's -81kg final.

He delivered Iran's first judo world title in 15 years.

Mollaei also won two bronze medals at the 2015 and 2016 Asian Championships and silver medal at the 2017 editions.

Jorge Fossati to replace Carlos Queiroz in Team Melli: report

Uruguayan coach Jorge Fossati will reportedly replace Carlos Queiroz in Iran national football team.

Queiroz will leave Team Melli after the 2019 AFC Asian Cup to take charge of Colombia and the Iranian federation is going to sign Fossati as the Portuguese's successor.

The former Uruguayan footballer and coach has most recently coached Qatar national football team.

The 66-year-old coach started his coaching career at River Plate Montevideo in 1993 and has also led Al-Sadd, LDU Quito, Cerro Porteno, Peñarol and Al Rayyan.

Carlos Queiroz had been already linked with a move to South Africa, Egypt, Mexico, and Algeria but has stayed in Iran.

(Source: Gol.caracoltv.com)

Esteghlal to play Neftchi Baku in Antalya

TASNIM — Esteghlal will reportedly play a friendly match with Neftchi Baku in their training camp in Antalya, Turkey.

Neftchi, who are Azerbaijan Premier League leader, are also holding a camp in Antalya.

The exact time of the match has not been yet revealed. Esteghlal archrivals Persepolis will also play Al Shahaniyah of Qatar on January 18 in Doha training camp.

Persepolis defeated Belgium First Division A KAS Eupen 2-1 in a friendly match on Sunday.

Esteghlal and Persepolis are preparing for the 2019 AFC Champions League.

Son arrives in Dubai to play for South Korea at Asian Cup

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Son Heung-min has arrived at the Asian Cup after missing South Korea's first two games while playing for Premier League club Tottenham.

The attacking midfielder posed for selfies and signed a jersey at the airport in Dubai a day after playing in Tottenham's 1-0 loss to Manchester United on Sunday in London.

South Korea has already qualified for the last 16 and Son could play in the final Group C match on Wednesday against China with both sides chasing first place.

It is Son's third international tournament in less than a year.

After playing at the World Cup, Son missed the first part of the English season while playing for South Korea at the Asian Games. He led the team to the title, securing exemption from military service.

Andy Murray: Wheelchair tennis pays tribute

The tennis world was shocked to hear British legend Andy Murray announce his retirement from competitive sport at a press conference prior to the 2019 Australian Open.

The former world No. 1 and two-time Olympic gold medalist later lost to Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut in the first round of the Grand Slam in which could possibly be his last match as a professional.

Wheelchair tennis players Gordon Reid and Gustavo Fernandez expressed their surprise and sadness that Murray will have to retire due to a chronic hip injury.

Speaking to BBC Radio Scotland, Paralympic champion Reid said: "He doesn't want to end his career short; it's difficult to see him going through that much pain."

"Andy's somebody who will always be able to say that he's done absolutely everything and turned every stone to try and prolong his career."

"It's somebody who's having something thrust upon him, forced upon him."

"He's not somebody that will go out with regrets thinking 'I wish I'd done that' and 'I wish I'd done a little bit different'."

"But obviously it's still really difficult and horrible for him, and I think everybody in tennis [is] going to miss him."

Latin America's first world No. 1 Fernandez added: "He is one of the players I enjoyed the most watching. A fighter and one of the most ferocious and toughest competitors of all."

"He (Murray) has an impressive mental clarity for playing. Those of us who love tennis wish him the best of the best in whatever he does."



(Source: Paralympic.org)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Fear is close to despair, and bashfulness is akin to privation. Opportunity passes quickly like a cloud, so make use of the right ones.

Imam Ali (AS)

Kermanshah exhibit explores history of ties between UN, Iran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – An exhibition of photos and documents featuring major events occurring over 73 years of relations between Iran and the United Nations opened on Monday at a complex in the western Iranian city of Kermanshah.



Maria Dotsenko (2nd R), director of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Tehran, cuts the ribbon to launch an exhibition of photos and documents on Iran-UN relations at the Shahid Avini Complex in Kermanshah on January 14, 2019. (IRNA)

Tehran and the northwestern city of Tabriz were the previous hosts of the exhibit in 2016 and 2018 respectively.

Maria Dotsenko, director of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Tehran, and a number of Kermanshah provincial officials attended the opening ceremony of the showcase, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Monday.

Dotsenko asked visitors to invite their families and friends to visit the exhibit.

The Tehran branch of UNIC has selected the photos for the exhibition in collaboration with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA).

Among the highlights are the photos of seven UN secretary generals who have visited Iran, as well as a selection of projects implemented by the UN in Iran.

Also included are photos related to the negotiations over the Security Council Resolution 598, which was approved by Iran.

The exhibit will be running until January 20 at the Shahid Avini complex.

FIAP execs on mental health photography exhibit jury

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Riccardo Busi, the president of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP), and his assistant, Freddy Van Gilbergen, are among the jury members of the 5th Mental Health International Exhibition of Photography, the organizers announced on Monday.



A poster for the 5th Mental Health International Exhibition of Photography.

Iranian photographers Kiarang Alaei, Ebrahim Bahrami and Nasser Mohammadi are the other members of the jury.

The 5th Mental Health International Exhibition of Photography will be held in the two categories of open and mental health in Zanjan from April 3 to 10.

The event is organized by the Zanjan University of Medical Sciences and Health Services in collaboration with the Focus Photo Club, Iran's branch of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP).

“Game of Thrones” final season to debut on April 14

NEW YORK (AP) — “Game of Thrones” fans, get ready.

HBO announced Sunday night that the eighth and final season will begin on April 14. In a one minute and 44 second teaser released Sunday, Arya Stark (Maisie Williams), Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) and Jon Snow (Kit Harington) are seen in the crypts of Winterfell.

Fans have eagerly awaited the six-episode finale of the show since Season 7 of the popular HBO show ended in August 2017.

The fantasy series based on the George R.R. Martin novels has been one of HBO's most successful shows.

HBO isn't getting out of the “Game of Thrones” business. A prequel created by Martin and writer-producer Jane Goldman is underway, with Naomi Watts set to star, and other spinoffs are possible.

Iranian studio makes native version of “Ganbare, Kickers!”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Rezwan Animation Studio based in Tehran has produced an Iranian version of the popular Japanese animated series “Ganbare, Kickers!”.

The first season of the series titled “The Golden Foot” is composed of 13 seven-minute episodes, the director of the Studio, Asadollah Dianati, who is also the producer of the series, said in a press release on Monday.

The series targeting adolescents has been produced to promote manliness of spirit and ethics in sport, he added.

Directed by Noruz Abbasi, “The Golden Foot” is about Salman, a teenage Iranian soccer player who is employed by the Portuguese ambassador to teach his son, Roberto, Persian. Roberto realizes that there is a local football league in Tehran and suggests that a team composed of foreign envoys' children play with a team of top Iranian teenage soccer players in a charity match.

“The animation also promotes peace and friendship among various cultures and nations,” Dianati said.

A team of outstanding Iranian voice actors directed by Hojjat Shokar has given voice to characters in “The Golden Foot”. The group had lent their voices to the characters in “Ganbare, Kickers!”, which was broadcast several times on Iranian TV.



“The Golden Feet” by Noruz Abbasi from the Rezwan Animation Studio.

Tehran conference to discuss effects of art, peace on sustainable development



A poster for the Art, Peace and Sustainable Development Conference.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The effects of art and peace on sustainable development will be discussed during a conference, which will open at the Qasr Museum Garden in Tehran on Thursday.

The Art, Peace and Sustainable Development Conference will be organized by the Honarnamay-e Aban Art and Cultural Institute in collaboration with the Art and Cultural Organization of the Tehran Municipality, ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), United Nations Information Centre in Iran and the Embassy of the Netherlands.

Dutch Ambassador Jacques Louis

Werner, UNIC officer Maria Dotsenko, ECI director Mohammad-Mehdi Mazaheri and a number of cultural officials and art students are scheduled to attend the opening ceremony of the conference.

A number of sessions and workshops will be also organized during the conference.

A multimedia exhibition displaying photos, graphic designs, paintings and sculptures by Iranian artists on the theme of peace, will also be held on the sidelines of the event.

The exhibit will run until January 23 at the museum located on Motahhari St. near Police Square.

University teacher laments inadequacy in academic art books

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – University teacher Bijan Ghonchehpour has said that academic art books lack efficiency and that appropriate programs are needed to raise academic standards at Iranian art universities.

“What is taught at the universities to art students is not productive enough and does not meet the needs of the students at the current time,” he told the Persian service of ISNA.

“The main issue for the students studying professional art courses is that their books were composed many years ago in the early years of the Islamic Revolution (1979) and have lost their academic value for the art of today,” Chonchehpour, who teaches sculpture to art students, explained.

“After the revolution, art courses were not taught for several years, and when the decision was made to reopen the art universities and resume teaching art, the



An art aficionado visits an exhibition of paintings by Reza Alizadeh named “Bubble” at the Sayeh Gallery on January 14, 2019. (Honaronline/Sharareh Samei)

Maroon 5 to play Super Bowl halftime show

ATLANTA (Reuters) — Pop band Maroon 5 will provide the halftime entertainment at next month's Super Bowl in Atlanta in a show that will also feature rappers Travis Scott and Big Boi, the National Football League said on Sunday.

Maroon 5, a three-times Grammy-winning group led by Adam Levine, will be joined by rising star Scott and Atlanta, Georgia native Big Boi, who was previously one half of rap group Outcast.

The Pepsi-sponsored show will feature “the broadest range of musical genres ever seen on the Super Bowl stage”, the NFL said.

Levine on Sunday Tweeted a video showing the band preparing to go on stage. It also featured images of Scott and Big Boi.

U.S. media reported in October that Pop superstar Rihanna declined an offer to headline the show because she supported former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and his protest against racial injustice.

The annual Super Bowl halftime show is one of the most high-profile entertainment events in the United States, drawing tens of millions of television viewers.

Previous performers have included Beyonce, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen and Prince.

The 2018 Super Bowl when Justin Timberlake performed at halftime was watched by a television audience of 103 million, the biggest by far for any TV event in the United States.

Fajr Film Festival announces jury for New Look section



This combination photo shows the jury members for the New Look section at the 37th Fajr Film Festival.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The organizers of the 37th Fajr Film Festival announced the jury for the New Look section on Monday.

The jury includes filmmakers Maziar Miri, Saeid Soheili and Aida Panahandeh. Author Habib Ahmadzadeh and film producer Mohammad Afarideh are other members of the jury.

Ten directorial debut feature films will premiere in the New Look section as well as five documentaries and four short films.

“Polo Coat” by Mehdi Alimirzai, “Gold Carrier” by Turaj Aslani, “Orange Days” by

Arash Lahuti, “The Clown” by Homayun Ghanizadeh and “Tsunami” by Milad Sadr-Ameli are among the feature films.

The lineup also includes documentaries “A House for You” by Mehdi Bakhshi Moqadam, “Beloved” by Yasser Talebi, “Copper Notes of a Dream” by Reza Farahmand and short films such as “S” by Hamed Aslani, “Bitter Sea” by Fatemeh Ahmadi and “Fault” by Soheil Amir-Sharifi.

The 37th Fajr Film Festival will take place in Tehran and several other Iranian cities from January 30 to February 11.

books and the texts were compiled based on the social conditions of the early years of the revolution. However, we have gone past all those years and that information is inadequate now,” he explained.

“The result is that the universities have fallen behind the art galleries and art festivals. If the books meet international standards and are revised as contemporary art changes, this widespread discontent of art students would disappear,” he remarked.

The old books bring professors with knowledge that is not up-to-date to the universities, he noted.

“After graduation, the students find out that none of their studies and the knowledge has been useful for them,” he said.

He also proposed that art colleges should be gathered in one location so that all art students would have more interactions.

“Roma” tops Critics’ Choice Awards; a tie for Gaga and Close

ANTAMONICA, Calif. (AP) — “Roma” is the top winner at the Critics' Choice Awards, winning best picture, foreign language film and a pair of individual honors for director Alfonso Cuaron.

The 24th annual ceremony held Sunday at Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, California, also split the top actress award between Glenn Close for “The Wife” and Lady Gaga for “A Star Is Born.” The split win comes a week after Close won the Golden Globe Award for best actress in a film drama, an award that many expected Lady Gaga would win.

“The Americans” and “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” tied for top television winners with three apiece. “Maisel” won the top comedy

honor for the second year in a row, and series star Rachel Brosnahan also was a repeat winner for best actress in a comedy series.

“Black Panther” and “Vice” each won three awards, including a pair of acting honors for Christian Bale for his portrayal of former Vice President Dick Cheney.

The best actress prize wasn't the only award that resulted in a tie: Amy Adams and Patricia Arquette split the best actress in a limited series or movie made for television honor.

Elsie Fisher won the best new actress honor for her breakthrough role in “Eighth Grade.”

The show was broadcast live on the CW network and hosted by Taye Diggs.