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Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) shakes hands with Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in Erbil on Tuesday, 15 January, 2019.

Japan banks set to resume Iran oil transactions after regulatory clearance

Major Japanese banks are set to resume Iranian oil transactions after receiving final regulatory clearance, paving the way for the country's refiners to begin loadings as early as this month, sources with direct knowledge of the matter told S&P Global Platts Tuesday.

The Japanese banks will be able to issue letters of credit for relevant deals

after the clearance from the Japanese and U.S. regulatory authorities, one of the sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said.

These banks are expected to accept payment by Japanese refiners for importing Iranian barrels mainly in yen, the source added. One of the Japanese banks declined to comment Tuesday. **→4**

Human resources main element for wealth creation: VP

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Human resources is the most important element in the country which can create wealth, vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari said during his speech at the 24th Razi Research Festival on Medical Science, which was held in Tehran on Sunday.

He called science and technology fields as wealth creating ones, which are great for investment, Mehr reported.

"Biotechnology is more profitable in comparison to IT. The vice presidency plans for producing over 60 medicines and 8 types of vaccines during past three to four months," he announced.

He lamented bureaucratic procedures saying that although procedures for medical equipment and medicine is a difficult one in all parts of the world, the government should facilitate administrative producers for entrepreneurs. **→10**

PMU stops U.S. recon mission on Syria border

Iraqi pro-government fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/Hashd al-Sha'abi) have stopped a "suspicion reconnaissance mission" by the United States military forces to collect critical information about the movements and positions of the voluntary forces in the country's western province of Anbar and on the border with crisis-hit Syria.

Commander of the PMU volunteer forces in Western Anbar, Qassim Mosleh, told the Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network on Tuesday that the U.S. action amounts to the violation of the Iraqi sovereignty, and could have seriously endangered Iraqi border troops by exposing their deployments and arms depots to terrorist groups. **→13**



PERSPECTIVE

M.A. Saki
Deputy editor-in-chief

Pompeo is the wrong man for his post

It is hard to comprehend that a person like Mike Pompeo is the chief diplomat of an important country like the United States. His career is alien to diplomacy.

Diplomacy brings to mind the profession of bringing ideas close together and resolving disputes between countries. The person credited with the post of diplomat should adopt an insightful and wise approach. But Pompeo acts the opposite.

In his speech at the Heritage Foundation on May 12, 2018, he laid out 12 conditions for Iran that were somehow viewed as a declaration of war rather than a policy approach. He said Iran must do this, must do that or else...

Also, in a speech in Brussels on December 4, Pompeo criticized the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of American States and the African Union. He put under question the efficacy of these institutions.

Possibly, Pompeo should not be much different from his boss Donald Trump, who is on the wrong side of the history and is undermining international order through his actions and remarks.

A diplomat must be a fixer of global problems. However, Pompeo is a breaker. Instead of healing the rifts, Pompeo divides nations.

Just recently the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell, who acts under the leadership of Pompeo, threatened that the U.S. would sanction Germany if Berlin doesn't stop supporting the Nordstream II, a gas pipeline from Russia to Germany now under construction.

Pompeo and his boss are against any move, treaty or economic project that can help reduce tension or foster tension between countries.

In general, Trump and his soldiers like Pompeo and John Bolton are envious of countries like Russia, China, Germany, France, Iran, etc. They see them as countries that challenge the U.S. unilateralism and its military and economic power.

Pompeo's language is so undiplomatic that he even cannot choose vague words for his ill will. In an interview with the BBC Persian in November last year, he said Iran must listen to U.S. "if they want their people to eat". It seems he enjoys to say things that enrage and frighten ordinary people. **→2**

Russia interfered in U.S. elections to get Trump elected: Askari

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Mohammad Ghaderi & Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Hossein Askari, an expert on Saudi Arabia who also teaches international business at the George Washington University, believes that "Trump has had business dealings with the Russians for many years. They have helped him."

"He is indebted to them and they have some compromising business information on him," Hossein Askari, who served as special advisor to Saudi finance minister, tells the Tehran Times.

He adds that "They have interfered in the U.S. elections to get him elected with the hope and expectation that they could control him to help

Russian interests—to divide Americans, destroy U.S. global leadership and fracture NATO."

Following is the text of the interview:

Q: Should we think of Russia collusion case as a mere political plot to destroy Trump or is Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections a fact?

A: We don't have all the facts for a definitive answer. But here is what I think or my best guess. I think that Trump has had business dealings with the Russians for many years. They have helped him. He is indebted to them and they have some compromising business information on him. They have interfered in the U.S. elections to get him elected with the hope and expectation that they could control him to help Russian interests—to divide Americans, destroy U.S. global leadership

and fracture NATO.

Q: Robert Mueller is a Republican. So his defiance against Trump might show that disaster is even beyond the imagination. What's your opinion on this?

A: Yes, Mueller is a Republican. But he is respected by Democrats as well as Republicans. His career has been exemplary. With this stature, it is hard for people to call him partisan. He is just a great public servant. No matter if he is investigating a Democrat or a Republican. I believe after all is said and done, one person will emerge as a hero—Mueller. He is dedicated, principled and truthful. Trump calls everyone who disagrees with him a liar, but ironically he is the biggest liar that I have ever seen in public office anywhere in the world. **→7**

Trump, Erdogan talk Syria 'safe zone' amid war of words over Kurdish militants

The United States President Donald Trump has held talks with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the establishment of a militant-free safe zone in northern Syria, shortly after he threatened to "devastate" NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally Turkey economically if it attacks Kurdish militants following Washington's military withdrawal from the state.

The Turkish presidency said in a statement that the two sides had "discussed the idea of creating a security zone cleared of terrorism in the north of the country" during a phone conversation on Monday.

The phone call came amid a war of words between Ankara and Washington over the fate of the Washington-backed Kurdish militants in Syria following the planned withdrawal of American troops. Turkey views those militants as terrorists.

Trump threatened to devastate Turkey's economy if it launches attacks against the Kurdish militants in Syria when the U.S. troops leave.

In response, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stressed that Turkey is "not scared of and will not be intimidated" by such rhetoric and that economic threats "will get nowhere."

Elsewhere in its statement, the Turkish presidency said Erdogan had told Trump that he had no problem with the Kurdish people in Syria, and that Ankara was only seeking to fight the armed groups there that threaten its national security.

Trump later tweeted about the call, saying he had spoken to Erdogan on issues such as a "20-mile safe zone" and "economic development between the U.S. and Turkey."

"The president expressed the desire to work together to address Turkey's security concerns in

northeast Syria while stressing the importance to the United States that Turkey does not mistreat the Kurds," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said.

Trump announced the plan to pull the U.S. forces out of Syria last month amid plans by Turkey to launch an operation against anti-Damascus Kurdish militants.

The Kurdish militants in northern Syria, who have long enjoyed the U.S. support, feel abandoned by Washington.

Erdogan: Turkey to set up 'security zone' in Syria

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country would set up a security zone in northern Syria as suggested by the U.S. President Donald Trump as both leaders sought to ease growing tensions. **→13**



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IRGC inaugurates 5,400 projects in underprivileged areas

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) inaugurated some 5,400 projects implemented in underprivileged areas across the country, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

Aboulqasem Mansouri, an official with IRGC, said that the projects include building and rebuilding housing units, building bridges and roads in villages, providing electricity access to remote areas, building schools and mosques, dredging qanats and rivers, developing fish farming pools and poultry breeding farms, developing greenhouses and supplying water to some villages. **→12**



ARTICLE

Masoud Hosseini
Head of the Sport Desk of the Tehran Times

Iran football federation seems blind to some rules

It would be odd to negotiate coaching a team while you are still under contract with another, but that seems to be the case for the Iran football federation and Team Melli coach Carlos Queiroz.

The Colombian media reports suggest that the South American federation has reached an initial agreement with Iran's current coach Queiroz. The Portuguese coach needs concentration to bring an end to the country's 43-year title drought in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

The time is ripe for Iran to win the title after more than four decades, because Team Melli has the advantage of a "golden generation". However, many obstacles still lie ahead.

Football rules and regulations are quite clear; you are not supposed to discuss new opportunities with other teams while you are still committed to your current team.

Take Spain's coach Julen Lopetegui, for example. He was sacked just two days before their opening the FIFA 2018 World Cup game against Portugal since he had agreed to take over at Real Madrid after the World Cup.

The Spanish football federation terminated Lopetegui's contract as a matter of principle.

Another instance is Sven-Goran Eriksson, who lost his job as England's coach after the Swede negotiated with 'Fake Sheikh' Mazher Mahmood over a new post in 2006. Mahmood posed as a wealthy Arab businessman interested in investing in football and held two meetings with Eriksson.

In the resulting story in the News of the World, Eriksson was reported saying he would quit England if they won the 2006 World Cup, and that he would consider becoming Aston Villa coach if the 'Sheikh' bought the club.

The Iranian federation's silence over this situation could break Team Melli's focus and spirit during the AFC Asian Cup.

All national coaches who are under contract with the countries' federations are not allowed to break the football rules, and there is no exception. Queiroz, just like other coaches, can hold negotiation with any other teams but after the Asian Cup ends.

On top of that what remains puzzling is the Iranian football federation has turned a blind eye to Queiroz negotiation with the Colombian team, prior to his tenure in Iran.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader calls for full probe into cargo plane crash

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Tuesday offered his condolences over the crash of a cargo plane in Iran's northern city of Karaj, west of Tehran, and urged the relevant authorities to fully examine the incident. "It is imperative that the relevant authorities, with a full probe into this tragic incident, identify and pursue (elimination of) the weaknesses, gaps and possible flaws," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a message, Tasnim reported.

He also described the crash as "a bitter and unfortunate incident". The Boeing 707, a four-engine jet airliner built by Boeing Commercial Airplanes and in possession of the Iranian Army, crashed during emergency landing in Alborz province, on Monday.



Erdogan says plans to meet with Putin, Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday he plans to meet with his Russian and Iranian counterparts, Vladimir Putin and Hassan Rouhani, TASS reported.

"I am highly likely to meet with Putin on Wednesday, January 23," Erdogan said, adding that "a trilateral meeting with [President] Rouhani and Putin is on the agenda."

On January 10, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that there were plans to hold a Turkish-Russian-Iranian summit on Syria in the coming weeks. He pointed out that a meeting between the presidents of Turkey and Russia was expected to take place in near future.



IRGC chief: Iran in economic war with enemy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Mohammad Ali Jafari on Tuesday highlighted reasons behind financial problems facing the country, saying the Islamic Republic is in an economic war with the enemy.

"If we rely on our own resources and indigenous Iranian and Islamic methods, we can resolve the problems much better than the present situation," Major General Jafari said in a speech, Tasnim reported.

In the 40th year after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and despite all these hostilities and attempts by the enemies to create problems for the country, Iran is resisting the problems unitedly, he added.



14 arrested in paper import cases

POLITICS TEHRAN — Tehran Prosecutor Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi says 14 people have been arrested in cases related to paper import, while three of the main culprits have fled abroad.

With regard to the issue of paper, there are two cases, Jafari Dolatabadi said, adding that one group received foreign currency at a lower exchange rate from the government for paper import but exchanged the currency in the market and did not import paper.

The second group, according to the prosecutor, imported paper but sold the imports at a higher price, which worsened the issue of paper.



Iran-Tajikistan cooperation essential to fighting terrorism: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN — Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, an Iranian MP and head of the Iran-Tajikistan parliamentary friendship group, said on Tuesday that Iran-Tajikistan cooperation is essential to fight terrorism.

During a meeting with Tajik Ambassador to Tehran Emomzoda Nematullo, Rahimi Jahanabadi said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran paid a high price in fighting terrorism in the region, however, unfortunately, certain Hebrew-Arab countries, because of their own regional benefits, seek to pretend that Iran is behind extremist movements."

Pointing to commonalities between the two countries, he said, "There are capacities of cooperation in various spheres between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Tajikistan."

The Tajik ambassador described the relations as "good" and "friendly". Nematullo said, "Deep historic and cultural affinities between the two countries will result in boosting ties."

Pompeo is the wrong man for his post

1 → And while Iran is repeatedly saying that it is ready to offer "hand of friendship" toward its Arab neighbors on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, Pompeo is currently visiting one Arab country after another to mobilize them against Iran.

He is particularly pressing Qatar to join Saudi Arabia in animosity against Iran, ignoring the fact that it was Iran which opened its arms to Qatar when it was surrounded from land, sea and air by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in June 2017.

Pompeo's anti-Iran tour doomed to failure: Rouhani

"U.S. seeking to build a wall around Iran"



POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's anti-Iran Middle East tour is doomed to failure, no matter how long it lasts, Mehr reported.

Speaking at a meeting of the administrative council of Golestan Province, Rouhani said while the country is not experiencing normal conditions, "we do not fear sanctions, we do not retreat and abandon our goals."

U.S. President Donald Trump is seeking to drive a wedge between the Iranian people and the government "so that we abandon our independence and be isolated, but he didn't succeed and will not be successful in the future," he said.

What the U.S. is seeking by bringing up negotiations is to force Iran to abandon its nuclear technology, the President stated, adding that Iran is still making progress in the nuclear field despite the sanctions.

Warning that the U.S. is seeking to build a wall around Iran, Rouhani said, "It is not

possible for the U.S. to do this and Iran will never be isolated."

There are only a few countries across the globe that are supporting Washington's move

with regard to the 2015 nuclear agreement and sanctions against Iran, he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani pointed out that Washington aims to decrease the role of Iran in the region "so that we cannot be among the leading and influential countries in this region."

"The U.S. wants Iran to leave the scene so it can take charge of everything. This is not achievable," he asserted.

He pointed to Yemen, Syria and Iraq as countries in which the United States failed to achieve its goals. "What happened in these countries was completely different from what they thought."

The Americans have spent money and used advanced military equipment to achieve their objectives in Yemen, but today they admit to their defeat and acknowledge that this conflict has no military solution, Rouhani remarked.

"The Americans should be held accountable for the disasters they have caused in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere," he added.

Diplomat says terrorism is an international challenge

POLITICS TEHRAN — Kazem Gharib Abadi, Iran's representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that terrorism is a serious challenge to the international community.

"Terrorism is a serious challenge to the whole international community whose consequences and dangers are extra-regional," he tweeted on Tuesday.

He described terrorism as "one of the most fundamental problems of the international community and the most dangerous threat against the nations' rights and international stability".

He noted that Iran supports any action in line with fighting terrorism.

Pointing to Mujahedin Khalq Organization's activities in certain Western countries, he said that the MKO terrorists' presence in

Western countries show double standards in countering terrorism.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted on January 10, "Europeans, incl Denmark, Holland & France, harbor MEK—who killed 12000 Iranians & abetted Saddam's crimes against Iraqi Kurds—as well as other terrorists staging murder of innocent Iranians from Europe. Accusing Iran won't absolve Europe of responsibility for harboring terrorists."

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

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

'Poland's hosting anti-Iran conference an insult to Europe'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Kamal Kharrazi, head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, said on Tuesday that Poland's action in hosting a U.S.-led anti-Iran conference is an insult to the Europeans' identity.

"The U.S. is taking Poland's national interests hostage by holding this political show and this action of Poland is an insult to the European identity and European nations," he said during a meeting with a Norwegian academic delegation.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Fox News in an interview aired on Friday that Washington will jointly host a global summit focused on Iran and the Middle East next month in Poland.

The gathering will take place in Warsaw from February 13 to 14, the U.S. State Department said in a statement.



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

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned Polish charge d'affaires to Tehran to protest Poland's bid to co-host an anti-Iran conference in Warsaw.

Tehran, Erbil stress friendly bonds

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday made a tour of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq to review and reiterate close ties between the Islamic Republic and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

In his meeting with Zarif, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani praised Iran's support for the Iraqi Kurdish people during attacks by the Daesh terrorist group and said the Kurds will never forget Tehran's backing.

Barzani described bilateral relations between Tehran and the KRG as very significant and called for closer cooperation in various areas, including economy and trade.

Barzani further pointed to Iran's support for Kurds during the Daesh terrorists' invasion of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, saying that the people of Kurdistan will never forget the support.

Zarif, for his part, hailed the ties between Iran and the Republic of Iraq as well as the KRG as "age-old, outstanding, and constructive" and said the trade relations are expanding.

Heading a high-ranking political and economic delegation, Zarif arrived in Erbil this morning after visiting the Iraqi capital of Baghdad and meeting with top officials of the Arab country.

Daesh militants made swift advances in much of northern and western Iraq over the summer of 2014, after capturing large swaths of northern Syria.

However, a combination of concentrated attacks by the Iraqi military and the volunteer forces, who rushed to take arms after top Iraqi cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a fatwa calling for fight against the militants, led to the collapse of the Daesh.

In November 2017, the self-proclaimed caliphate of Daesh collapsed after Syrian and Iraqi armed forces and their allies managed to recapture the terror group's last strongholds in the two Arab countries.

Later the day, Zarif met with Leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Masoud Barzani.

Zarif also addressed a gathering of business people from both Iran and the Iraqi region in Erbil on Tuesday, calling for stronger ties.

He praised the brotherly and historical relations between the two sides and called for closer Tehran-Erbil cooperation.

The Iranian foreign minister further said that the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran would fail to affect and hamper Iran's relations with Iraq's Kurdistan region.

"Sanctions will fail to create an obstacle in the way of expanding economic ties between Iran and Iraq," he said, adding that Iran was "a highly reliable partner" for all of its friends, "particularly Iraq's Kurdistan region."

Zarif also said that the security of the Islamic Republic is intertwined with and "inseparable from" that of Kurdistan, expressing support for the central government in Baghdad as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Speaking on the sidelines of the economic forum, Barzani hailed Zarif's visit as an indication of the "deep-rooted and good relations" between Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan.

He further praised Iran's support for the Kurds when the Takfiri Daesh terrorists were wreaking havoc in the region.

Dara Jalil Khayat, the chairman of the Kurdistan Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, who also attended the economic forum, put the volume of trade exchanges between Tehran and Erbil at \$6 billion, expressing hope for the expansion of economic ties between the two sides.

He further said that a joint committee would be established to deal with the existing economic problems.

Zarif, in a tweet on Tuesday, highlighted the positive outcomes of the Iran-Iraq Joint Trade Conference in Baghdad and said the doubling of the bilateral trade "is on the horizon".

"Today, I, accompanied by 6 Iraqi ministers, addressed

hundreds of participants at the Iran-Iraq Joint Trade Conference; exploring paths to significantly expand bilateral trade and investment," Zarif wrote.

"With implementation of shared vision, doubling of annual trade volume is on the horizon," he added in his tweet.

On Monday, the Iranian top diplomat met in Baghdad with Iraq's President Barham Salih and exchanged views about a range of issues, including regional developments, and voiced his country's willingness to enhance its relations with Iran.

In the meeting, Salih stressed the need to pursue political solutions to all regional problems, the Iraqi president's office said in a statement.

Salih further highlighted the importance of bilateral relations between Tehran and Baghdad and voiced his country's willingness to boost the ties.

He emphasized that closer bilateral relations not only serve both nations but also serve the security and stability of the entire region, according to the statement.

Iraq's foreign minister said recently that his country is "not obliged" to abide by sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Iran and would be pursuing options to continue bilateral trade. On December 20, the U.S. granted Baghdad a 90-day extension to a waiver on abiding by the sanctions that were re-imposed on the Islamic Republic in November.

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

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

"These sanctions, the siege, or what is called the embargo, these are unilateral, not international. We are not obliged (to follow) them," he said, speaking to a gathering of journalists on January 3.

Officials call for closer Tehran-Damascus ties

POLITICS TEHRAN — The chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee and Syrian President Bashar Assad in a Monday meeting underlined the importance of enhanced ties between the two countries.

Assad and Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh affirmed the two countries' determination to continue to develop their bilateral ties and serve the interests of their nations in the fields of economy and politics, Tasnim news agency reported.

"The relationship between Damascus and Tehran has been based on principles, morals, and respect for the will of the peoples to determine their fate and build their future away from any external interference, and this approach contributed to the independence of the two countries," Assad said.

The Syrian president stressed the need for enhancing the ties between the two nations.

Falahatpisheh, for his part, emphasized the importance of closer bilateral ties.

He further slammed certain countries for "seeking to use terrorism as an instrument and imposing sanctions on other countries to achieve their interests in the region".

The senior Iranian lawmaker also sat down with Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem on Monday.

The two sides expressed their will to enhance and develop the mutual ties at various fields, including parliamentary relations.

The two sides also exchanged views about the latest developments in the region.

In his third meeting, Falahatpisheh held talks with Syria's parliament speaker Hammoudeh Sabbagh. Sabbagh described Iran as Syria's main partner that helped the Arab country in fighting terrorist groups.

For his turn, the Iranian MP said, "Iran will continue to support Syria until its final victory against terrorism".

Iran can resume 20% uranium enrichment in 4 days: Salehi

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, has said that Iran can resume uranium enrichment to the purity of 20 percent in 3-4 days.

Speaking in an interview with the IRIB published on Tuesday, he added, however, that "Currently, we do not need 20 percent enrichment, because we have enough stockpile for some years."

Salehi noted that Iran has continued uranium enrichment with limitations under its obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal which have had no effect on the country's nuclear technology.

Based on the nuclear agreement, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic and financial sanctions. The deal was signed between Iran, the European Union, Germany and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council including the

United States. It went into effect in January 16, 2016.

However, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 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 imposed on November 4.

Trump took the move while the International Atomic Energy Agency had reported 13 times that Tehran had been committed to the deal, which is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

In an interview with the European Council on Foreign Relations published on Friday, European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said that the EU is working with the rest of the international community to keep alive the JCPOA.

New UN envoy arrives in Damascus on first Syria trip

Israeli military finally admits supplying arms to Syria militants

The United Nations' new special envoy for Syria says he hopes to have constructive talks in Damascus.

Geir Pedersen spoke briefly to reporters upon his arrival in the Syrian capital Tuesday. It's his first trip to Syria since he took office earlier this year.

The veteran Norwegian diplomat took over from Staffan de Mistura, who stepped down for family reasons after four years and four months of peace efforts that led nowhere.

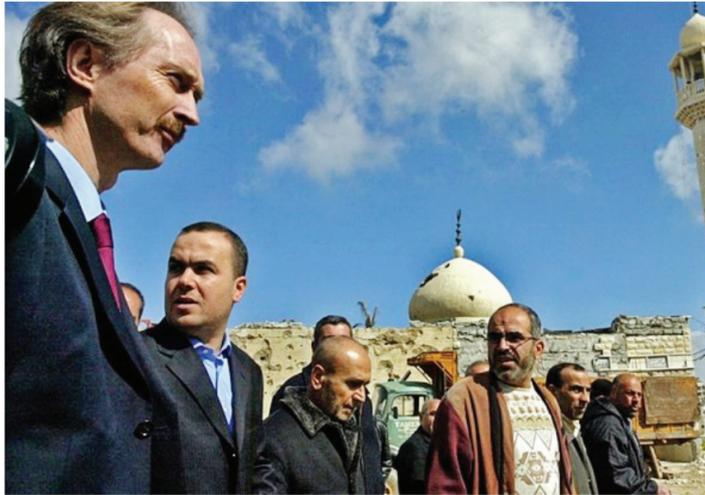
Pedersen's office, in a tweet, said the envoy is looking forward to productive meetings in Damascus. Syria has said it will cooperate with Pedersen if he avoids the "methods" of his predecessor and commits to Syria's territorial integrity.

Israel admits supplying arms to militants

The Israeli military has finally confirmed long-running reports of its collaboration with militant groups operating against the Syrian government, admitting that it has provided weapons to them.

In an interview with the British daily The Sunday Times, Lieutenant General Gadi Eizenkot, the army's outgoing chief of staff, said the Israeli regime had supplied "light" weapons to anti-Damascus militant groups operating in Syria's Golan Heights for "self-defense."

This is the first time the Tel Aviv regime acknowledges arms supplies to militants



fighting in Syria, after numerous reports emerged of the discovery of Israeli-made weapons and military equipment during clean-up operations by the Syrian army.

In September, Israel's Jerusalem Post removed an "explosive report," which revealed the Israeli military had supplied weapons and ammunition to the militants in Syria's

Golan Heights. The paper later told Russia's RT that the report had been taken down at the request of the Israeli army's "military censor."

The Foreign Policy magazine reported last September that Israel had covertly sponsored at least a dozen militant groups operating in southern Syria. Citing interviews with several

militant figures, the report said that Israeli officials had given \$75 per-person monthly allowances to militants as well as funds to their ringleaders meant to procure weapons on the black market.

In return, the report added, the militants were expected to deter Hezbollah resistance fighters and Iran military advisers from the Israeli-occupied Golan.

In an interview with the New York Times earlier this week, Eizenkot acknowledged that Israel had carried out "thousands" of airstrikes in Syria in recent years.

In 2018 alone, the Israeli army dropped 2,000 bombs in Syria, he noted.

The occupying regime has been providing medical treatment to extremist elements wounded during fighting in Syria.

Tel Aviv frequently attacks military targets inside Syria in what is considered as an attempt to prop up Takfiri terrorist outfits that have been suffering heavy defeats against Syrian government forces.

On Saturday, Syria complained to the UN about Israel's latest air raids, stressing that the "cowardly" attacks would fail to hamper its resolve to defend the country and confront its enemies.

The Foreign Ministry said that the Israeli actions in Syria were no different from those of Takfiri terrorist groups such as Daesh and al-Nusra Front.

(Source: agencies)

China condemns Trudeau's remarks about Canadian's death sentence

China denounced Canada on Tuesday for "irresponsible" remarks after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused it of "arbitrarily" sentencing a Canadian to death for drug smuggling, aggravating already icy relations.

The two countries have been at odds since early December, when Canadian police arrested Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies Co Ltd [HWT.UL], on a U.S. extradition request as part of an investigation into suspected violations of U.S. trade sanctions.

Days later, China detained two Canadians on suspicion of endangering state security - former diplomat Michael Kovrig and business consultant Michael Spavor.

Monday's death sentence for Canadian Robert Schellenberg for smuggling 222 kg of methamphetamines has become the latest strain on ties.

China has not linked any of the three Canadians' cases to Meng's arrest but has warned of severe consequences if she was not immediately released.

Trudeau said it should be of "extreme concern" to Canada's friends and allies, as it was to Canada's government, that China had chosen to "arbitrarily apply" the death penalty.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, speaking at a regular news briefing, expressed "strong dissatisfaction" with the comments.

"The remarks by the relevant Canadian person lack the most basic awareness of the legal system," Hua said.

Taking Canada to task for issuing an updated travel advisory warning its citizens about the risk of arbitrary enforcement of laws in China, Hua said that Canada should instead remind its people to not engage in drug smuggling there.



"We urge the Canadian side to respect the rule of law, respect China's legal sovereignty, correct its mistakes, and stop making irresponsible remarks," Hua said.

Hours later, the ministry issued its own travel warning.

Citing the "arbitrary detention" of a Chinese national in Canada at the request of a "third-party country", it urged its citizens to "fully evaluate risks" and exercise caution when traveling there.

No new evidence

Schellenberg had appealed against an original 15-year prison sentence issued in November, but the Dalian Intermediate People's Court in Liaoning province sided with prosecutors at the retrial that the punishment was too light.

A lawyer for Schellenberg, Zhang Dongshuo, said his client would appeal.

Zhang said there was insufficient evidence to prove Schellenberg was part of a drug syndicate, or that he was involved in the smuggling of methamphetamines.

Even if the court accepted all the charges, it should not have increased his sentence, given that the prosecution presented as new evidence had already been heard in court, Zhang told Reuters. "Chinese law stipulates that during an appeal, only if new evidence is discovered and retried can there be an increase in the severity of a sentence," Zhang said.

Schellenberg was arrested in 2014. State media has played up coverage of his case following the deterioration in relations with Canada. The court invited media to cover the retrial, and state television aired a five-minute segment on the proceedings.

Drug smuggling is routinely punished severely in China, and foreigners convicted of drug crimes have been executed before, including a Briton in 2009.

Schellenberg had faced a number of charges in Canada related to drug possession and drug trafficking, according to Canadian court records.

But international rights groups condemned Schellenberg's sentence, with some saying it was too severe and may have been politically motivated.

"China is going to face lots of questions about why this particular person, of this particular nationality, had to be retried at this particular time," Human Rights Watch's Washington-based China director Sophie Richardson told Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S., North Korea to hold talks this week seeking 'interim' deal

The United States and North Korea plan to hold high-level talks in Washington this week to discuss a second meeting between their leaders, South Korean media said on Tuesday, as the old enemies seek an "interim" deal to revitalize nuclear talks.

The meeting, led by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and senior North Korean official Kim Yong Chol, is due on Thursday or Friday, the Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported, citing an unidentified diplomatic source familiar with the issue.

They are expected to finalize the date and venue of a second summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the newspaper said.

The U.S. embassy in Seoul referred questions to the White House. The White House offered no immediate comment on the Chosun Ilbo report, while a State Department official said: "We don't have any meetings to announce."

South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted an unidentified diplomatic source as saying Pompeo and Kim Yong Chol could meet this week.

The North Korean delegation could visit the United States "as soon as this week" but plans have not been finalized, a CNN reporter, citing an unidentified source, said on Twitter.

Trump wrote Kim Jong Un a letter, which was flown to Pyongyang and hand delivered over the weekend, the CNN reporter added, citing the source.

South Korea's foreign ministry spokesman



told reporters the North and the United States were "in contact" but it was "inappropriate" to comment on plans for talks.

A meeting this week could mean the two sides are nearing a compromise after months of standoff over how to move forward in ending North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

Trump and Kim pledged at their first summit, in Singapore in June, to work toward denuclearization "of the Korean peninsula". But there has been little significant progress.

Pompeo, who made several trips to Pyongyang last year, sought to meet his counterpart last November, but the talks were called off at the last minute.

Contact was resumed after Kim's New Year's speech, in which he said he was willing to meet Trump "at any time," South Korea's ambassador to the United States, Cho Yoon-je, told reporters last week.

In Seoul, South Korea deleted a description of North Korea as an "enemy" in its defense white paper released on Tuesday, though it said its weapons of mass destruction posed a threat to peace and stability.

Interim measures

The United States and South Korea have been discussing how to respond to any North Korean steps toward denuclearization, South Korean officials told Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

Macron launches 'grand debate' following protests



French President Emmanuel Macron is formally launching a "grand debate" to try to appease the Yellow Vest movement following weeks of anti-government protests.

Macron heads Tuesday to Grand Bourgtheroulde, a small town in Normandy, where he is to meet about 600 mayors and local officials.

Some groups of yellow vest protesters have called for demonstrations in the town during the visit.

Authorities have issued a ban on traffic in the area and access is restricted to residents and local workers only. There will also be a high security presence.

Macron addressed this week a "letter to the French" to encourage people to express their views on a series of economic and political matters during a three-month "grand debate."

The consultation will take place through local meetings and on the internet. The debate will focus on taxes, public services, climate change and democracy.

The French leader, whose popularity ratings hit record lows at the end of last year, hopes the process will help quell anger over his economic policies.

About 84,000 people turned out last weekend for the ninth straight round of anti-government demonstrations across France, according to the French Interior Ministry.

The Yellow Vest movement, prompted in November by a tax hike on diesel fuel, has expanded to encompass demands for wider changes to France's economy to help struggling workers. Protesters have denounced Macron's pro-business policies as favoring the rich.

The movement is named for the fluorescent garments French motorists are required to keep in vehicles.

(Source: AP)

Greek PM set to win confidence vote with support from opposition



Greece's Alexis Tsipras appeared set to win a confidence vote after winning the support of an opposition centrist lawmaker who broke ranks with his party Tuesday, giving the prime minister the final vote he needs to survive.

Tsipras called the confidence vote following the resignation of Defense Minister Panos Kammenos and his Independent Greeks' party over an accord to end a long dispute between Greece and Macedonia by changing Macedonia's name.

Parliament began a debate Tuesday and the vote is expected on Wednesday night.

The prime minister said last week he could call a snap election if he failed to win a majority of 151 votes.

His leftist Syriza party has 145 seats in the 300-seat chamber and the support of one independent lawmaker. Despite the resignation of Kammenos, four lawmakers from the right-wing Independent Greeks have said that they will still back him, leaving him a single seat short of a majority.

Tsipras secured what appeared to be the pivotal vote Tuesday when an official from the small To Potami party said its member Spyros Danellis had announced his backing.

"Danellis called [Potami leader] Stavros Theodorakis late last night and told him that he will support the government," the party official told Reuters.

The fate of the Macedonia name deal hinges on the outcome of the confidence vote, as the opposition has vowed to reject it.

The deal, reached last year, is intended to resolve a dispute that has kept Greece's northern neighbor excluded from the EU and NATO over its name.

Greece argues that the name Macedonia represents a territorial claim over a Greek province by the same name, and has blocked the former Yugoslav republic from joining Western institutions. Under the deal, Macedonia will change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, and Greece will accept it.

To Potami had been expected to support ratification of the accord, but Danellis's defection prompted a rethink.

"We have second thoughts," said Potami's George Mavrotas when asked by state TV if his party's stance on the deal had changed. "We'll weigh emotions and logic and make our final decisions."

Macedonia's Parliament last week passed an amendment to the constitution to rename the country, leaving it up to Greece to ratify the deal.

Greek opponents of the agreement say Macedonia's new name still represents an attempt to appropriate Greek identity. Groups opposing the deal will rally in central Athens on Sunday.

Kammenos, who has called the deal a national sell-out, handed the Defense Ministry to his successor, Evangelos Apostolakis, who had held the position of armed forces chief.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	165445.5
IFX	1977.76

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	\$51.27/b
Brent	\$59.79/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.48/b
Gold	\$1,293.25/oz
Silver	\$15.68/oz
Platinum	\$806.60/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Chinese investment in Iran's Abadan Refinery at \$2b

E N E R G Y T E H R A N — Alireza Sadeq-Abadi, the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) said China has already made some \$2 billion of investment in the development project of Abadan Refinery in southwest of Iran.

As reported by IRNA on Tuesday, the official noted that NIORDC is in talks with several other renowned foreign companies in order to attract investment for renovating and overhauling refineries of the country.



Aluminum ingot production exceeds 228,300 tons in 9 months

E C O N O M Y T E H R A N — Three major aluminum ingot producers in Iran produced 228,314 tons of ingots during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- December 21, 2018), IRNA reported.

According to the latest data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), Iranian Aluminum Company was the major aluminum ingot manufacturer in the said time, producing 110,642 tons of ingot.

Japan banks set to resume Iran oil transactions after regulatory clearance

I Japanese refiners and shipping companies have recently clarified their concerns over relevant shipping insurance.

Japan's JXTG Holdings intends to resume loading oil from Iran at the end of January, while Cosmo Oil aims to load around 1.8 million barrels of Iranian crude at the end of this month upon final clearances, the presidents of the companies told S&P Global Platts on January 7.

Japan was among eight countries to receive a 180-day waiver from the U.S. sanctions. The waiver expires in early May, when the country will be expected to cut purchases significantly.

However, a lack of clarity over rules for shipping insurance had meant Japanese refiners were avoiding loadings of Iranian oil for January despite the waiver.

Japan did not import any crude from Iran in November 2018.

The country last recorded zero Iranian oil imports in July 2012 during the last international sanctions against Tehran. There was a brief suspension of loadings from Iran until the introduction of government-backed shipping insurance for protection and indemnity cover. (Source: S&P Global Platts)

Stock futures flat as weak JPMorgan results offset China stimulus boost

U.S. stock futures pointed to a flat start on Tuesday, with an early boost from hopes of more Chinese stimulus for the economy fading following poor results from JPMorgan.

JPMorgan Chase & Co (JPM.N) fell 2.1 percent in premarket trading after the biggest U.S. lender by assets reported a lower-than-expected rise in quarterly profit and revenue, hurt by weakness in bond trading.

Wells Fargo & Co (WFC.N), due to report results later in the morning, slipped 0.9 percent.

UnitedHealth Group (UNH.N) kicked off the earnings season for health insurers, reporting a better-than-expected quarterly profit, helped mainly by growth in its services business. Shares of the company, however, were little changed.

At 7:16 a.m. ET, Dow e-minis 1YMc1 were up 0.03 percent. S&P 500 e-minis ESc1 were up 0.09 percent and Nasdaq 100 e-minis NQc1 were up 0.34 percent.

Futures were up more than half a percent after Chinese officials came out in force hinting at more stimulus in the near term for their slowing economy especially after surprising contractions in China's December trade and factory activity.

Providing some relief over the trade front, U.S. President Trump said on Monday he thought a trade deal with China was possible. (Source: Reuters)

Iraqi Kurdistan calls for expansion of economic ties with Iran

E C O N O M Y T E H R A N — Iraqi Kurdistan's senior officials called for expansion of trade ties with Iran during an Iran-Kurdistan business forum which was held on Tuesday in Erbil, IRNA reported.

The business forum was attended by senior officials and businessmen from both sides including Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Dara Jalil Khayat, the president

of the Erbil Chamber of Commerce, along with Mohammad Reza Ansari, the deputy chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

Speaking in the event, Khayat expressed the hope that the economic relations between the two sides would be expanded and that obstacles to the development of the relations would be resolved.

He further mentioned the level of trade



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif speaking in the Iran-Kurdistan business forum held on Tuesday in Erbil

between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan region, saying, the worth of trade between Iran and Kurdistan region currently stands at \$6 billion. "To increase the volume of mutual trade, opening new border crossings is on the agenda", the official added.

Iranian foreign minister for his part said, Iran is ready to establish five joint trade zones across Iraq in order to improve productivity in the neighbor country.

The first round of Iran-Kurdistan business forum was held last year in Erbil.

Development of Kish Gas Field awarded to POGC

E N E R G Y T E H R A N — Development of Kish Gas Field was awarded to Pars Oil and Gas company (POGC), Mohammad Meshkinfam, the company's managing director, announced.

The managing director said that the development project is aimed at producing 85 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas per day from the field, POGC Public Relations Department reported.

Kish Gas Field, located 30 kilometers off the eastern coast of Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain 55 trillion cubic feet of in-place natural gas. The first phase of developing the gas



field was started by Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) and it will be continued by POGC, which is replacing PEDEC.

Private sector seeking imports not relying on NIMA

E C O N O M Y T E H R A N — Regrading the urgent need of producers for the raw materials and also for machineries, setting up a mechanism for imports of such goods not relying on receiving foreign currency through NIMA is now seen more necessary, head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) stressed.

Making the remarks in the 46th meeting of TCCIMA board of representatives, which was held at the place of TCCIMA on Tuesday, Masoud Khansari said that the producers require to supply their raw materials at the least possible time, but under the current condition it will be a long-term process if they want take action through NIMA, TCCIMA portal reported.

Forex Management Integrated System, locally known as



NIMA, was inaugurated in early July, 2018 to allow exporters of non-oil commodities to sell their foreign currency earnings to importers of consumer products.

The system, which seeks to boost transparency, create competitiveness among exchange shops and a secure environment for traders, is a new chance for importers to supply their required foreign currency without specific problems and for exporters to re-inject their earned foreign currency to domestic forex market.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Khansari referred to some major challenges faced by the private sector and said the related ministries should take urgent action to remove them.

He mentioned order registration as one of those challenges and called for extending the validity of order registration duration to six months which will be also extendable by another three months in a way that the applicants will have enough time to pass the requires processes in the ministry of industry, mining and trade.

German economy posts weakest growth in 5 years

Germany's economy witnessed lackluster growth in 2018, according to flash data released Tuesday, in line with expectations.

German gross domestic product (GDP) grew 1.5 percent in 2018, compared with 2.2 percent in 2017, the latest data from the Federal Statistics Office (Destatis) showed. The figures point to the weakest rate of growth in five years.

Destatis noted that the German economy had grown for the ninth year in a row, "although growth has lost momentum."

"In the previous two years, the price adjusted GDP had increased by 2.2 percent each. A longer-term view shows that German economic growth in 2018 exceeded the average growth rate of the last ten years (+1.2 percent)."

The data body also said positive contributions to growth came mainly from domestic demand in 2018.

"Both household final consumption expenditure (+1.0 percent) and government final consumption expenditure (+1.1 percent) were up on the previous year. However, the growth rates were markedly lower than in the preceding three years,"

it said.

German exports continued to increase on an annual average in 2018 (up 3.5 percent on the previous year), though at a slower pace than in the previous years.

An official estimate of fourth-quarter growth will only be available in February but the statistics office said it was likely that the economy had grown slightly in the period, meaning that a technical recession could have been avoided.

Blame game

The country's economy ministry said reasons for slower growth in 2018 included a globally weaker economy, sales problems in the car industry as a result of tougher pollution standards, and special effects including an outbreak of flu and strikes, were also to blame for slower growth, Reuters reported.

The ministry said the German economy was likely to remain on an upward trend at the start of 2019, however.

Carsten Brzeski, chief economist at ING Germany, said the country had escaped lightly.

(Source: CNBC)

China hopes boost stocks, pound near two-month top before Brexit vote

Chinese stimulus hopes lifted world stocks on Tuesday, while Britain's pound huddled near a two-month high as the UK's parliament readied for a "meaningful" vote on Prime Minister Theresa May's unpopular Brexit plans.

Most European markets were in buoyant form early on - feeding off attempts by Washington and Beijing to downplay the risks associated with their trade war and sterling's bizarrely positive twist on the looming Brexit drama.

There was a slight wobble when German data showed Europe's biggest economy saw its weakest growth in five years last year but there were plenty of other factors offsetting the news.

Despite Wall Street ending in the red overnight, Shanghai and Hong Kong stocks had gained almost 2 percent overnight - with Tokyo rising 1 percent on return from holiday and Seoul up smartly too.

That was after U.S. President Trump said on Monday he thought a trade deal with China was possible and Chinese officials came out in force on Tuesday hinting at more stimulus for their slowing economy.

"It seems like a coordinated effort (between the U.S. and China)," said Saxo Bank's head of global equities strategy, Peter Garmy, highlighting how the Federal Reserve had also scaled back talk of multiple U.S. rate hikes.

"For now at least it seems to be working," he added, adding that China's plans to cut taxes showed policymakers were starting to wake up to its problems.

All other focus was largely on Britain's Brexit gyrations.

The pound was barely budged at \$1.2860 and up 0.2 percent at 88.88 pence per euro in London having strengthened steadily in recent weeks.

Worries of the UK plunging out of the EU at the end of March without some kind of transition deal seem to have been eased but with May potentially facing the biggest defeat for a UK government plan in 95 years, uncertainty still dominates.

"We are recommending our clients not to take strong positions on the pound or the equity markets," Garmy added. The vote is due around 1900 GMT.

(Source: Reuters)

Volkswagen, Ford to announce automotive alliance

Volkswagen AG (VOWG_p.DE) and Ford Motor Co (F.N) are expected to unveil an alliance on Tuesday that combines forces on commercial vehicles and is likely to expand into joint development of electric and self-driving technology, moves meant to save the automakers billions of dollars.

Ford and VW will announce their partnership against the backdrop of the Detroit auto show, VW Chief Executive Herbert Diess told reporters on Monday. The companies in recent months have discussed cooperating in vans and other commercial vehicles, and have said that any expanded alliance would not involve a merger or equity stakes.

They have scheduled a joint conference call at 8:30 a.m. EST (1330 GMT) to provide an update on the status of the proposed collaboration.

The two automakers have been exploring closer cooperation as trade frictions force carmakers to rethink where they build vehicles for Europe, the United States and China.

The expanding alliance highlights the growing pressure on all global automakers to manage the costs of developing electric and self-driving vehicles, as well as technology required to meet tougher emissions standards for millions of internal combustion vehicles they will sell in the years to come.

Slowdowns in the world's largest auto markets - China and the United States - have ratcheted up the pressure to cut costs. The scope of the VW-Ford alliance was still being determined



The President and CEO of Ford Motor Company Jim Hackett, poses with Volkswagen CEO Herbert Diess at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Michigan, U.S., January 14, 2019.

ahead of the auto show as talks covered cooperation in the area of electric and autonomous cars.

The framework of the alliance is expected to include the pooling of resources in autonomous technology and VW

investing in that Ford business, and Ford licensing Volkswagen's MEB electric vehicles platform, sources have said.

Volkswagen's Diess confirmed at the Detroit auto show on Monday that the alliance will include VW gaining access to Ford's mid-sized Ranger pickup truck platform.

In June 2018, Ford and VW revealed talks about an alliance in commercial vehicles and added they were looking at other joint projects.

Executives with both companies have talked about the potential savings of a deeper alliance, and VW officials have talked openly about building their vehicles in Ford plants, and Ford using the German automaker's electric vehicle platform.

The tie-up with Volkswagen serves as a big bet for Ford Chief Executive Jim Hackett since he took over in May 2017 from the ousted Mark Fields with the mandate to speed up decision-making and cut costs. Some analysts and investors have been frustrated by Ford's laggard stock price and a perceived lack of details from Hackett about the Dearborn, Michigan-based automaker's \$11 billion restructuring.

Last week, Ford said it would cut thousands of jobs, discontinue building money-losing vehicles and look at closing plants as part of a turnaround effort for its unprofitable European business.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC+ plans review in Baku in March, ministers' meeting in April

OPEC and its allies plan to hold a meeting in March to assess their oil-production accord in Azerbaijan, and then ministers will gather to set policy in April, according to the organization's top official.

The body that reviews the implementation of OPEC's supply cuts, the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee, will convene in the Azeri capital of Baku on March 17 to 18, Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said in a statement. Ministers will then meet in Vienna on April 17 to 18 to decide whether the cutbacks should be extended beyond their scheduled expiry in the summer.

Barkindo recently met with Venezuelan Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo, who this year holds OPEC's rotating presidency, and arranged the dates in consultation with him and the ministers of Saudi Arabia and Russia, who co-chair the JMMC.

The 24-nation coalition of oil producers known as OPEC+, which includes OPEC nations as well as non-members, is cutting output to stabilize global markets. They have agreed to collectively reduce supplies by 1.2 million barrels a day for the first half of this year.



By restraining supply in 2017 and early last year, the alliance engineered a recovery in prices that ended the oil industry's worst slump in a generation, but the market has started to weaken again. At about \$60 a barrel in London, prices remain about 30 percent down from a four-year high reached

in October.

It took more than a month for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to settle on the dates, an unusually long time for the group, which typically concludes each conference with a prompt resolution on when to meet again.

The delay may reflect the more complicated logistics that come with expanding into a broader coalition with more countries. Whereas in the past decisions were confined to the dozen-or-so members of OPEC, these days its consultations can involve all 24 nations in the broader network, with Russia having particular influence.

Pronounced volatility in oil prices in the month since OPEC+ announced its supply curbs suggests market participants have been looking for additional clarity on the organization's plans.

Besides the two meetings for ministers, delegates will also convene in coming weeks to work on a framework that will cement co-operation between OPEC and non-OPEC over the long-term.

OPEC officials will meet to discuss the framework on Feb. 7 to 8, and representatives from their non-OPEC partners will follow-up the consultations on Feb. 18 to 19. The charter will be finalized in order to be considered by ministers at their meeting in April, Barkindo said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Bangladesh's second LNG terminal to start in March; supply faces hiccups



Bangladesh's second liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal is expected to start operations in mid-March though domestic pipeline constraints means it will be unable to fully supply gas demand to the country's capital Dhaka.

Summit Corp, a subsidiary of Bangladesh's Summit Holdings, and partner Mitsubishi Corp are expected to start operations at their floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) off the country's coast by the middle of March and ahead of schedule, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Tuesday.

A Summit Corp spokeswoman confirmed in an emailed response that the Summit LNG terminal is on schedule, but did not elaborate.

However, construction delays on a pipeline that will carry regasified gas from the coastal city of Chattogram, near where the FSRU will be anchored, to Dhaka means that the vessel will not be fully utilized, the source said.

Until the pipeline is fully connected, the FSRU will handle about 300 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas which will be supplied to the Chattogram area, the source said. The ship can regasify up to 500 mmcf of LNG, according to Summit's website.

Once the pipeline is completed, state-owned energy company Petrobangla will be able to send up to 1,000 mmcf from both

the Summit FSRU and a vessel operated by U.S. company Excelerate that started up in August, the source said.

"Our target is to complete all the connecting gas transmission pipelines by April," Ali Al-Mamun, managing director of the Gas Transmission Company Limited, a subsidiary of state-owned Petrobangla, told Reuters.

He added that the company has awarded a contract to Chinese oil and gas major CNOOC to build a 7-km (4.2 mile) pipeline that connects the Summit FSRU to the shore.

Other pipelines that will connect the offshore pipeline to the country's main gas grid near the city of Bakhrabad are still being built, he said.

Summit LNG's FSRU will anchor 6 km off the island of Moheshkali in the Cox's Bazar district of the Chattogram division, where it will regasify LNG procured by Petrobangla. The planned LNG import volume of the project is about 3.5 million tons a year, which will double the country's LNG import capacity to 7.5 mmtpa once fully operational.

Bangladesh has scrapped plans to build additional floating LNG terminals in favor of land-based stations after the start-up of Excelerate's vessel was delayed by several months due to technical problems and bad weather.

(Source: Reuters)

First U.S. crude cargoes head to China since trade breakthrough: sources



Three cargoes of U.S. crude are heading to China from the U.S. Gulf Coast, trade sources said on Monday, the first departures since late September and a 90-day pause in the two countries' trade war that began last month.

The vessels left Galveston, Texas, last month and are scheduled to arrive at Chinese ports between late January and early March, according to shipbrokers and vessel tracking data. The shipments mark a change since Chinese buyers largely began avoiding U.S. oil during the trade dispute that flared last summer.

"It looks like China has resumed purchasing U.S. crude," one U.S.-based shipbroking source said. The person, who declined to be identified because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter, said the destination data could yet change.

China is the world's biggest crude importer and became a top buyer of U.S. crude after Washington lifted a 40-year ban on shipments in late 2015. It imported 325,000 barrels per day (bpd) of U.S. crude in the first nine months of 2018, customs data showed.

Beijing has also resumed purchases of some U.S. soybeans for delivery this year. But China's 25 percent tariff on

U.S. soybean cargoes remains in place.

The supertanker Alboran carrying about 2 million barrels of oil recently rounded South Africa's Cape of Good Hope and is due to arrive in China late this month, said brokers, citing fixture data.

The Almi Atlas and the Manifa, two other vessels carrying 2 million barrels of crude, are expected to reach China in late February or early March. The two ships are currently located off Brazil, according to Refinitiv Eikon vessel tracking data.

The cargoes mark the first shipments of U.S. crude to China since U.S. President Donald Trump in December said China would begin taking more American products.

"It's a follow through of statements by the Chinese government they would indeed begin purchasing commodities from the United States again," said Reid l'Anson, an energy economist at data provider Kpler.

As China reduced U.S. crude imports, more American oil flowed into neighboring Asian countries, including India, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. U.S. exports climbed to 2.33 million bpd in October, up from 2.2 million bpd in June.

(Source: CNBC)

Winners and losers in big oil's offshore spending revival

After four years of cutbacks, oil companies are poised to open their purses again and develop new offshore fields, although the benefits won't be spread equally across the companies who provide them everything from seismic surveys to pumps and turbines.

The long-awaited spending rebound will re-energize oil-services providers that have survived the deepest crisis in a generation thanks to cost cuts, mergers and sometimes painful debt restructuring. But for some debt-laden suppliers, the investment pickup may come too late.

Notwithstanding recent oil-price volatility, spending on offshore oilfield services will rise by 6 percent in 2019 reaching \$208 billion, before surging by another 14 percent in 2020, according to Norwegian consultant Rystad Energy AS. That's after almost halving since 2014.

Oil in London is currently heading for its longest run of daily gains on record, buoyed by OPEC supply cuts and hopes of easing trade tensions between the U.S. and China, rising Wednesday above \$60 a barrel for the first time since December.

Subsea leads rebound

Oil producers will probably commit to 110 new undersea projects this year, up from 96 in 2018 and just 43 in 2016 -- when the industry slashed capex as oil slumped.

The market for subsea equipment may expand by between 13 percent and 14 percent each year through 2023, said Audun Martinsen, head of oilfield service research at Rystad, in an interview. This is in part as suppliers resume to hike prices.

Oilfield surveyors and providers of support and maintenance services should rebound at a slower pace as an overcapacity of vessels continues to glut the market and the rigs sector, the worst performing segment in offshore last year, should improve at last, Martinsen said.

London-based oilfield services provider TechnipFMC Plc forecast that 2019 revenue at its subsea division will climb but margins may fall. This year the company is anticipating "continued strong activity" for investment decisions in small-



to-mid-size projects, and "an increasing number of the larger greenfield subsea projects," Chief Executive Officer Doug Perdehrt said in December.

"A lot of these offshore projects are located at deep waters," benefiting subsea gear makers such as TechnipFMC and Subsea 7 SA, Rystad's Martinsen said.

Oilfield surveyors follow

While oil and gas companies press ahead with new developments, they may initially focus on already-discovered fields, while keeping a cautious stance on riskier exploration projects, for which returns are harder to reap, forcing surveyors and drillers to send more vessels and rigs to scrap.

"With oil prices trading below \$60 per barrel, there continues to be some uncertainty on 2019 E&P spending, particularly offshore," Kristian Johansen, CEO of Norwegian oilfield surveyor TGS Nopec Geophysical Co. ASA said on Jan. 9.

However, TGS should benefit from its "solid balance sheet," while Petroleum Geo-Services ASA may face "challenges ahead

in terms of an oversupplied seismic vessel market and approaching debt maturities," Nordea analysts Glenn Lodden and Even Mostue Naume wrote in a note this month. France's CGG SA should be more attractive once it completes a plan to shed its remaining seismic vessels. Although restructuring takes time and the company may incur additional costs, the analysts said. A CGG spokesman declined to comment.

There should be a "slight rise in demand from drilling," meaning that just 30 percent of deepwater rigs may remain idle this year, down from 35 percent last year, Mhairidh Evans, an analyst at Wood Mackenzie, said in an interview. "Some more overcapacity needs to be taken out of the supply chain."

Transocean Ltd, which last month announced an \$830 million drilling contract, may benefit from the rebound as it focuses on deepwater, while Shelf Drilling Ltd. may also gain from its exposure to the Middle East, said Rystad's Martinsen.

Petroleum Geo-Services is "cautiously optimistic" that last year's market rebound will continue this year, a spokesman said.

Still hard times

On the other hand, the market for equipment used on shallow water platforms such as pumps, turbines and heat exchangers provided by the likes of General Electric Co., ABB Ltd. and National Oilwell Varco Inc. may lag, partly because they tend to be ordered later in project cycles, Martinsen said.

Bourbon Corporation, a French operator of support vessels for offshore industry, is also looking for signs of recovery as persisting low rates has forced it to suspend the payments of its debt. Bourbon's situation is "worrying" as it operates in an oversupplied market, said Kevin Vo, an analyst at AlphaValue in Paris. Bourbon declined to comment.

"As a company sanctions a project or an exploration campaign, that cash doesn't flow through the supply chain until perhaps one or two or three years, so the supply chain isn't out of the woods yet," said Woodmac's Evans. "So 2020 looks like the year where many parts of the supply chain will start to feel better."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil prices rise on supply cuts, but global slowdown looms

Oil prices rose on Tuesday amid supply cuts by producer club OPEC and Russia, although a darkening economic outlook may soon weigh on growth in fuel demand.

Brent crude oil futures were at \$59.47 per barrel at 0950 GMT, up 48 cents, or 0.81 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$50.92 per barrel, also up 0.81 percent, or 41 cents.

"OPEC-led cuts and declining U.S. rig counts have bolstered market sentiment in the new year," Singapore-based brokerage Phillip Futures said.

The Middle East-dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including the world's number two producer Russia agreed in late 2018 to cut supply to rein in a global glut.

In the United States, the number of rigs looking for new oil production has dropped from a 2018 peak of 888 to a still-high 873 in early 2019.

The rig data, released on Friday, pointed to a potential dent in production growth which was at more than 2 million barrels per day last year, making the United States the world's top oil producer. C-OUT-T-EIA.

Meanwhile, the United States last November reimposed sanctions against Iran's oil exports. Although Washington granted sanctions waivers to Iran's biggest oil customers, mostly in Asia, the Middle Eastern country's exports have plummeted since.

However, Japan expects to restart oil imports from Iran as early as this month, the Nikkei business daily reported on Tuesday, with some Japanese banks notifying customers they will resume transactions for oil purchases.

South Korea expects to receive Iranian oil imports in January after a four-month interruption.

On the demand side, an economic slowdown continues to loom over oil and financial markets.

The gains in crude futures on Tuesday came after losses of more than 2 percent the previous session as weak Chinese trade data pointed to a global economic slowdown.

China's National Development and Reform Commission on Tuesday signaled it may roll out more fiscal stimulus to stem any further decline in growth.

HSBC said it was cutting its average 2019 Brent price forecast by \$16 per barrel, to \$64 per barrel, citing surging U.S. production and an "increasingly uncertain demand backdrop".

(Source: Reuters)

S&P Global Platts to reform key Dated Brent crude oil benchmark

S&P Global Platts plans reforms to its Dated Brent crude oil price assessment as part of ongoing moves to boost the liquidity of the benchmark used as a basis for pricing the majority of the world's traded oil, it said Monday.

From November 2019, Platts plans to include qualifying North Sea crudes on an adjusted cost, insurance and freight (CIF) basis Rotterdam into its FOB (free on board) Dated Brent benchmark.

The move marked the first time Platts will assess crude being offered on a delivered basis to determine the value of its main FOB Dated Brent assessment, which currently includes falling volumes of crude traded at North Sea terminals.

"With FOB supply in the North Sea gradually falling, this proposal will ensure ample liquidity of grades in the Dated Brent basket for the foreseeable future," Platts global director of oil market reporting, Vera Blei, said in a statement.

Under the changes, Platts said it will reflect in the FOB benchmark competitive offers of the five North Sea crude grades that make up the Dated Brent assessment -- Brent/Ninian Blend, Forties, Oseberg, Ekofisk, and Troll, or BFOE -- after adjusting for freight and sailing time.

The changes will not affect the methodology used by Platts for assessing the BFOE Brent crude markets, the company said.

Crude output from the UK's offshore Brent oil field has dropped significantly since its peak at around 520,000 bpd in 1984.

Subsequent declines in wider North Sea oil output have prompted Platts to include alternative grades to increase the liquidity of the assessment.

Platts began consulting with the industry on the proposed changes to its Dated Brent benchmark in September.

As part of the consultation, Platts also said it was considering adding new streams of sweet crude oil to the price assessment.

Industry feedback was requested on the possible inclusion into the Dated Brent CIF Rotterdam assessment of Norway's Statfjord and Gullfaks crude, Kazakh-Russian CPC Blend, US WTI Midland, and Nigeria's Forcados and Qua Iboe crudes.

"On this element of the proposal, S&P Global Platts will continue to observe market developments in other grades within and outside the North Sea, and consult with stakeholders," the company said.

Platts said it was open to feedback on the Dated Brent plans, including on the timing of the measure and the freight adjustment factor, by February 14.

(Source: Platts)

Libya halves budget deficit thanks to rise in oil revenues

Libya's budget deficit was narrowed to 4.6 billion dinars (\$3.32 billion dollars) in 2018 down from 10.6 billion dinars in 2017 thanks to a rise in oil revenues, the central bank said on Monday.

Libya's oil revenues stood at 24.5 billion dollars in 2018, up 78 percent from the previous year, central bank data showed.

State oil company NOC aims to increase production to 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2021.

Currently Libya produces about 950,000 bpd, less than its pre-civil war capacity of 1.6 million bpd, as the country's biggest oil field El Sharara remains closed since it was taken over on Dec. 8 by tribesmen, armed protesters and state guards demanding salary payments and development funds.

Libya has been divided since 2014 between rival institutions and warring factions based in the east and west.

However, the central bank in Tripoli has continued to control oil revenues, which account for nearly all the country's income, and to disburse them across the country.

(Source: Reuters)

When big nations need a little tête-à-tête

France's president, besieged by protests, initiates a national dialogue to gather ideas and form a new 'contract.' Has listening become key to political leadership?

In the anti-elite politics and protests of today's democracies, leaders are eager for new ways to gauge public opinion. Many of the old ways – elections, polling, referendums, even Twitter – just seem inadequate to shape consensus.

In Ethiopia, for example, a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, holds "listening rallies" before crowds, seeking advice. "Change can only come," he tells them, "if we are only able to change ourselves." Mexico's new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, takes questions during hour-long press conferences – every workday starting at 7 a.m. and live on YouTube. Such style of leadership – or is it listenership? – reflects a certain self-reflection.



Now France's beleaguered president, Emmanuel Macron, offers his own model. On Monday he kicked off a two-month national dialogue in response to weeks of "yellow vest" protests against his economic policies.

The French are being encouraged to express opinions at the local level with the help of mayors, either in town hall meetings or in online questionnaires. The topics up for discussion: the environment, democracy, public services, and taxes. Macron will attend the first meeting on Tuesday in Grand Bourgheroulde.

"We'll show we're a people which is not afraid of talking, exchanging, debating," he wrote in a letter to the public. "This is how I intend to turn anger into solutions."

Macron himself is famous for breaking the political mode in 2017 by defeating France's entrenched parties. His victory was a symbol of Europe's anti-elite movements of both the left and right. Now even he, after proposing a fuel tax that sparked grass-roots protests in November, is being forced to find what he calls a new "contract for the nation."

He faces a high wall of distrust. One poll shows few in France believe the "grand débat" will be independent enough to lead to useful solutions. The poll also indicates about 40 percent of people will participate.

The mood is similar to that in many American companies where workers demand fewer bosses and more equality and consultation – or simply bosses who ask questions before giving answers.

To come up with blueprints for solutions, a group or society must first build bridges of mutual understanding. Techniques like "listening tours" help in pushing people to take a long-term perspective and be willing to show empathy. They are often inclusive and do not define a winning argument from the start. An invitation for deliberation can change the way people talk.

Macron's grass-roots national dialogue – in response to grass-roots protests – is noble in concept. Yet it's unclear what it might unleash. "In trying to bring fresh air into our democracy, it could quickly degenerate into a free-for-all," warned the French daily *Le Figaro*. With patience and reflection on the part of the French, however, good ideas can float to the top.

(Source: *The CSM*)

The push to get rid of Bolton

By Daniel Larison

Whatever the motive, conservatives who favor more robust U.S. involvement abroad should sit up and take notice. One of their strongest allies within the administration is under attack. Whether Bolton's influence wanes or even whether he remains is crucially important for anyone who worries that the president's impulses that deviate from past American foreign policy will weaken American security.

There have been a number of unflattering reports about Bolton in the last few weeks, but for the most part those stories are just proof that Bolton has no diplomatic skills and does a terrible job of managing the administration's policy process. If Bolton had done a better job of coordinating Syria policy, the administration's Syria policy wouldn't be the confused mess that it is. If he hadn't made such a hash of things with the Turkish government, there would have been no snub by Erdogan for anyone to report. There may be quite a bit of hostile leaking against Bolton, but that is itself a testament to how many other people in the administration loathe him.

The National Security Advisor has had a reputation of being an abrasive and obnoxious colleague for a long time, and his attempts to push his aggressive foreign policy agenda have made him even more enemies. If Bolton is "under attack" from within the administration, it is because he has behaved with the same recklessness and incompetence that characterize his preferred policies overseas.

He should be attacked, and with any luck he will be defeated and driven from office. Unfortunately, we have been seeing the opposite happen over the last few weeks: more Bolton allies are joining the administration in important positions and at least one major rival has exited.

Bolton's influence in the administration is an important indication of what U.S. foreign policy will look like in the months and years to come, and the longer he remains National Security Advisor the worse it will be for U.S. interests.

(Source: *The American Conservative*)

The Transatlantic leadership void

By Ana Palacio
former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain

Since the end of World War II, the United States, as the dominant European (and world) power, has piloted transatlantic security. But under President Donald Trump, the U.S. isn't doing much leading, and it is not always even clear who in Trump's administration is really in charge.

Transatlantic security today looks a lot like a ghost plane. With the "crew" incapacitated – that is, bereft of ideas or leadership – it is flying on autopilot until it inevitably hits something or runs out of fuel and comes crashing down. To avoid disaster, those in the cockpit need to wake up – and soon.

Since the end of World War II, the United States, as the dominant European (and world) power, has piloted transatlantic security. But under President Donald Trump, the U.S. isn't doing much leading. Indeed, it is not even clear who in Trump's administration is really in charge any more. Today, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's apocryphal question – "Who do I call if I want to call Europe?" – can just as easily be tossed back across the Atlantic.

When Trump came to power, America's European allies (and much of the rest of the world) thought they knew the answer to that question. They hoped that, whatever bluster issued from the White House, the U.S. would ultimately support the status quo. U.S. policy, they told themselves, would be dictated not by Trump's tweet storms, but by the more reliable "adults" in his government – Rex Tillerson, Trump's first secretary of state; HR McMaster, Trump's second national security adviser; and James Mattis, Trump's secretary of defense.

All are now gone. Mattis, the most recently departed, left after Trump's abrupt announce-



What is happening to U.S. foreign policy reflects a lack of any kind of leadership at all. At this point, no one knows what U.S. policy is or even who is making it. Unsurprisingly, this has left the entire transatlantic community adrift.

ment that he would withdraw all U.S. troops from Syria – a major policy decision that was made flippantly and against Mattis's advice and that of his Department of Defense. His scathing resignation letter excoriated Trump for not "treating allies with respect" or "being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors." Mattis told Trump that "you have the right to have a Secretary of Defense whose views are better aligned with yours."

Given Mattis's rationale for leaving, one might have imagined that his resignation would at least make U.S. policy more predictable. Rather than wonder whether the U.S. would abandon NATO, as Trump suggested, or stand by it, as his administration's senior

officials promised, Europe could respond to a single message. That message might be unwelcome and dangerous, but at least others would know where they stand.

But the erratic, mixed messages have persisted – and even increased. On December 19, following a phone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump tweeted: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency." The next day, he tweeted: "Russia, Iran, Syria & many others are not happy...because now they will have to fight ISIS and others, who they hate, without us."

Then, at the beginning of January, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton was dispatched to the Middle East to reassure

nervous allies – in particular, Israel – about Trump's decision. These countries are concerned that an abrupt withdrawal of U.S. forces will permit ISIS to survive and even recover, leave Kurdish forces that have been integral in the fight against ISIS exposed to Turkish attacks.

These are legitimate concerns – so legitimate, in fact, that Trump's big Syria announcement was quickly walked back. A U.S. withdrawal, Bolton declared, would be contingent on fully defeating ISIS and a Turkish guarantee not to attack America's Kurdish allies. Yet, with no adults around to tell them what to do, Trump's administration failed to clear these new conditions with Turkey. An outraged Erdogan canceled a planned meeting with Bolton to discuss the withdrawal. The Trump administration's Syria policy is now an open question.

This was not the result of an oversight or disorganization in the Trump administration. Nor was it a case of ineffective or misguided leadership. What is happening to U.S. foreign policy reflects a lack of any kind of leadership at all. At this point, no one knows what U.S. policy is or even who is making it. Unsurprisingly, this has left the entire transatlantic community adrift.

Next month, the dozens of international politics and diplomacy will gather for the annual Munich Security Conference. While the event has grown over the years, and now covers global issues, its core remains the transatlantic community. The MSC thus represents an important opportunity to discuss openly the utter lack of leadership on transatlantic security.

Last year, the MSC chose as its theme the semi-hopeful "To the brink – and back?" This year, it should be "Is anyone at the wheel?" The Americans in the ballroom at Munich's Hotel Bayerischer Hof may say yes. But they are not the ones in the cockpit.

(Source: *Project Syndicate*)

Pompeo said the U.S. will hold Khashoggi's killers accountable. Is he serious about it?

After meeting the king and crown prince of Saudi Arabia on Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he had raised human rights issues, including imprisoned female activists and the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. He said he had reiterated U.S. "expectations" that "every single person who has responsibility for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi needs to be held accountable." That is the right position; the question is whether Pompeo and President Trump are serious about it. Unfortunately, all indications are that they are not.

The problem with Pompeo's message is that he delivered it to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who the CIA has concluded was the author of the Khashoggi murder. How is it possible for the crown prince to hold himself responsible? To suppose that he will is ludicrous. Yet Pompeo continues to describe the "investigative process and the judicial process" the Saudis claim to have undertaken as fully credible. "Their continued commitment to continue to pursue all those connected is something that they have not wavered from," Pompeo assured reporters.

Even setting aside the culpability of the crown prince, that's an extraordinary assertion given what we know about the Saudi "process." The regime has claimed that 21 people have been connected to the murder, but only 11 have been charged in court. Those excused appear to include two close



aides to Mohammed bin Salman: Saud al-Qahtani, who has been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department for his role in the affair, and Ahmed al-Assiri, the former deputy chief of intelligence.

The Post's David Ignatius reported last week that Mohammed bin Salman remains in contact with Qahtani and is pressing ahead with a campaign to silence dissent. According to the family of Loujain al-Hathloul, one of the detained

female activists, Qahtani was present last summer when she was subjected to torture that included waterboarding and electric shocks, and he personally threatened to rape and kill her.

Meanwhile, news accounts from Turkey say that Salah Muhammed al-Tubaigy, a forensic specialist who reportedly dismembered Khashoggi's body with a bone saw, is living quietly with his family in a villa in Jeddah.

Pompeo no doubt is aware of all this. Yet when he was asked whether he felt assured that the Saudis were going to get to the bottom of the Khashoggi case, he responded: "They are still working through their fact-finding process." The Trump administration, he added, was doing the same.

In reality, what the administration appears to be doing is what it has done all along: help the Saudi regime protect Mohammed bin Salman and others responsible for the murder from serious consequences – particularly from Congress.

The new House Democratic leadership should not allow that to happen. The Senate passed a resolution last year holding Mohammed bin Salman responsible for the Khashoggi murder; House Democrats should now work to assure that he and all other senior officials involved face consequences, including U.S. sanctions.

(Source: *The Washington Post*)

Why a Republican won't beat Trump in 2020

By Lincoln Mitchell

Two days before being sworn in to the U.S. Senate, Mitt Romney wrote an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* outlining his concerns about President Donald Trump "not rising to the mantle of the office." Romney, the Republican presidential nominee in 2012, did not exactly break new ground. His column mostly rehearsed concerns that many Republicans have long held about Trump's temperament and international relationships while stopping short of an active commitment to addressing the many problems Romney sees in the Trump administration.

The op-ed also includes the kind of language that was standard from pre-Trump presidential candidates: "I remain optimistic about our future. In an innovation age, Americans excel. More importantly, noble instincts live in the hearts of Americans." Romney has since said that he won't run against Trump, but that he won't necessarily support him either. It is difficult to read Romney's column and not think that he won't at least be part of any conversation about which Republican might be able to take on Trump for the Republican nomination.

The notion that a Republican will challenge Trump is not new. The idea of a primary against Trump is very appealing to many centrists, as well as whatever remaining conservative critics of the president still exist. A successful primary would also help bring an end to the Trump experiment while limiting

lasting damage to America's political system and perhaps even diverting the Republican Party from the direction it has taken under Trump. These are the developments that many in the political class, including many of the pundits and political analysts calling for a primary challenge to Trump, would like to see.

The problem with this scenario is that it overlooks the extent to which the Republican Party has been remade to look like Trump, meaning that any primary challenger to Trump would likely get drubbed and therefore only strengthen Trump's hold on the GOP. Trump

Beating a president who is beloved by the base in his own party in a primary challenge is almost impossible.

himself has been extremely popular among his party. According to Gallup, his job approval rating among those who identified themselves as Republicans has not dropped below 77 percent at any point in his presidency. In 2018, that number never dipped below 81 percent and most weeks was much higher than that. (By contrast, his overall national approval rating has averaged 39 percent since he took office.)

Unseating an incumbent president in a primary is difficult enough – in recent decades the only candidate to do so was Senator Eugene McCarthy, who almost beat Democratic President Lyndon Johnson in the 1968

New Hampshire primary, spurring Johnson to drop out of the race. Beating a president who is beloved by the base in his own party in a primary challenge is almost impossible. Trump's popularity among Republicans also demonstrates the gap between how Republican voters and some Republican elites think about the president. There are a lot of Republicans who are critical of Trump on television and popular political websites, but that is about the only place they can be found.

Beyond public opinion data, Republican primaries since 2016 have generally been won by pro-Trump Republicans while Republicans

in Congress often have had to cater to their pro-Trump Republican electorates in order to stay in office. Even Jeff Flake, Trump's most outspoken Senate Republican critic, conceded that if he had been running for reelection he would not have taken some positions that rankled the president. Policies around trade and foreign policy where Trump differs from Republican orthodoxy still polarize Republican leaders, but these are not the kinds of issues that will swing large number of voters in a Republican primary.

Last month, in the kind of move that does not draw headlines, the Trump reelection campaign and the Republican National Com-

mittee (RNC) began to create a structure that will essentially combine the two entities into one for the 2020 race. The plan, according to a report in *Politico*, is for the campaign and the RNC to merge their field and fundraising organizations into a single, more streamlined unit. That all but ensures Trump will control the RNC, making it even less plausible that anyone can mount a successful, or even relevant, primary against him. Given this, RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel's Twitter response calling Romney's opinion piece "disappointing and unproductive" is no surprise.

While it is perhaps possible that Trump will face a primary campaign to become the party's nominee, whoever runs against Trump is likely not only to lose badly, but to fail in any attempt to move the party away from him. This is why the Republicans most frequently cited as potential challengers, like Arizona's Flake and former Ohio Governor John Kasich, are in the later stages of their careers. Republicans with futures in the party, like Senators Ted Cruz of Texas or Marco Rubio of Florida, who disagree with Trump on many key issues and have previously indicated concern about his conduct and ethics, are not entertaining the idea of running against Trump and thus damaging their standing in the party. Over the last two years, the Republican Party has become Trump's. Highfalutin opinion pieces in major media outlets are not going to change that.

(Source: *Reuters*)

Russia interfered in U.S. elections to get Trump elected: Askari

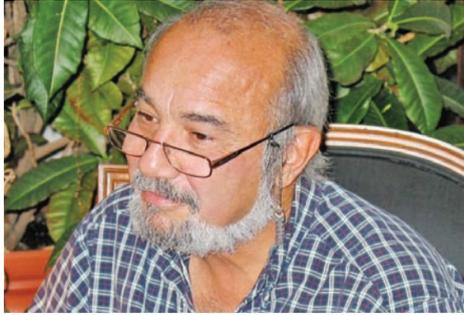
1 → ■ In regard to leaked information to the media, could it be something more than a political interference to change the result of the election? Could it be a sign of a deep security infiltration?

A: No, I don't think there is deep infiltration. But my guess is that Trump has disclosed U.S. secrets to Russia. I believe that he acts in Russia's interests but I think that the U.S. agencies are not compromised. I say this because of the way Trump acted during the campaign and especially since he has been President.

■ If we are to accept the assumption that Russia infiltrated the U.S. governance structures, what do you think is the origin of this interference?

A: Again, I don't believe they have done this. But they have Trump protecting Russia's interests and divulging important U.S. secrets directly to Putin. The origin of this is Trump and his business dealings. Loans, money laundering and more.

■ Some experts believe that the relations of Trump's family members, especially Jared Kushner, with a big multinational Mafia is the origin of such a vast infiltration into different layers of the U.S. political system and information structure.



A: I don't agree with this. However, I do believe that Trump and Kushner worship money. Money is their God. So in this sense they will do anything for money. They will associate with anyone to get more money. But not a multinational Mafia.

■ A look into the U.S. policies since 2016 shows how its position as a superpower has been undermined while at the

same time, Russia has been strengthening its international position. What's your opinion on this matter?

A: I agree with this conclusion. The U.S. has been indecisive. Its global reputation has been tarnished beyond short-term repair. It has not used its soft power well. Always the military and support for dictators. This has caused thousands of innocent deaths. The U.S. is seen as racist and anti-Muslim and anti-democratic values. A recent London Economist report rated the U.S. as FLAWED democracy! How can the world respect a country that has a serial liar as its president, supports brutal dictators, sell arms that kill innocent civilians and imposes economic sanctions that hurt millions of innocent people while going soft on its adversary, Russia.

■ Less than one year, some western media revealed that some people in Kushner's inner circle (such as Senator Tom Cotton) had relations with Mossad and spied on the U.S. senate intelligence committee. At the same time, some other media indicated Russian infiltration into Mossad and even their infiltration into Israel and the U.S. security intelligence structures. Do you think that there is any relations with the Russia collusion case and other infiltration claims?

A: No, I don't think that such a web, if it exists, was planned.

The rise of far right populism in Europe ahead of EU elections



By Punsara Amarasinghe

Populism in Europe as a civilizational legacy has a deeply rooted history which dates back to Greco Roman antiquity and as it has been recorded by classical historians like Livy, the overarching political structure of Roman republic nailed by populism that arose as a result of the loopholes of the system. The role of Publius Clodius against Roman nobility during the late republic was a reflection of how populist discourse functioned in classical world. Nevertheless the principles emerged after the post second world war Europe such as social welfare system, social democracy and cultural integration reduced the gravity of populist discourse as a powerful political tool. Moreover the mass migration of political refugees from Eastern Europe to Western Europe during cold war was a phenomenal factor that encouraged west and its citizens to accept refugees or asylum seekers more dearly and it was rather a display of European values. But as all good things come to an end this wave of immigrations from Non-European countries to Western Europe gradually conceived the seeds of socio economic and political turmoil in the continent that finally paved the path for a greater revival of populist politics in Europe. Especially the political trajectory created with the Syrian refugee crisis since 2015 in Europe has compelled the people to look for Right wing politics as an alternative. Recent discussion held in Warsaw, Poland between Italian deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini and Jaroslaw Kaczynski shows the spark of far right populist coalition in European Union against its center right more socio democratic leadership of Germany and France. The significance of this meeting lies in the fact that how EU politics has been changed in the recent years before its troubled policies over the illegal immigration and refugee crisis and this Polish Italian axis seems to create a decisive impacts upon the upcoming elections to EU parliament.

As a matter of fact in the past, it never really mattered much if the Euro election was carried by the left or the right: the result was the same anyway. The parliament has always been keener of the federalist flame, but the unorthodox political upheavals Europe envisaged for past two years have such as BREXIT in 2016 and Trump's victory in US presidential elections have upset the center right liberal orthodoxy in EU. Moreover it is a fact not to be ignored that how national politics in European countries have taken a populist bend as a consoling since most of the common people in Europe are gutted by the refugee crisis and economic deprivation. Especially being the undisputed forerunner in EU Germany has faced severe social issues since 2015 as Angela Merkel decided to not to close Germany's borders resulting in the arrival of more than one million of people. Last August in Italy the Migrants mainly coming from former Italian colony Eritrea had been stranded at a port in Sicily before Italian deputy premier Salvini finally allowed them to disembark after Ireland and Catholic Church in Italy agreed to take most of them in. Apart from Italy most of European states have been exposed to the wave of populism mixed up with far right ideological elements. For an example elections held in Sweden in 2018 September dragged the country into a political limbo as the results of the elections did not leave either main parliamentary block with a majority and its far right anti-immigrant party Sweden democrats won 17.6% of the votes. Being a country that has resisted populist politics and far right wing ideology since the end of its notorious dictator Farco's era, Spain too has witnessed the new wave of populism in its national level politics. The dazzling impact created by Santiago Abascal's Vox party at the election held in Andalusia by gaining 10.97% of the votes and 12 out of 109 cannot be ignored despite the fact that his party is still in its infancy stage.

Populist discourse spreading across Europe has not been emerged out of the blue as it is imbued with how common people in Europe perceive the socio economic and political circumstances currently. It was a misconception that many analysts believed that rise populism sprang from the financial collapse and unemployment, because it is evident that the rise of populism has not been solely attributed to the economic crisis. If economic growth had been decisive in Poland, which enjoyed the faster growth rate in Europe between 1989 and 2015, the populist Law and Justice Party would never have become the country's dominant political force. The bitter truth portraying from the rise populism is non-other than Europe antipathy over mass immigration and their concern for preserving common European values. This aptly shows from how Hungarians have rallied around Mr. Victor Orban as he triumphantly calls himself the defender of Christian Europe. On the other hand such xenophobic notions like cultural preservation, growth of Islam have been clearly captured by populist parties as drawbacks created by the apathy of European Union and its center right liberal democracy. Perhaps the influence coming from Putin's Russia can be taken as one pivotal factor that has intensified the populist discourse, because president Putin's knack on ethno nationalism and religious traditionalism seem to have allured the populist movements in Europe.

It is a fact beyond dispute that the rises of populist political parties under its far right ideologies in the backdrop of European Union parliamentary elections have destabilized the continuation of European integration under liberal center right outlook. The populist plan to expand their numbers in EU parliament in 2019 May elections have begun to upset the ostensible stability of EU and its French German leadership or perhaps this year Europe will face the arch encounter between newly emerged far right populism and the social democracy that has been the ruling slogan in Europe since 1968 in an open space.

(Source: Modern Diplomacy)

Proposed UN resolution should establish long-term Yemen ceasefire monitoring

TEHRAN (FNA) — A new draft resolution making its way to the UN Security Council can and should establish a long-term Yemen ceasefire monitoring mission.

The resolution is expected to be voted on next week and it shouldn't fail. A previous resolution from December 21 established a small monitoring team for 30 days. About 20 monitors are in place now. Under the new plan, up to 75 monitors could be sent. The initial period would be six months, and the resolution makes room for extensions.

And why not. The new mission should also monitor Saudi-led troop redeployment and air strikes to help provide security for three ports within the ceasefire area, including the main Hodeida aid port.

According to the Food Security Information Network (FSIN), there is an increasing risk of famine across Yemen. The FSIN says food crisis has notably deteriorated, adding that conditions will further worsen because of the Saudi-led war, drought, macro-economic collapse, and blockade. The FSIN, which is co-sponsored by the United Nations food agency, the World Food Program, and the International Food Policy Research Institute, says there is a growing demand for humanitarian aid.

On the fourth year of the illegal Saudi offensive, the UN International Children's Emergency Fund also reports that over 17 million people, which equals to 65 percent of all Yemeni households, are



food insecure, meaning that they cannot afford feeding themselves and their children adequately.

Anyone at the UN whose major concern is the sanctity of human life is in effect, by leaving Saudi-led, US-backed war crimes unchecked, ensuring death by famine in Yemen. This dirty war is pitiless, and if the international civil society itself does not stop the Saudi-led violence and war crimes through this new resolution, then

it will be complicit.

The problem of Yemen is exacerbated by Western governments' control of the "fake-stream" media. This runs counter to their obligation to promote truth, independence in the media, regional peace, and global security. The biggest problem is the lack of information of the real situation on the ground and the fact that many journalists avoid speaking out because they fear retaliation from their governments which are arming and supporting

the Saudi-led campaign.

Nonetheless, the international civil society cannot and should never stomach these crimes without offering resistance. Resistance is what has animated Yemen for the past four years, and pushed a nation on the brink, to manifest a movement that saw the bending of the might of Saudis and their allies.

Mind you, it is not the first time that a minority has come to overpower the multitude majority: Syria comes to mind. Just like in Yemen, the cabal of US invaders led by the Saudi allies chose to invade Syria too - with a helping hand from militant proxies. The regime changers loudly posit that their war on Syria - just like their war on Yemen - is righteous and fair.

It is not. The world community center has decided to frown before the slaughtering of a nation whose crime is to argue political self-determination in the face of Saudi Arabia's grand Wahhabist complex and America's Christian-Zionist colonial campaign. The world is in the know that the Saudis and the Americans cannot have a war on terrorism when their own war against Yemen is terrorism. Those who are going to vote next week at the UN should take note: The besieged people of Yemen need a long-term ceasefire monitoring mission and then an end to the Saudi war, not just for six months but forever. And the first thing to note in the Yemen war is the Saudi airstrikes.

Leah Bolger: Trump not tolerating differing opinions, fires Gen. Mattis

TEHRAN (FNA) — Retired U.S. Navy Commander, Leah Bolger, says even though Gen. Mattis seems to have resigned, from the military perspective it is clear that he was fired from the administration.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, Leah Bolger said "Trump surrounds himself with Yes-men, and does not tolerate differing opinions" which is enough to "fire Gen. Mattis" after his disagreement with withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan.

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense, before his resignation, had voiced his disagreement with some other Trump's policies, including the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran Nuclear Deal) and withdrawal from the Paris Accord concerning climate change.

Leah Bolger retired from the U.S. Navy at the rank of Commander after twenty years of active duty service. After retirement, she started her peace activities. She is the creator and coordinator of the "Drones Quilt Project" which serves to recognize the victims of U.S. combat drones and educate people. Currently she serves as the Chair of the Coordinating Committee of World Beyond War.

Below is the full text of the interview:

■ Both Republican and Democrat parties are alarmed over Gen. Mattis's resignation. Also, some world leaders have expressed concern about his resignation. Why was Mattis's resignation significant?

A: The Trump administration is replete with presidential appointees who are unqualified and have absolutely no experience in the area for which they have been given control; however, Gen. Mattis was one of the few exceptions. He was highly qualified, having served in the Marine Corps for 44

years, and he had a good reputation as a strategic thinker and leader, as well as bipartisan respect and support from both political parties in Congress. Because Trump is so reckless, compulsive, and inexperienced, Congress and other world leaders felt they could trust Gen. Mattis to be the "adult in the room." Now with Mattis gone, there is no safety gate. Patrick Shanahan, the Trump-appointed acting Secretary of Defense, has no international relations or military experience. His "credentials" are that he was a former senior executive with Boeing, one of the top weapons manufacturers in the world. It will be difficult for anyone to feel good about putting someone with no experience into what is arguably one of the most powerful positions in the world.

■ From the side of Trump, he showed good relations with Gen. Mattis during his presidential campaign. Why do we see them get to the point where they cannot tolerate each other?

A: Trump surrounds himself with "Yes men", and does not tolerate differing opinions, nor does he accept the advice of others. He is completely unable to admit that he might be wrong, or that others might know better. When he feels that he is losing the allegiance of an underling, he resorts to insults and grandstanding. Although Gen. Mattis submitted a letter of resignation, it is profoundly obvious that he was fired after he disagreed with Trump's proclamation via Twitter about withdrawing from Syria and Afghanistan. I believe that Trump underestimated the negative reaction he would get from all sides about his firing of Gen. Mattis.

■ From the side of Gen. Mattis, he had criticized Trump's worldview before he resigned. If he were a critique of the U.S. President, what took Mattis "so long" to resign?

A: Gen. Mattis served on active duty in the Marine Corps



for 44 years and he understands the President is also the Commander-in-Chief. Military personnel are trained to follow orders even if they disagree with them, although they may disobey an illegal order. I believe that Mattis respected the position of Commander-in-Chief despite his difference of opinion. I believe after Trump tweeted his major military and foreign policy decisions without consulting with Gen. Mattis (or apparently, anyone), he confronted Trump, who then fired him. It is also my guess that this had been coming for a long time.

■ What is the main feature of whom Trump will appoint as the future Secretary of Defense?

A: Unfortunately, I believe that Trump will continue to ignore the counsel of his advisors, and will continue to act impulsively and recklessly. I believe that future appointees will be more obsequious than experienced.

Japan strengthening military due to possible regional tensions: Japanese admiral

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — In an interview with the Tasnim News Agency in New Delhi on Wednesday, Chief of Staff of Japanese Self-Defense Forces, Katsutoshi Kawano commented about tensions between China and the U.S. and its impact on Japan's internal security.

Asked about the possible tensions between China and the United States in 2019 and its possible impacts on Japan, Kawano said, "Firstly we are taking diplomatic measures to decrease the tension, but at the same time we understand that the situation can endanger our own internal security and that is why we decided to strengthen our military

strength also."

Answering to a question about Japan's position regarding the U.S. and North Korea reaching dead end in resolving their disputes, the Japanese admiral said, "Well, we are basically looking at resolving the problem in cooperation with the U.S. within the bilateral framework, so as far as the bilateral relations and the talks between the U.S. and North Korea goes, currently we are just observing and watching them as how it's going on."

Asked about Japan's view about the possible tension between the U.S. and Iran in the Persian Gulf especially the strait of

Hurmoz, the Japanese Chief of Staff said, "Well, especially with regards to the disputes and problems in the Persian Gulf, this is part of our oil line and hence it is a matter of great interest and concern for us and we are looking forward to a peaceful resolution to this problem."

Answering to a question about whether Japan has been in contact with the U.S. about the situation in the Persian Gulf, the highest-ranking officer of the Japan Self-Defense Forces said, "Again, I would not know about it, because it is more of a political level. If any of these talks are happening they are

not part of my domain."

Asked for his opinion about the possible consequences of further tension in the Persian Gulf region and its importance to Japan, the Admiral said, "I think what you're putting forward to me is a hypothesis and I would like to refrain from answering questions based on hypothesis."

When asked about further tensions, conflicts and challenges in the Persian Gulf region and their implications to Japan, Kawano said, "I can say that especially with regard to Persian Gulf, if there is a problem that occurs over there it can be a big problem for Japan."

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IMI holds 14th HRM conference: Iran's most significant HR event

By Setareh Jahandideh

TEHRAN — Iran's 14th conference on Human Resource Management (HRM) 2019, as the most significant event dedicated to promotion and management of human resource in the country started yesterday.

The two-day conference is organized by the Industrial Management Institute of Iran (IMI)

Founded in 1962, the Industrial Management Institute (IMI) has been the hub of management, consulting and education in

and cognitive computing. Industry 4.0 is commonly referred to as the fourth industrial revolution.

The goal of this conference is, as in previous years, to bring together international scholars and business leaders to facilitate the exchange between business and academia on the latest ideas and empirical results concerning work in the digital age, the transformation of the HRM department and its activities, and to match cutting-edge smart HRM research and practice with the focus on HRM for industry 4.0.

of information between HR experts.

According to him, holding over 14 human resource management conferences by IMI has resulted in production of 3,805 articles and 300,000 hours of training.

International aspects of HRM 2019 Conference

According to Dr. Kiani Bakhtiari, the conference included cutting edge presentations from five international experts in several subjects; namely, leadership and ethics, the impact of hard economic conditions on employee performance, agile listening, leading and communicating effectively in the workplace, new ways of working based on digital transformation in the workplace and how to lead teams under complex and uncertain conditions.

He added that another conference, named "the Areas of Learning" was held before this conference where the best practices of companies and organizations were presented, and the results of their experience were used in organization of the present conference.

Kiani Bakhtiari added that since the very first days of IMI foundation, the organization has been cooperating with international organizations such as United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Bank.

"For 18 years now, we have been running joint MBA (Master of Business Administration) and DBA (Doctor of business administration) programs with French universities including University of Bordeaux and University of Lyon. We have also been having joint global SMA management courses (small and medium-sized enterprises) with Germany," said Kiani Bakhtiari.

"Furthermore, IMI has been launching online courses with Simon Fraser University. Besides, we have ran joint DBA programs in oil, gas and petrochemical fields with York University," added the IMI Managing Director.

According to Kiani Bakhtiari, the presence of top HR managements in the conference makes a huge contribution to the development of this sector, as these

managers will learn the most recent trends in this field and can put them into practice in their own work environment.

Innovative approach of HRM 2019

In his interview with Tehran Times, Dr. Ahmad Bazli, the Deputy Head of IMI, said the organization aims to run its next HR conference in full international scales; that is, to follow all international standards and to have international keynote speakers and guests.

Dr. Bazli also referred to a new sector in the conference, called "the Innovation Station" that started since last year. According to him, the new section is an opportunity for new businesses and startups to share their innovative ideas.

"This year, we have invited 20 startups to share their challenges and achievements in HR management. This would greatly contribute to the development of business environment as the number of small businesses and startups are now on the rise and these groups have started to play a vital role in the country's industrial sector," he further remarked. According to Dr. Bazli, another objective of the conference was to promote local HR models and templates.

"Unfortunately, our HR systems have been proven unsuccessful in many areas as we have imported different HR management models from east and west without noticing that they may not suit our culture and social environment. This has resulted in failure of some of these models, and in some cases the models are being run in a superficial manner," he further announced.

"Events, such as this conference, give an opportunity to HR experts to present their locally designed models and the problems they had in running them. This would help other participants to learn new methods; additionally, the local models are closely reviewed, so their potential shortfalls are detected," Bazli noted.

"This event brings together more than one thousand HR managers, this will lead to formation of a big network that can further facilitate the exchange of information between different HR departments and

facilitates the companies' final efficiency," he said.

"Another outcome of the conference is corporate entrepreneurship; this means that we stop repeating our previous mistakes and start taking an innovative approach."

Dr. Bazli referred to the establishment of Iranian Society for Human Resource Management, as another positive outcome of the conference.

"The HRM society was established a few years after the conference was convened and it is the largest private HR management

performance and possible success.

According to Dr. Abolalaei, All the methods are non-monetary, so they are perfectly suitable for the country's current circumstances.

In his interview with Tehran Times, Abolalaei said the main obstacle in development of human resource in the country, is that some managers have not yet understood the vitality of the issue. However, fortunately, such conferences will be a wake-up call for many managers to be reminded of the importance of human



Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari, the managing director of IMI and the chairman of the conference

Iran's industrial and service sectors. IMI's purpose is to develop management capacity and facilitate change and improvement in public and private sectors.

The conference is majorly based on international experience and its main focus is to explore the effects of digital transformation and in particular the effects of industry 4.0 on human resource.

Industry 4.0 is a name given to the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. It includes cyber-physical systems, the Internet of things, cloud computing

According to Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari, the managing director of IMI and the chairman of the conference, more than 1200 top managers and industry executives on the field of human resource management has taken part in the conference.

In an interview with Tehran Times, Dr. Kiani Bakhtiari noted that the main idea behind the conference was to develop the infrastructures of human resource management in the country, to transfer the global HR knowledge to local sectors, to instate a new corporate culture based on latest HR trends and to facilitate the exchange



organization in the country. The society grants an award to the companies who have successfully ran the HR development model in their workplace. During the current event, 37 organizations will receive this award," Bazli further announced.

Prioritizing HR development in the country

During the conference, Dr. Behzad Abolalaei gave a full-length speech on different methods to promote the sense of ownership and engagement among employees. According to this theory, when employees are more involved in decision making process of the company, they would feel more responsible about the company's

resource management. "The methods and tools are always available, but the mindset has to change," he highlighted.

Dr. Abolalaei added that the international focus of the conference has increased compared to the last years, and expressed hope that more and more attention will be paid to HR development.

Abolalaei also referred to a newly added section in the conference where the companies and individuals can share their unsuccessful experiences in managing the human resources. He said such critical approaches has a great teaching value for all participants in the conference.

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Iran enjoys development in space technology: official

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iran is now absolutely powerful in designing and manufacturing satellites and enjoy day-to-day development in space technology, the head of Iranian Space Agency Morteza Barari said, Mehr reported on Sunday.



In comparison with the last Iranian satellites, which were placed in the orbit, Payam satellite has a weight and a resolution two times and ten times more respectively. Besides, its orbital lifetime is 16 times more, he explained.

"The previous Iranian satellites were research satellites, however, today we manufacture operational satellites," he said.

The Iranian experts can manufacture a satellite like Payam satellite in six months, he said.

The homegrown Payam satellite was launched Saturday morning, however, it failed to reach the orbit.

He said that the space technology owes to professional experts who care about the development of the country.

Space technology has a strategic role in development of the country and can create job opportunities for people, he explained.

"We should try to introduce the role of space technology in development of the country so the private sector encourage to invest in this field," he said.

The AI 'kitchen manipulator' learning to do everything from keeping track of dirty dishes to making meals

Your next sous-chef in the kitchen may be a robot.

Semiconductor giant Nvidia has debuted its 'kitchen manipulator' robot that uses AI and machine learning to be able to identify ingredients.

The hope is that as the robot gets smarter, it can one day work alongside humans to help cook a meal.

Nvidia's kitchen robot is just one of several other robots in development at the firm's new lab in Seattle, which is meant to oversee all of its robotics projects.

The lab's focus is on 'cobots,' or robots that are trained to perform complex tasks and work next to humans.

Cobots could play a role in factories, hospitals, helping people with disabilities and, now in the house, or more specifically, the kitchen.

"Collaborative robotics, we might even call it the holy grail of robotics right now," Nathan Ratliff, a distinguished research scientist at Nvidia, explained.

"It's one of the most challenging environments to get these robots to operate around people and do helpful things in unstructured environments."

The 'kitchen manipulator' uses AI and deep learning to detect and track objects, as well as take note of where doors and drawers are in the kitchen, Nvidia said.

It can even open and close drawer doors on its own.

"We want to develop robots that can naturally perform tasks alongside people," said Dieter Fox, who leads the lab, in a statement.

To do that, they need to be able to understand what a person wants to do and figure out how to help her achieve a goal.

After the robot detects the objects in its surroundings, that data is used to generate 'continuous perceptual feedback' of where they are if they're moved, if they fall or their position changes in any way.

Information is then fed to a motion generation layer of the machine learning software, which enables the robot to make 'real-time, fast, reactive, adaptive and human-like motion,' Ratliff said.

The goal is for the kitchen manipulator to be able to handle dirty dishes, retrieve ingredients and cook alongside humans.

"One of the most challenging collaborative domains is the kitchen environment," Ratliff explained.

"So we've chosen that as a test bed so we can develop a lot of these technologies, study the system in this space and take a lot of what we learn and apply them across the board to these other collaborative domains."

(Source: dailymail.co.uk)

Impossible Burger named best product launch at CES 2019

A "next-generation" plant-based faux burger has been hailed as the best technological innovation at CES 2019 by two independent tastemakers in the industry, Digital Trends and Engadget.

To describe the wins as a big coup for Impossible Burger would be an understatement.

Impossible Burger's attendance at the world's biggest consumer electronics conference this year marked the first time ever that a food product was given an exhibit at the show.

And experts and editors at Digital Trends and Engadget independently named the revamped meatless burger their favorite product launch this year.

Though Impossible Burger has been on the market since 2016, the product was given a recipe makeover and showcased as the version 2.0 at CES: The newest version contains no gluten, animal hormones or antibiotics, and is kosher and halal-certified.

The updated burger also has as much iron and protein as ground beef. Engadget editors heaped a trio of awards on the Impossible Burger 2.0, including Most Unexpected Product, Most Impactful Product and Best of the Best Award.

Likewise, Digital Trends named the product their Top Tech Winner this year.

"By shrinking the flavor gap between real meat and fake meat, Impossible is making it easier for everyone to make more environmentally conscious food choices, and that's a big deal," said Digital Trends' Drew Prindle, emerging tech editor in a statement.

"Animal agriculture is the number one cause of environmental destruction in the world, so reducing humanity's consumption and cultivation of meat is arguably one of the most effective ways that we can combat climate change."

The Impossible Burger is sold at more than 5,000 locations in the U.S., including burger chains like Umami Burger, Bareburger and Wahlburgers. White Castle becomes the first fast-food chain to debut the newest recipe at restaurants in Las Vegas.

(Source: msn.com)

Payam satellite fails to reach orbit

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iran launched homegrown Payam satellite early on Tuesday, however, the satellite's carrier rocket could not reach the "necessary speed" and so did not reach the orbit, the information and communication technology (ICT) minister told the state TV.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said that the satellite successfully passed the first and second stages of the launch, but could not reach the "necessary speed" in the third stage.

The satellite was launched from Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Kerman on 4:30 a.m. local time by the Ministry of Defense, he announced.

It took 500 seconds to reach the orbit above the southeastern port of Chabahar, he explained.

Payam, a 90kg non-military satellite, was planned to be sent into a 500km orbit using domestically-made Safir satellite-carrier rocket.

Manufactured by Amirkabir University

of Technology, the image resolution of the Payam satellite is 45 meters and can stay in orbit for three years.

"I want to make you happy with good news, however, life is not what we expect most of time ... but we should not back out! This is when we manifest our differences with other nations in high spirit and bravery, we prove others that 'Dousti' will be successful, Inshallah," Jahromi tweeted on his account Saturday morning.

Dousti satellite, is another homegrown production, which passed the pre-launch tests and is ready for launch.

■ Dousti satellite
Literally means 'friendship', Dousti satellite is manufactured at the Sharif University of Technology.

Over 150 experts in different fields of electronics, aerospace, computer science, mechanics and industry from five faculties manufactured the satellite.



The satellite takes images with better than 30 meter resolution, investigate of vegetation and monitors water resources.

Dousti will be placed into the orbit 500

kilometers above the earth's surface.

Iran has launched several short-lived satellites into orbit over the past decade, including the Simorgh and the Pajouhesh.

Human resources main element for wealth creation: VP

▶ In the field of biotechnology, some accelerator centers have been established in Tehran and other Iranian cities including Tabriz and Urmia.

The biotechnology is profit-making

field and investment on this field is an economical decision, he said.

Biotechnology is not limited to medicine and medical equipment but also food safety and probiotic products are considered in this category.

During his speech, he focused on the importance of interdisciplinary subjects to improve science and technology.

He said that startups attract Iranian expat experts to come back to country and invest on them.



How 3D technology is revolutionizing face transplants

Face transplants are an ideal setting to fuse medicine with the growing world of 3D printing and imaging. The left image is a rendering of what face transplant recipient Cameron Underwood's face looked like before his surgery; the right is a planned rendering based on the donor's face.

Cameron Underwood received a new face on January 6, 2018. By the time his surgery ended, everything below Underwood's eye sockets had been replaced with the face of organ donor William Fisher.

A face transplant is exactly what it sounds like—replacing the disfigured face of one person with the whole, undamaged face of a very recently deceased person. Eduardo Rodriguez, plastic surgeon and face transplant specialist at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York who performed surgery on Underwood, insists this surgery is a way to give these patients "a second chance at life." Without a new face, patients like Underwood

have great difficulty speaking, swallowing, eating, expressing themselves, as well as all the other things we do with our faces that we never think twice about.

A physician in France performed the first successful face transplant surgery in 2005. Since then, only 40 other such surgeries have been done around the world. Rodriguez has performed three of those surgeries, including Underwood's.

Face transplants are an ideal setting to fuse medicine with the growing world of 3D printing and imaging. During Cameron Underwood's surgery, everything from planning, printing the tools, and accurately aligning the face during the operation relies on the latest medical technology.

■ Building a digital model of a face
After suffering a self-inflicted gunshot wound, Underwood's upper and lower jaw bones, gums, and all 32 teeth had to be replaced, as well as the roof and floor of his mouth, part

of his tongue, the lower eyelids, cheeks, nose, and parts of the nasal passage. He had metal plates screwed into his remaining facial bones, the handiwork of surgeons attempting to patch him up immediately after the incident. His speech was difficult and muffled. He relied on a feeding tube to eat and a hole in his neck to breathe. Most of the time, he wore a surgical face mask to avoid surprised stares.

Prior to any surgeries, Rodriguez and his team took a CT scan of Underwood's face. CT scans, also known as CAT scans, shoot x-rays from different angles to build a picture of the bones, tissues, and cavities in any area of the body, in this case the head. The scanner can display the inside of the head as 2D "slices" of each area. By flipping through the slices, you can get a sense of what's happening with the underlying architecture of the face.

But for a surgery as detailed as this one, a single CT scan isn't enough. Precision—particularly in facial alignment—is key during a face

transplant surgery. So they sent the CT scans to a company in Michigan called Materialise. This company specializes in building 3D-printing software and applications, and has developed an entire practice around medical tools. The engineers at Materialise took the slices from the CT scan and converted them into a digital, three-dimensional model of Cameron Underwood's face that Rodriguez could use to meticulously plan every element of the surgery.

Part of the normal 3D printing process involves taking a 3-dimensional digital model and converting it into slice files that the printer can then read and use to build the physical representation layer by layer, says Bryan Crutchfield, vice president and general manager for Materialise North America. Materialise realized they could reverse that process, using similar software to convert slice files, like those from a CT scanner, into 3-dimensional renderings.

(Source: popsci.com)

AI is about to take the ship's helm away from humans

The next time you hop on a ferry, take a look at the captain's bridge. There may not be a human at the helm much longer. Ships around the world are beginning a transformation into autonomous machines, leveraging the same advances in artificial intelligence that are shaking up the automotive world.

In 2017, Ugo Vollmer and his friend Clement Renault were working on self-driving cars in Silicon Valley when an article on autonomous shipping caused them to make a sudden change in direction.

Reading that more than 80% of goods are transported by sea, a light bulb went off, says Vollmer. "We can have a very huge impact," he remembers thinking. The French engineers started tinkering with robotizing a small boat along with another friend friend, Antoine de Maleprade. Within three months of joining the incubator Y Combinator in January 2018, their startup Shone struck a deal with the big French shipping line CMA CGM to install a system on cargo ships plying trans-Pacific routes that detects surrounding ships and obstacles.

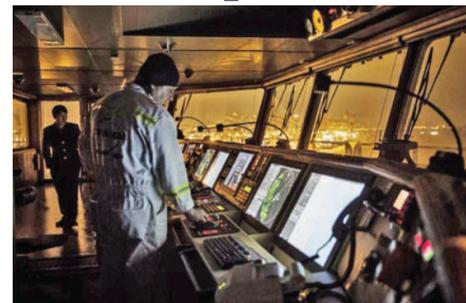
Shone is one of a wave of companies that are seeking to robotize ships using artificial intelligence to fuse data from shipboard sensors like radar and cameras to create a picture of the hazards around a ship and to navigate among them. Autonomous and remote-controlled shipping promises to reduce the costs of consumer goods and improve safety for passenger ferries and cruise liners. The first commercial vessels likely to operate autonomously at least part of the time are expected to be tugboats and small ferries traveling short routes—the technology could enable an expansion of passenger service into thinly traveled early morning hours and in rural locations.

However, autonomy will play out very differently on the water than on land, and in many cases it won't take humans off the ship—or entirely away from the controls. Rather than just replacing one driver of a car or truck, oceangoing ships can have 20 or more crew members onboard, some of whom tend to a range of mechanical systems en route.

"Diesel engines require replacement of filters in oil systems—the fuel system has a separator than can get clogged," says Oskar Levander, who heads Roll-Royce's autonomous systems efforts. "There are a lot of these things the crew is doing all the time."

In the near term, it's more likely that the helm will be controlled by an autonomous system or a remote human operator while a smaller crew takes care of the vessel. Transoceanic autonomous journeys will require rule-making by the International Maritime Organization, a process that could take through the middle of the next decade.

The first commercial applications of autonomous systems are likely to be on small vessels in coastal waters in Scandinavia, where Finland and Norway have staked out testing areas. In December in Finland, Rolls-Royce pulled



off the first public demonstration of an autonomous voyage by a passenger vessel, a state-run car ferry that avoided obstacles on a 1-mile route and docked automatically. On that day and in previous trials, Rolls-Royce says the system performed ably in rough winter weather, handling snow and strong winds.

Small ferries are a key part of the transportation network in Scandinavia, carrying cars across fjords and connecting to islands. Autonomous and remote control systems could allow for an expansion of service on short routes into nighttime hours, and reduce staffing on less popular ones, with boats potentially piloted from onshore centers where one captain could supervise many, says Levander.

The tugboat market also has a good near-term business case for autonomy and remote control, says Levander. "There's a very attractive payback time, crew costs are high," he says. Rolls-Royce demonstrated remote control of a tugboat in Copenhagen in 2017 working with Svister, a tug operator owned by Maersk. A Boston-based startup called Sea Machines is also developing autonomous and remote-control systems for tugs, ferries and other workboats.

In 2020, the Norse conglomerate Kongsberg, which is acquiring Rolls-Royce's marine unit, will launch the world's first electric containership designed to be autonomous, the YARA Birkehead. The vessel, which is on the smaller side with capacity for 120 shipping containers, will carry fertilizer in Norwegian waters from a YARA plant to nearby ports to be transferred to larger vessels for export.

Rolls-Royce's Levander and many in the industry believe new-build electric vessels will be the ideal platform to robotize cargo shipping—electric propulsion systems will have fewer moving parts and require less maintenance. But it will take decades for cargo fleets to turn over—vessels typically stay in service for about 20 years—and batteries don't have enough energy density yet to power ships for cross-ocean voyages.

Shone is staking its business on retrofitting existing cargo ships. In certain ways it's easier to make ships au-

tonomous than automobiles. Large ships already have marine-tested sensor systems that can be plugged into: radar, GPS and a transponder-based automatic identification system. Shone adds 360-degree cameras and microphones and uses artificial intelligence to fuse the sensor data into an object detection system that displays an integrated picture of a ship's surroundings for the crew on an iPad.

Microphones can pick up a ship's horn and by algorithm the system can pinpoint its location. The system also adds layers of intelligence, says Vollmer. "It can flag you should pay attention to this one ship because it has erratic behavior."

At this point that's the extent of what the system does. In the spring Vollmer says it will begin recommending courses of action for the ship's helm to take, from obstacle avoidance to optimizing routes, building trust for the final step, when it's permissible: taking automatic action. Shone is installing its system for a price "in the hundreds of thousands," says Vollmer, and a recurring fee for service. It's a small amount, he says, compared to the \$200 million price for a cargo vessel, and contrasts to the cost issues that autonomous sensor suites raise for cars.

Intelligent awareness systems from companies including Shone and Rolls-Royce promise to provide crews with a better picture of their ship's surroundings, fusing data from radar, cameras, AIS and GPS.

Intelligent awareness systems from companies including Shone and Rolls-Royce promise to provide crews with a better picture of their ship's surroundings, fusing data from radar, cameras, AIS and GPS.

In the near future cargo ships are only likely to operate autonomously on the open ocean, says Levander, because of the difficulty and expense of creating a system capable of handling the most complex situations that ships encounter. Going in and out of port the ship would be controlled remotely by a captain in a center onshore, with video and other data streaming over land-based 4G and 5G networks. Out on open water, the ship would switch to autonomous mode, which wouldn't require as much data transmittal, with captains ashore standing by to take over as needed, aided by satellite communications.

With more jobs on shore, Levander says it will provide a better, safer life for some seafarers. "The captain doesn't have to be away for six months at a time and can have a family life."

The enhanced situational awareness systems are expected to reduce accidents—from 2011 through 2016, 75% of incidents at sea that resulted in liability insurance claims were due to human error, according to the German insurer Allianz.

And that means taking sailors out of harm's way. "We can provide a better life for the seafarer," says Levander. (Source: forbes.com)

Scientists want to grow beans in space as early as 2021

NASA's space garden. The crew of the International Space Station (ISS) will soon be eating fresh beans grown while in orbit. The experiment, which will begin in 2021, will inform how food will be produced for long journeys across space.

In 2015, the astronauts onboard the International Space Station successfully harvested fresh lettuce. By 2021, fresh beans could be on their menu, too.

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology revealed in a press release last week that the crew of the orbiting outpost will attempt to grow beans in space using high-tech planters. The goal, the university said, is to one day provide fresh produce for astronauts who are in a mission to outer space.

The "dream of every astronaut is to be able to eat fresh food — like strawberries, cherry tomatoes or anything that's really flavorful," stated Silje Wolff, a plant physiologist at the NTNU. "Someday that will certainly be possible."

Absence of gravity

For the meantime, however, the NTNU scientists want to grow beans and observe how the legumes would react to the absence of gravity, specifically with how the plant transports water and absorb nutrients.

According to the press release, the plants will be placed into a centrifuge that rotates to simulate different levels of gravity in the



space station.

On Earth, the gravity causes warm air to float while cold air sinks. In space, the air is more stable and still. This affects astronauts and scientists want to know if it will affect

plants, too.

"Stationary air affects a layer on the underside of the leaf where the stoma pores are located. When gravity disappears, the boundary layer in the slit-shaped apertures

On Earth, the gravity causes warm air to float while cold air sinks. In space, the air is more stable and still. This affects astronauts and scientists want to know if it will affect plants, too.

thickens. This reduces evaporation and causes the leaf temperature to increase," explained Wolff.

"Water vapor diffusion to the environment is an important part of plant regulation and can be compared with sweating to cool the body in humans and animals."

NTNU is currently working with French and Italian scientists to cultivate more plant-based food for future manned missions in space.

Vacuum-packed food

The experiment will also benefit astronauts who spend up to six months onboard the space station. Right now, the ISS crew survives by eating freeze-dried and vacuum-packed food, which are not always appetizing.

Wolff explained that astronauts often have to deal with little appetite. Fresh food can trigger the appetite.

That is why, in 2015, when astronauts made their first harvest of lettuce grown onboard the ISS, they celebrated. Crew members of Expedition 44 feasted by eating the leaves with extra virgin olive oil and Italian balsamic vinegar.

Moreover, gardening has been found to aid a person's cognitive performance and mental well-being. Wolff added that for astronauts who spend months away from their families and other humans, tending for the plants remind them of life back home.

(Source: techtimes.com)

This totally real map makes it look like Australia is on fire: study

Australia is sweltering through an intense heatwave this week that's scorching the country from coast to coast with temperatures as high as 49.3 degrees Celsius (120.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

In numerous locations, temperature records have already been broken, with minimum overnight temperatures in three towns of 33°C (91°F) showing even the night offers no escape from the blistering heat.

In parts of the country, maximum temperatures are rising to 8°C to 12°C above average, producing emergency alerts, like in South Australia, where Code Red conditions are seeing bats drop out of trees.

When you check out the temperature map from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (below), it's kinda like staring into the flaming eye of Sauron, although thankfully there's no trace of purple just yet - a color that had to be added to weather maps in 2013.

Regional towns in New South Wales are being hit by brutal mid-40°C temperatures, while one small town in Western Australia has hit at least 40°C every day for almost a whole month.

Until the intense conditions pass, as the South Australian Bureau of Meteorology says, "Keep your family, friends and pets cool" - if you can. And maybe leave some water out for wildlife. (Source: sciencealert.com)

Team discovers new way supermassive black holes are 'fed'

Supermassive black holes weigh millions to billions times more than our sun and lie at the center of most galaxies. A supermassive black hole several million times the mass of the sun is situated in the heart of our very own Milky Way.

Despite how commonplace supermassive black holes are, it remains unclear how they grow to such enormous proportions. Some black holes constantly swallow gas in their surroundings, some suddenly swallow whole stars. But neither theory independently explains how supermassive black holes can "switch on" so unexpectedly and keep growing so fast for a long period.

A new study finds that some supermassive black holes are triggered to grow, suddenly devouring a large amount of gas in their surroundings.

In February 2017, the All Sky Automated Survey for Supernovae discovered an event known as AT 2017bgt. This event was initially believed to be a "star swallowing" event, or a "tidal disruption" event, because the radiation emitted around the black hole grew more than 50 times brighter than what had been observed in 2004.

However, after extensive observations using a multitude of telescopes, a team of researchers led by Dr. Benny Trakhtenbrot and Dr. Iair Arcavi, both of TAU's Raymond & Beverly Sackler School of Physics and Astronomy, concluded that AT 2017bgt represented a new way of "feeding" black holes.

"The sudden brightening of AT 2017bgt was reminiscent of a tidal disruption event," says Dr. Trakhtenbrot. "But we quickly realized that this time there was something unusual. The first clue was an additional component of light, which had never been seen in tidal disruption events."



Dr. Arcavi, who led the data collection, adds, "We followed this event for more than a year with telescopes on Earth and in space, and what we saw did not match anything we had seen before."

The observations matched the theoretical predictions of another member of the research team, says the author.

"We had predicted back in the 1980s that a black hole swallowing gas from its surroundings could produce the elements of light seen here," says Prof. Netzer. "This new result is the first time the process was seen in practice."

(Source: phys.org)

Cities could play a key role in pollinator conservation, research suggests



Given the pressures that pollinators face in agricultural land, cities could play an important role in conserving pollinators, according to a new study.

The research, carried out by scientists at the Universities of Bristol, Edinburgh, Leeds and Reading in collaboration with Cardiff University and the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC), has revealed that gardens and allotments are good for pollinators, and lavender and borage are important garden plants that pollinators use as food sources.

The study, published on Monday 14 January in *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, has assessed all major urban land uses for pollinators.

While there have been a few small-scale studies on pollinators in some urban land uses, this is the first-time scientists have considered cities in their entirety.

The research found that residential gardens and allotments (community gardens) are particularly good for pollinators, and lavender, borage, dandelions, thistles, brambles and buttercups are important plant species for pollinators in urban areas.

Communities of pollinators

The team also designed a new measure of management success, based on community robustness that considers the stability of whole communities of pollinators, and not just individual species.

Robustness is a measure of how a community responds to species loss; robust communities can survive the disappearance of some species but species loss in fragile communities leads to a domino effect of other extinctions.

Dr. Katherine Baldock, NERC Knowledge Exchange Fellow and lead researcher from the School of Biological Sciences and the Cabot Institute at the University of Bristol,

said: "By understanding the impact of each urban land use on pollinators, whether it's gardens, allotments, road verges or parks, we can make cities better places for pollinators."

Public green spaces should be managed so they benefit pollinators. Parks, road verges and other public green spaces make up around a third of cities but have fewer pollinator visits and resources for pollinators than other land uses.

Increasing number of flowers

The research shows that increasing the numbers of flowers, for example by mowing less often, can help urban pollinators.

Gardens make up a quarter to a third of the area of UK cities and better garden management in new developments and existing gardens is likely to benefit pollinator conservation.

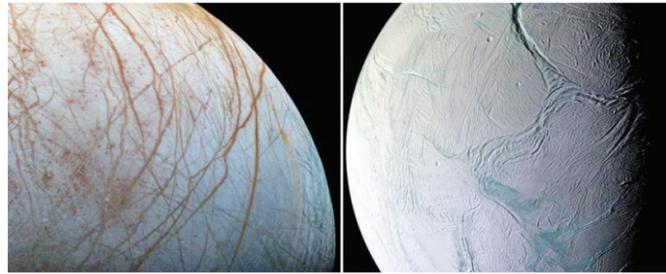
City planners and local councils should increase the number of allotments (community gardens) in towns and cities. Allotments (community gardens) are good for pollinators as well as people and increasing their area even by a small amount could have a large positive effect on pollinators.

Jane Memmott, Professor of Ecology at the University of Bristol and who leads the Urban Pollinators Project, added: "This is the first time a new measure of management success that considers the long-term sustainability of pollinator communities, and not just individual species, has been used in a practical conservation context."

"Rather than simply asking about how management affects the number of pollinator species or their abundance, we also ask how potential strategies affect the ability of pollinators to cope with species losses associated with environmental change. A good management intervention leads to more sustainable communities."

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Ocean moons, promising targets in search for alien life, could be dead inside



For more than two decades, scientists have wondered whether extraterrestrial life may be flourishing deep below the icy coatings boasted by moons in our outer Solar System.

Spacecraft like the Galileo mission to Jupiter and the Cassini mission to Saturn have stumbled on evidence that some of their moons hide global oceans, warmed by the pull of the giant planet they orbit. And oceanic explorers much closer to home have discovered dynamic communities living in darkness around geologic features on the ocean floor.

Combine the two and it's easy to be carried away with dreams of alien seafloors teeming with microbes. But new research is looking deeper, into the rock itself, and suggesting that these worlds may be dead inside — not just biologically, but geologically as well.

"We were wondering, what would it look like if you were in a submarine and you were able to fly over the surface of the ocean floor on (Jupiter's moon) Europa," lead author Paul Byrne, a planetary geologist at North Carolina State University told Space.com last month at the annual conference of the American Geophysical Union in Washington.

Black smokers on Earth

These are the seafloors where astrobiologists have hoped to find heated, mineral-packed seawater spitting out into the ocean, like hydrothermal vents and black smokers on Earth.

In our oceans, those features support bustling communities centered on microbes ("crawlies," as Byrne calls them) that can feed themselves on chemicals produced where hot rock and seawater continuously mix.

If similar structures are found on alien ocean worlds, the prospect of finding life on worlds far from the sun becomes just a little more plausible.

To reach that conclusion, the team fo-

cused on the rock itself, determining how much force would be necessary to break the rock in two ways we see on Earth: normal faults, which occur when rock is pulled apart, and thrust faults, which occur when rock is pushed together and which require more force to produce.

The more force required to break rock, the less geological activity is happening — and that means less of the interactions between fresh rock and alien seawater that could theoretically support life.

Rock strength calculations

Byrne and his colleagues focused on four ocean worlds: Jupiter's moons Europa and Ganymede and Saturn's Enceladus and Titan. For each of these worlds, the team calculated the strength of the rock. While there are plenty of questions we can't yet answer about these worlds, it turns out that rock strength calculations — which are commonly made on Earth for mining operations — are pretty feasible.

Those calculations are based on the thickness of the cold, solid rock layer, which rests on top of a warmer, mushy layer that can't break. An analogy may help. "Think of like a Milky Way bar or a Mars bar, it's where the chocolate and caramel touch," Byrne said. "That depth, you can treat that as the thickness of the brittle, rigid layer." The thicker it is, the harder it is to break.

Byrne said those initial results, which he was presenting at the conference, suggest that the rock is so strong that there's no force we know of on these moons powerful enough to regularly crack it. That's because of the sheer weight of the water and ice sitting above the rock. "When it actually comes to understanding how strong the rock is, it's pretty strong, and it's pretty strong because even though the gravity's pretty low there's a lot of water on top of it," Byrne said.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

Antarctica losing six times more ice than 1979, study says

As global average temperatures continue to rise, it's becoming increasingly clear that ice at the poles is melting faster than ever before. This is bad news considering that Antarctica alone holds over seven times more land-ice than all other sources in the world combined and contains enough water to raise global sea levels by 190 feet, according to NASA.

Now, a study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has found that annual ice mass loss in Antarctica increased by six times between 1979 and 2017, corresponding to a sea level rise of more than half an inch in that period.

"That's just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak," Eric Rignot, lead author of the study from the University of California, Irvine and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said in a statement. "As the Antarctic ice sheet continues to melt away, we expect multi-meter sea level rise from Antarctica in the coming centuries."

According to Rignot and his team, the study is the longest ever assessment of Antarctic ice mass, while also covering a large geographical area, encompassing 18 different regions in total.

Satellite data

For their research, the team examined images taken NASA research aircraft as well as satellite data collected by several



agencies.

Their findings showed that between 1979 and 1990, Antarctica lost an average of 40 billion tons of ice every year. However, in the period from 2009 to 2017, this figure jumped to 252 billion tons.

In fact, the rate of ice loss for the period between 2001 and 2017 was 280 percent higher than it was between 1979 and 2001.

Furthermore, the study shows how the East Antarctica region has played a significant role in the trends that were identified.

The "Wilkes Land sector of East Antarctica has, overall, always been an important participant in the mass loss, even as far back as the 1980s, as our research has shown," Rignot said. "This region is probably more sensitive to climate [change] than has traditionally been assumed, and that's important to know, because it holds even more ice than West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula together."

The regions of ice which are close to warm water tend to be the ones where ice mass loss is the worst, Rignot added. "As climate warming and ozone depletion send more ocean heat toward those sectors, they will continue to contribute to sea level rise from Antarctica in decades to come."

The latest results echo those of a landmark international study published in the journal *Nature* in June last year which found that Antarctica could have lost up to 2,720 billion tons of ice between 1992 and 2017. Similarly, the paper found that the rate of ice loss increased threefold over this period.

(Source: Newsweek)

Upper-ocean warming is changing the global wave climate, making waves stronger

Sea level rise puts coastal areas at the forefront of the impacts of climate change, but new research shows they face other climate-related threats as well. Scientists found that the energy of ocean waves has been growing globally, and they found a direct association between ocean warming and the increase in wave energy.

Sea level rise puts coastal areas at the forefront of the impacts of climate change, but new research shows they face other climate-related threats as well. In a study published January 14 in *Nature Communications*, researchers report that the energy of ocean waves has been growing globally, and they found a direct association between ocean warming and the increase in wave energy.

A wide range of long-term trends and projections carry the fingerprint of climate change, including rising sea levels, increasing global temperatures, and declining sea ice. Analyses of the global marine climate thus far have identified increases in wind speeds and wave heights in localized areas of the ocean in the high latitudes of both hemispheres. These increases have been larger for the most extreme values (e.g., winter waves) than for the mean conditions. However, a global signal of change and a correlation between the localized increases in wave heights and global warming had remained undetected.

The new study focused on the energy contained in ocean waves, which is transmitted from the wind and transformed into wave motion. This metric, called wave power, has been increasing in direct association with historical warming of the ocean surface. The upper ocean warming, measured as a rising trend in sea-surface temperatures, has influenced wind patterns globally, and this, in turn, is making ocean waves stronger.

"For the first time, we have identified a global signal of the effect of global warming in wave climate. In fact, wave power has increased globally by 0.4 percent per year since 1948, and this increase is correlated with the increasing sea-surface temperatures, both globally and by ocean regions," said lead author.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

IRGC inaugurates 5,400 projects in underprivileged areas

The projects are inaugurated on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (1979), Mansouri added.



Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Mohammad Ali Jafari in attendance.

According to the report concurrent with the inauguration of the aforesaid projects thousands of employment plans were also provided to the residents of the underprivileged areas.

The projects were inaugurated simultaneously over a video conference with Commander of the Islamic

Tehran to host environmental impact assessment conference

TEHRAN — The 16th national conference on environmental impact assessment will be held in Tehran on February 20-21, Mehr news agency reported on Monday.



The event is held annually to address different environmental issues. It is organized by the Iranian Association for Environmental Assessment in cooperation with the environment and sustainable development research center and the Department of Environment.

Strategic environmental assessment, environmental impact assessment from economic, social, health and ecological points of view, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Participation of local communities in environmental assessment, climate change, management of environment, sustainable tourism and green production are among the issues to be discussed during the conference.

LEARN ENGLISH

Tune Up

A: Welcome to Al's Garage. What seems to be the problem?
B: No problem at all! I am taking a long road trip and I want to make sure my car is in good mechanical condition.

A: Very wise decision. When was the last time you had a tune up?
B: Not that long ago, I think it was four months ago.

A: We usually recommend that you bring your car in every five thousand kilometers.

B: Why? I mean, what exactly do you do to a car that you need to check it so often?
A: First of all, we change the motor oil and oil filter. If you don't do this, it can cause your engine to wear faster and that means you would probably have to change the pistons and intake valves.

B: I see. What else?
A: We also check your spark plugs, fuel filter, and other oil levels such as hydraulic fluid. We also check the clutch and brakes to determine when you will need new ones.

B: Ok, well, when you put it that way, it doesn't seem like a waste of time and money.

A: Trust me, regular tune ups will keep your car running smoothly and avoid break downs.

Key vocabulary
road trip: long trip by car
tune up: the process of making small changes to an engine so that it works as well as possible

engine: the device which helps cars getting running
piston: a part of an engine that moves up and down inside
spark plug: a device in the engine which produces electric spa
clutch: pedal that you press before you change gear
brake: a device that slows down or stops something
regular: happening every hour, every week, every month etc., usually with the same amount of time in between
smoothly: without problems or difficulties
break down: stop working

Supplementary vocabulary
brake pads: part of the disk brake, brake pads are squeezed together to help the car brake
antifreeze: a chemical compound used in internal combustion engines, helps to regulate the temperature of the engine
ABS; anti-lock: braking system prevents the wheels of the car from locking up while braking
mileage: the number of miles traveled over a period of time

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Without water, everything withers

DOE, ICT Ministry to prevent, fight wildfires in Golestan National Park

TEHRAN — The Department of Environment (DOE) and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to contain natural disasters such as wildfires using modern technologies in Golestan National Park, northern Iran.

ICT Minister Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi and DOE chief Issa Kalantari have signed the MOU during a meeting held in Golestan National Park Museum, ISNA reported on Monday.

As per the MOU, such projects aiming at achieving environmental goals and sustainable development along with early detection and warning of natural disasters using modern technology, will be implemented nationwide.

A project will be piloted in Golestan national park in the northern province of Golestan, using technological advances for early detection of wildfire and floods.

Protecting Mirza-Bayloo plain in Golestan national park using fences, equipping the protected areas with security advances such as fire detection sensors, surveillance drones, modern motorcycles, night vision cameras to detect and deal with illegal hunters are among the subjects addressed in the MOU.

"There are 25 national parks accounting for 12 percent of the country's land area, which will be expanded to 15 percent in near future, so must be preserved for the next generations to benefit from natural resources as well," Kalantari stated.

He went on to say that a separate budget exclusively will be allocated to the Golestan national park in the budget bill for the next calendar year (starting



Golestan National Park is facing the danger of wildfires every year, the agreement with the DOE is about using Techs, including IOT and satellite imagery for preventing and fighting wildfire.

on March 21, 2019). Referring to the technological advances to help the DOE in protection of the natural resources and prevention of losing forces protecting the environment, he noted that some 120 rangers have

been martyred and 700 injured while trying to safeguard the environment and wildlife.

"Today, technology can detect the wildfire haunting the forests and parks, and warn the DOE forces to soon extinguish the fire," he concluded.

Azari Jahromi, also for his part, said that the pilot project will be carried out in the Golestan national park during the next 9 months, and in case of success it will be implemented throughout the country.

"We will call on the private sector and startups to help us through the process," he further highlighted.

"Golestan National Park is facing the danger of wildfires every year, our today agreement with the DOE is about using Techs, including IOT and satellite imagery for preventing and fighting wildfire," Azari Jahromi wrote in English on his Twitter account.

In August 2018, Qasem Sabz'ali, the commander of the forest protection unit of the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization said that forest wildfire brings heavy economic burden amounting to 560 million rials (about \$13,000) per hectare for the country. Since the beginning of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 21, 2018), some 500 wildfires have erupted mostly in 1,500 to 2,000 hectares of natural resources across the country.

On average, some 10,000 hectares of natural lands burn in wildfires annually in Iran that 15-20 percent of them takes place in forests and the rest in pastures. Golestan province is one of the most haunted areas by wildfire, he also added.

Over 1.2m infants undergone hearing screening test

TEHRAN — The welfare Organization has conducted hearing screening test on 1.210 million newborns since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), Mehr news agency reported on Monday.

In the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), hearing screening test for 3 to 5 year-old children have been carried out for the first time in 13 provinces of the country, through which 50,000 children were covered by the test nationwide.

Some 120,000 kids aging 3-5 will undergo the hearing screening test this year, the report added.

The tests would set the scene for early intervention for hearing-impaired babies and can also be effective in reducing the disability incidence, so that the number of hearing screening centers have increased from 425 to 600 centers since the past four years.

In the Iranian calendar year 1393 (March 2014-March 2015), some 966,275 infants have been covered by the Organization's tests, the number have been enhanced to over 1.187 million newborns last year.

Additionally, it is anticipated that the tests will be carried out on over 1.210 babies by the end of this year.

Moreover, The Welfare Organization has started



vision screening tests for children aging 3 to 6 years, aiming to identify children with visual impairment or eye conditions and reduce the prevalence of visual impairment with early diagnosis, intervention, treatment and rehabilitation.

Last year, the vision screening program grew 6 percent compared to two years before that.

In September 2018, Minoos Rafiei, an official with the Organization, told ISNA that vision screening test was conducted last year on 3.2 million children, 15,000

of them were diagnosed with Amblyopia (known as lazy eye) and referred to the treatment centers.

She went on to say that while treatment processes of these children has different stages and might be costly, the Welfare Organization has provided financially struggling families with the cost of treatments and even surgeries, if required.

Some 85 percent of the newborns underwent hearing screening tests carried out by the Organization last year, she highlighted.

In June 2018, Hossein Nahvinejad, deputy director for the Welfare Organization for rehabilitation affairs, said that out of 1.5 million people living with different kinds of disabilities some 225,000 are suffering hearing impediment.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics newborn hearing screening can detect possible hearing loss in the first days of an infant's life. If a possible hearing loss is detected, further tests will be done to confirm the results. When hearing loss is confirmed, treatment and early intervention should start immediately. Early intervention refers to programs and services available to babies and their families that help with hearing loss and learning important communication skills.

National document on sexual health training being prepared



TEHRAN — The national document on sexual health education and training is being prepared by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Tasnim reported on Tuesday.

A meeting was held in this regard on Sunday with officials from the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Vice Presidency for Women's and Family Affairs in attendance, the report added.

The document aims to promote awareness and education on sexual health and sexual abuse using an Islamic approach.

Empowering teachers, parents and peers in adolescents' sexual health education, developing and implementing education packages to improve sexual health for certain groups, establishing policies and interventions to promote indirect sexual education through media? are among the subjects of the document.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality and not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

More than 1 million sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are acquired every day worldwide, which can have serious reproductive health consequences beyond the immediate impact of the infection itself (e.g., infertility or mother-to-child transmission) in some cases.

More than 30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites are known to be transmitted through sexual contact. Eight of these pathogens are linked to the greatest incidence of sexually transmitted disease. Of these 8 infections, 4 are currently curable, while the other 4 are viral infections and are incurable, including, hepatitis B, herpes simplex virus (HSV or herpes), HIV, and human papillomavirus (HPV).

Second Announcement

Call for public tender (First/Second publish)
One -Stage (semi compressed) tender

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

N.I.O.C 1397.5497 National Iranian Drilling Company

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 tenders

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

Purchasing & Submitting

Tender Document Distribution by Company	Distribution Place	Submitting Method
	Hall No: 113, 1st-floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN 061-34148656 - 06134148615	Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 510,000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 520100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC Saving account" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank
Documents Receiving Method	Closing date	Address
	Days after the last time of Purchasing 14	Hall No: 107, 1st-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 ۹۷/۱۰/۲۵ نوبت دوم ۹۷/۱۰/۲۶

PMU stops U.S. recon mission on Syria border

➔ Mosleh went on to say that PMU fighters forced American troops to return to their base, and not approach them.

PMU fighters played a major role in the liberation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-held areas to the south, northeast and north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, ever since the terrorists launched an offensive in the country in June 2014.

Iraq has repeatedly condemned allegations of sectarian nature against the voluntary force.

In December 2016, Baghdad warned Riyadh of the ramifications of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs, after former Saudi regime Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Iraq cannot realize unity with the presence of the Popular Mobilization Units.

The House of Saud regime has repeatedly labeled the PMU, which incorporates volunteer forces from different Iraqi factions and tribes, as a Shia movement and called for the dismantling of the group.

The Iraqi parliament on November 26, 2016 approved a law giving full legal status to PMU fighters.

It recognized the PMU as part of the national armed forces, placed the volunteer fighters under the command of the prime minister, and granted them the right to receive salaries and pensions like the regular army and police forces.

Former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the end of military operations against the ISIL Takfiri terrorist



group in the country on December 9, 2017.

On July 10 that year, he had formally declared victory over ISIL in Mosul, which served as the terrorists' main urban stronghold in Iraq.

In the run-up to Mosul's liberation, Iraqi army soldiers and volunteer PMU fighters had made sweeping gains against ISIL.

Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January 2017 after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19 last year.

The ISIL terrorist outfit began a terror

campaign in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks.

■ U.S. troop deployment in Kirkuk causes Iraqi outcry

Meantime, the United States military has made a large troop deployment to military bases near the Iraqi city of Kirkuk, causing outcry among the local population.

The troops have been stationed predominantly at the K1 airbase situated 15 kilometers away from the city, Press TV's correspondent in Kirkuk said on Thursday. The deployment is said to have happened

on the pretext of countering remaining ISIL Takfiri terrorists.

PMU spokesperson Ali al-Hussaini denounced the presence of the U.S. forces, saying that the city faced no terrorist threat and Americans had no reason to be there.

"Deploying U.S. forces in Kirkuk or any other city is unacceptable. This is violating the treaty between the U.S. and Iraq," said Hussaini.

The city experienced relative calm since Iraqi Kurds over positions to Iraqi troops in October 2017.

On Thursday, Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) were also deployed in Kirkuk.

The ISOF deployment was in response to rising tensions after the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) flag was illegally raised over a political party headquarters building, signaling unfounded Kurdish claims to the city.

The rising tensions in Kirkuk come as Pompeo visited the capital of Iraq's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, Erbil, after visiting Baghdad on Wednesday.

"These have been folks that have fought with us and it's important that we do everything we can to ensure that those folks that fought with us are protected," said Pompeo during the trip.

The visit was part of a Middle East tour aimed at assuring the U.S. allies of continued American presence in the region despite earlier remarks made by the U.S. President Donald Trump calling for a regional troop withdrawal. (Source: agencies)

Trump, Erdogan talk Syria 'safe zone' amid war of words over Kurdish militants

➔ Addressing his deputies on Tuesday, Erdogan said he held a "quite positive" telephone conversation with Trump late on Monday where he reaffirmed "a 20-mile [32-km] security zone along the Syrian border ... will be set up by us".

Erdogan said he viewed the planned security zone in Syria positively and added its range may be extended further.

The president added he and Trump reached "a historic understanding" during the phone call, but Erdogan didn't elaborate. Trump confirmed the idea of establishing a zone around the border in a tweet earlier, referring to the proposed area as a "safe zone".

The phone conversation came amid heated discussions about a U.S. decision to withdraw forces from Syria and rising tensions over the fate of the U.S.-allied Kurdish fighters in the war-torn country.

■ Manbij discussed

Elsewhere, Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported during the phone conversation the two leaders also discussed the need to complete a security plan for Syria's border town of Manbij to prevent a power vacuum once the U.S. forces pull out.

Turkish and U.S. troops began joint patrols in Manbij on November 1 as part of an agreement that focuses on the withdrawal of the People's Protection Units (People's Defense Units/ Yekineyen Parastina Gel/YPG) fighters from the city to stabilize the region. Last month, Trump's withdrawal announcement surprised many politicians in Washington as well as Western and Kurdish allies fighting alongside the U.S. against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.

Trump's decision was initially expected to be carried out swiftly, but the timetable became vague in the weeks following his announcement. (Source: agencies)



Saudi flag statue to be removed from near 9/11 site after backlash from public

A statue of the Saudi Arabian flag is to be removed from the World Trade Center grounds in New York later this week in response to public complaints about its proximity to the site of the September/11 attacks, which are believed to have been carried out by Saudi nationals.

The September 2001 attacks, better known as the 9/11 attacks, were a series of coordinated strikes in the United States which killed nearly 3,000 people and caused about \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage.

Of the 19 hijackers that allegedly carried out the attacks, 15 were Saudi nationals. Evidence has surfaced suggesting links between some of these people and high-ranking Saudi officials.

The candy-shaped sculpture wrapped in the Saudi Arabian flag, is part of an art exhibition entitled "Candy Nations," that represents the G20 member states; however, its proximity to Ground Zero, the site of the tragedy, has outraged a number of Americans

who accuse the kingdom of being complicit in the horrifying terrorist attack.

Terry Strada, the chair of an umbrella group for 9/11 victims' families, told Buzz-Feed News, "I personally think the Saudi flag candy display shows very poor judgment and a lack of empathy on the part of the Port Authority" - the sponsor of the exhibit.

The group, 9/11 Families & Survivors United for Justice Against Terrorism, successfully pressed for the adoption of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act in 2016, allowing Saudi Arabia to be sued in the U.S. court over the role of its citizens in the attacks.

Strada also contacted the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to express disappointment with the statue's appearance nearby the World Trade Center.

"We have been in contact with the 9/11 Memorial and various stakeholders, and in full collaboration with the artist will relocate the exhibit from its current location,"

a spokesperson for the organization said Monday. "We believe this solution respects the unique sensitivities of the site and preserves the artistic integrity of the exhibit."

Following the complaints, the Port Authority confirmed on Monday that instead of removing the Saudi flag from the exhibit, it was moving all 20 sculptures from its current site in the World Trade Center complex.

Created by French sculptor Laurence Jenkell in 2011, the installation has already been shown in several countries, as well as elsewhere in New York.

The statue was installed in downtown Manhattan last month - where it was due to remain until February 28.

Jenkell, the artist, told the U.S. newspaper Observer that she originally wanted to "pay tribute to people of the entire world."

"Given the unique and justified sensitivities surrounding the World Trade Center, it came to my mind to propose to remove the sculpture showcasing the flag of Saudi

Arabia, or relocate it to a less sensitive location," she said.

The U.S. officials assert that the attacks were carried out by 19 al-Qaeda terrorists but many experts have raised questions about the official account.

Many analysts are of the opinion that rogue elements within the U.S. government, such as former Vice President Dick Cheney, orchestrated or at least encouraged the 9/11 attacks in order to accelerate the U.S. war machine and advance the Zionist agenda.

A number of the U.S. lawmakers have called on the White House to declassify documents that shed light on Saudi Arabia's possible complicity in the terror attacks.

In 2016, the House of Saud regime threatened to sell off some \$750 billion of American assets held by the kingdom if Congress passes a bill that would allow the ruling family to be held responsible in the U.S. courts for any role in the incident. (Source: Press TV)

Ansarullah dismiss Pompeo's accusations of Hudaydah truce breach

A senior Yemeni official has hit back at the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo over his recent allegations that the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement fighters are violating the United Nations-brokered ceasefire in the Hudaydah port city, criticizing Washington for keeping up its support for the Saudi regime-led war on the impoverished nation.

In a post on his Twitter account on Monday night, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, the head of Yemen's Supreme Revolutionary Committee, said that the Ansarullah redeployment from Hudaydah refuted Pompeo's allegations.

"Pompeo's accusations are refuted by the steps of redeployment at the port of Hudaydah and the submission of positive proposals," he tweeted.

Speaking in Riyadh on Monday, the top U.S. diplomat claimed that the Ansarullah had "chosen" not to comply with the Hudaydah truce.

"The work that was done in Sweden on Yemen was good, but both sides need to honor those commitments," Pompeo



said after talks with Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "To date, the Houthis have chosen not to do that."

The Ansarullah official said that the U.S. administration "has refused to stop supporting the war despite the con-

gressional decision," referring to the U.S. Senate's historic vote last month to end American military assistance for the Saudi regime aggression against Yemen.

Representatives from the Ansarullah movement and militants loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed former regime reached the Hudaydah ceasefire during peace talks in Sweden last month.

They agreed to the withdrawal of their forces and deployment of UN monitors to the port city, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis.

Hudaydah has seen some of the heaviest fighting in the ongoing Saudi-led offensive since March 2015.

The House of Saud regime and its regional allies, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), launched the devastating military campaign against Yemen to bring the Riyadh-backed former government back to power.

The invaders have, however, failed to achieve their objective in the face of Yemenis' resistance. (Source: Press TV)

Explosions and gunfire heard in Kenyan capital Nairobi

Two explosions and gunfire were heard at an upscale hotel complex in Nairobi, Kenya's capital, on Tuesday afternoon, according to witnesses and police.

The attack on the Dusit hotel complex - which also houses offices and banks - sent people fleeing for their lives, black smoke rising from the scene.

"We are under attack," a person in an office inside the complex told the Reuters news agency.

"It is terrible. What I have seen is terrible. I have seen a human as I ran out and there is what looks like minced meat all over," said

one man who said he ran from the scene. He did not elaborate further.

Gunfire continued several minutes after the first reports. A bomb disposal unit was on the scene and vehicles were being cordoned off for fear that they contained explosives.

"A group of unknown armed assailants attacked the Dusit Complex in what we suspect could be a terror attack," Kenya police chief, Joseph Boinnet, said.

There could still be armed assailants in the building and the police operation was ongoing, he told reporters in a short briefing.

■ **Al-Shabab claim responsibility** Somalia-based armed group al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was ongoing.

"We are currently conducting an operation in Nairobi," the group's military operations spokesman, Abdiyaz Abu Mus'ab, told Al Jazeera.

The attack came one day after trial began in another Nairobi attack al-Shabab claimed responsibility for: the deadly Westgate mall attack that left 67 people dead in 2013.

Kenyan prosecutors say the four suspects in the Westgate case currently on trial com-

mitted a terrorist act and used false documents. The men deny all charges.

■ A spate of attacks

The East African country faced a spate of attacks after it sent its army into Somalia in 2011 to fight the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group. Tuesday's attack is exactly three years after al-Shabab overran a Kenyan army base in Somalia, killing dozens of soldiers.

On April 2, 2015, in one of the most gruesome attacks on Kenyan soil, the armed group killed 148 people, most of them students, at a university in Garissa, eastern Kenya. (Source: Al Jazeera)

'Treated as a slave': Saudi teen details family abuse

The Saudi teenager Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, who was granted asylum in Canada, said she was physically and mentally abused by her family since the age of 16, forcing her to risk her life and flee the kingdom.



Speaking to the media for the first time since landing in Toronto on Saturday, the 18-year-old detailed the mistreatment by her family saying she hoped her story would encourage other Saudi women to be "brave and free".

Last week, she fled to Thailand while visiting Kuwait with her family. Her case drew international attention on social media after she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room after Thai authorities threatened to deport her and live-tweeted her desperate attempt to flee.

"My life was in danger and I felt I had nothing to lose. I wanted to tell people my story and about what happens to Saudi women," she told Canada's CBC news and the Toronto Star on Monday.

Mohammed, who has dropped "al-Qunun" from her name after learning about her family disowning her, said she was beaten up for not praying and locked in the house for six months for cutting her hair short.

"I was exposed to physical violence, persecution, oppression, threats to be killed," she said. "I felt that I could not achieve my dreams that I wanted as long as I was still living in Saudi Arabia."

"It's daily oppression," Mohammed added. "We are treated as an object, like a slave. We could not make decisions about what we want."

Following a 48-hour standoff at Bangkok's airport, Mohammed was allowed to enter Thailand and was then processed as a refugee by the United Nations refugee agency.

The teenager claimed she had contemplated ending her life during the ordeal, as her father and brother travelled to retrieve her in Thailand.

"I was scared of being captured, arrested and sent back home, and no one would know anything about [me]," she said.

■ Born again

On Friday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Canada had accepted a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to take in Mohammed.

Several other countries, including Australia, had been in talks with the UN's refugee agency to accept the Saudi citizen before she fled to Canada.

She was welcomed by Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland at Toronto's airport on Saturday.

"I feel very happy. I feel born again from feeling the love coming from everyone waiting for my arrival," she said.

Mohammed told reporters she plans to learn English, rejoin school and find work in her adopted homeland.

She said she hopes that her story that has garnered international attention will be a catalyst for change in Saudi Arabia.

"I think the number of women fleeing from the Saudi administration and abuse will increase, especially since there is no system to stop them," she told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

"I'm sure that there will be a lot more women running away ... I hope my story prompts a change to the law, especially as it's been exposed to the world." (Source: Al Jazeera)

Israeli troops prevent Muslim worshippers from entering Dome of Rock

Israeli police forces have prevented hundreds of Muslim worshippers from saying their prayers in the Dome of the Rock mosque, which is located inside the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

The Palestinian Ma'an news agency further reported on Monday that Israeli troops were heavily deployed in all over the compound as Muslim worshippers, after being barred from entering the holy site, gathered in one place to perform prayers together outside of the Dome of the Rock.

The report, citing Firas al-Dibs, spokesperson of the Islamic Waqf (Endowment) organization, as saying that Israeli police forces also prevented a group of imams and sheikhs from entering the site.

He added that the Israeli forces also assaulted Sheikh Omar al-Kiswani, director of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, without giving more details.

Israeli police also held ID cards of all worshippers, al-Dibs further noted.

The al-Aqsa Mosque compound sits just above the Western Wall plaza and houses both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque.

Tensions continue in the occupied Palestinian territories as part of the aftermath of the United States President Donald Trump's recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital" and relocation of the U.S. embassy to the occupied city.

On December 21, 2017, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution that calls on the U.S. to withdraw its controversial policy shift.

Despite the vote, the U.S. went ahead with the embassy transfer on May 14, triggering demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

Infuriated by Trump's move, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas boycotted his administration, saying Washington is no longer qualified to serve as the sole mediator in the decades-long conflict with Israel, and that an international mechanism should be devised to replace the U.S. in the so-called peace process. (Source: Press TV)

Djokovic clobbers qualifier Krueger to reach second round

Top seed Novak Djokovic looked every inch the Australian Open favourite as he comfortably beat American qualifier Mitchell Krueger 6-3 6-2 6-2 to reach the second round on Tuesday.

Soaking up the Rod Laver Arena limelight, the Serb moved superbly in his Melbourne Park opener and hit 42 winners to wrap up the one-sided clash in little more than two hours.

Despite the scoreline, the 230th-ranked Krueger hardly disgraced himself and broke Djokovic in the third game of the first set.

That was as good as it got for the American, as Djokovic coasted to an easy victory. The Serb will continue his bid for a record seventh Australian Open title against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, the man he beat for the 2008 trophy.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey prosecutor seeks Interpol red notice for NBA star Kanter

An Istanbul prosecutor on Tuesday applied for an Interpol "red notice" to be issued for Turkish NBA player Enes Kanter for his alleged links to the group blamed for a 2016 failed coup, state media reported.

Kanter, a New York Knicks' centre and an outspoken critic of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is accused of being a member of an armed terrorist organisation, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Turkish officials in the Istanbul chief public prosecutor's office prepared paperwork also seeking the player's extradition, the agency said. An Interpol red notice informs the police agency's member states about a suspected criminal wanted in one country.

The documents prepared by the prosecutor have been sent to the "relevant ministries", Anadolu added, without giving details.

Turkey blames the July 2016 attempted overthrow of Erdogan on former ally-turned-foe Fethullah Gulen, but the preacher vehemently denies the claims.

Turkey officially refers to the Gulen movement as the "Fethullah Terrorist Organisation" and thousands of individuals are on trial over alleged membership of the group.

But the Gulen movement insists it is a peaceful group, promoting secular education. Earlier this month, Kanter refused to make the NBA team's trip to the UK over fears he might be murdered by Turkish spies. "There's a chance that I can get killed out there," he said. Former NBA player Hedo Turkoglu, now a chief advisor to Erdogan and head of the Turkish Basketball Federation, rebuked Kanter's fears about his homeland as a "smear campaign".

Kanter was detained last year at a Romanian airport after being told his Turkish passport was cancelled -- a move that Kanter blamed on his political views.

Kanter, who has expressed support for Gulen, was allowed to leave a few hours later.

(Source: France 24)

Barcelona first team to spend half-a-billion euros on wages

La Liga champions Barcelona became the first soccer team to spend over half a billion euros in wages after their staff costs shot up by 42 percent over the past year, according to a study by KPMG.

KPMG's Football Benchmark study analysed the squads and finances of the respective champions of Europe's top eight leagues. The Catalans, who signed Brazil playmaker Philippe Coutinho from Liverpool in January 2018 for a club record €160 million (£142 million), have staff costs of €562 million a year.

Along with the arrival of France forward Ousmane Dembele in August 2017 and the renewal of several players' contracts, including talisman Lionel Messi's, their expenditure in this field has increased hugely.

Paris St Germain have the second highest wage bill on the KPMG list at €332 million, an increase of 20 percent.

Expenditure on wages rose across the board with the exception of Premier League champions Manchester City, who saw their spending on wages fall five percent.

The report says Manchester City have the most valuable team, worth a total of €1.182 billion euros, while PSG duo Neymar (€229 million) and Kylian Mbappe (€215 million) are the most valuable players in the world, followed by Messi (€203 million).

(Source: Goal)

Barca set to swoop for prolific Uruguayan Stuani

Barcelona are targeting Uruguay forward Cristhian Stuani of fellow Catalan side Girona as their number one target in the January transfer window, Spanish media reported on Tuesday.

According to Barcelona-based newspaper Sport, which dedicated its front cover to Barca's pursuit of Stuani, the 32-year-old Uruguayan has a release clause of 15 million euros.

Fellow Spanish newspapers AS and Marca also claim Barca have been in discussions with Girona for Stuani, who is the third top scorer in La Liga behind Messi and Suarez, scoring 12 goals for mid-table Girona.

Barca's lethal front two of Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez lead the scoring charts with a staggering 31 goals between them, but the club have been left short of back up options due to Munir El Haddadi departing for Sevilla last week.

With Barca aiming to win a treble of La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Champions League, signing an extra striker is essential to ensure Messi and Suarez, both aged 31, do not suffer from over-exertion.

Stuani has spent most of his career as a prolific forward for lesser known clubs, playing for the likes of Spanish sides Levante and Espanyol as well as English club Middlesbrough, where he spent two years before joining Girona in 2017.

He has made 46 appearances for Uruguay, most of which has come as a substitute, scoring five times.

(Source: Goal)

Ronaldo makes Juventus Champions League contenders, says Chiellini

Juventus were not ready to win the Champions League until Cristiano Ronaldo arrived.

That's the view of club legend Giorgio Chiellini, who says he never initially believed Ronaldo would sign for the Italian giants when he was first linked with a move in the summer.

Since the Portugal captain arrived from Real Madrid in July, he has scored 14 goals in 19 Serie A appearances and turned Juventus into serious European contenders.

Here, 34-year-old Chiellini talks to BBC Sport about "the personality of Cristiano", Juve's chances in Europe this season and the Italy defender's own glittering career.

Champions League hopes

Juventus have won the Champions League on two occasions and appeared in two of the past four finals, in 2015 and 2017, losing both - with Ronaldo scoring twice in the latter as Real thumped Juve 4-1.

But Chiellini, who played in both, thinks Ronaldo's arrival means that only now can they win it for the first time since 1996.

"Cristiano scored many, many, many times against us and he broke my dreams many times - in Cardiff, in Madrid, in Turin," said the defender.

"Before, the Champions League was a dream. Now it is a target because Cristiano is the best player in the world and we need him to make the last step.

"It's the personality of Cristiano. He has fantastic skills in the field but out of the field, his attitude - how he works, how he prepares for the match, how he lives every day of his life - can help us. The team has changed."

Juventus will face Atletico Madrid in the last 16 of the Champions League in February



and March, with the La Liga side themselves having lost in two recent finals.

Chiellini says that, despite a first half of the season in which his side have gone nine points clear of Napoli in Serie A, everything will be decided in the final portion of the campaign.

"We started in the first three months nearly in perfection but we know the most important period is from spring," he said.

"I think that we are one of the four or five teams who are favourites - Barcelona, Manchester City, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich. But also PSG and Atletico can reach the victory and we are so far away from the key matches still."

Ronaldo's impact

Even at the age of 34, Chiellini says he is still learning from Ronaldo, who is one year his junior.

"I was curious to see some particular attitude far from the field," he said.

"His work in the gym, and his concentration, is something I try to take. He's helped me because I would like every day to improve myself."

But the Juve captain admits that even at Italy's most successful club, where big name arrivals are a regular occurrence, Ronaldo's signing was unexpected.

"I didn't believe it at the beginning. But after some days of rumours I talked with

[Juventus president] Andrea [Agnelli] and I was surprised. I think that for many fans and also the players it was not so normal."

Away from football, Ronaldo's season has been overshadowed by a rape allegation made against him by an American woman, Katherine Mayorga, which he has vehemently denied.

But Chiellini says the allegations haven't affected the players' opinion of the Portuguese forward.

"Surely not. We never talk about it in our dressing room and Cristiano has been very able to think about only football," he said.

I'm not scared - I'm ready for a new era

The nearing end of his playing career is no concern for a man who has been planning his retirement for years.

"I don't know how long I will play," said Chiellini, who has worn the famous black and white of Juventus more than 370 times.

"I live day by day and I think only about the next match. I'm very happy, I enjoy to train and play in this team and I'm proud of our team. At this age, we can't think too far ahead. "But I've prepared for the end of my career."

Chiellini has two degrees. For the most recent one, a Masters in Business Administration, his dissertation was on "The Business Model of Juventus Football Club in an International Context".

"I would like to do something for Juventus - not as coach but as a manager," he said.

"I will have to study new things and I will start a new life, but I'm not scared, really. I will be ready for a new era."

As well as his future, football is also vying for Chiellini's attention along with his three-year-old daughter, Nina.

(Source: BBC)

Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech to retire at end of season



Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech announced on Tuesday that he will retire at the end of the season.

The 36-year-old, who won four Premier League titles with Chelsea, revealed his decision on Twitter.

He wrote: "This is my 20th season as a professional player and it is 20 years since I signed my first professional contract, so it feels like the right time to announce that I will retire at the end of this season."

The Czech, who arrived in the Premier League with Chelsea in 2004 and moved to Arsenal in 2015, added: "Having played 15 years in the Premier League and won every single trophy possible, I feel like I have achieved everything I set out to achieve.

"I will continue to work hard at Arsenal to hopefully win one more trophy this season, then I am looking forward to seeing what life holds for me off the pitch."

Cech joined Arsenal in 2015 and has made 129 appearances for the Gunners after winning multiple trophies at rivals Chelsea.

Signed from Rennes by Claudio Ranieri in 2004, Cech won four Premier League titles, four FA Cups, the Champions League,

the Europa League and three League Cups with the Blues.

Cech suffered a serious head injury in 2006 following a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt.

Hunt's knee crashed into Cech's head, leaving him with a fractured skull, but he returned to action four months later wearing what became his trademark protective headgear.

Cech became the first goalkeeper to keep 200 Premier League clean sheets in Arsenal's 3-0 win over Watford last season, during which he saved a penalty from Troy Deeney.

He is also the Czech Republic's most capped player, making 124 appearances.

Cech is no longer first choice at Arsenal, with Bernd Leno preferred for most of this season so far, but the club were quick to pay their own tribute.

Arsenal tweeted: "For your consummate professionalism, for being the perfect role model, for the 50 clean sheets, for your honesty, your integrity and for your inspiring work with AFC Foundation, we want to say... Thank you, Petr Cech!"

(Source: AFP)

Chelsea charged with racist behaviour by UEFA for supporters' chants



UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against Chelsea on a charge of racist behaviour relating to antisemitic chants by their supporters in a Europa League group match against Vidi in December.

The match, which ended 2-2, was marred from the opening minutes by reports on social media of antisemitic chanting coming from the section of Groupama Arena that housed the 1,273 Chelsea supporters who had travelled to Budapest.

Chelsea now face the possibility of a partial closure of Stamford Bridge for a future UEFA match, though any punishment will come too late to affect their round-of-32 tie against Swedish giants Malmo next month.

A UEFA statement read: "Based on the report submitted by the UEFA Ethics and Disciplinary Inspector commissioned to conduct an investigation -- according to Article 31 (4) of the UEFA Disciplinary Regulations (DR) -- in relation to the alleged racist incidents that occurred at the afore-mentioned match, UEFA has announced that disciplinary proceedings have been instigated against Chelsea FC in accordance with the Article 55 of the DR.

"The UEFA Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Body will deal with this case on the occasion

of its next meeting on 28 February 2019."

Shortly after the game a Chelsea spokesman condemned the chants of a minority of supporters at Groupama Arena, claiming they had "shamed the club."

News of UEFA's action comes a week after Metropolitan Police confirmed that three men had been arrested on suspicion of antisemitic chanting prior to Chelsea's clash with Tottenham in the first leg of the Carabao Cup semifinal at Wembley. A 23-year-old man has been released under investigation.

The prospect of UEFA punishment for antisemitic chanting is particularly embarrassing for Chelsea, who have gone to great lengths in their attempts to eradicate antisemitism from football since launching a targeted campaign at the urging of owner Roman Abramovich in January.

Holocaust survivor Harry Spiro was invited to Cobham to address the first-team squad in January, while Chelsea sent a delegation to attend the annual March of the Living at Auschwitz in April.

This was followed in June by an official visit, consisting of 150 supporters and club officials, to the Nazi concentration camp.

(Source: ESPN)

Ominous Serena, Zverev make Open statements

A focused Serena Williams sent an ominous Australian Open warning with a 49-minute first-round demolition Tuesday as young gun Alexander Zverev comfortably began his tilt at a maiden Grand Slam title.

The American giant is bidding to match Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam crowns on her first return to Melbourne Park since winning in 2017 while eight weeks pregnant.

Now 37, she kept a low profile in the lead-up to the opening major of the year and came out of the blocks flying against fellow mum Tatjana Maria, pummelling her German opponent 6-0, 6-2.

Sporting a striking jade green jumpsuit and fine mesh stockings on Rod Laver Arena, the 16th seed wasted no time in getting out of the blistering Melbourne heat and said it was good to be back. "The last time I was here I was pregnant and playing at the same time which is insane," she said. "It's weird walking back on -- by myself this time -- it feels good. I have so many memories from last time I was here."

Bidding for an eighth Melbourne Park crown, few are betting against Williams despite her lowly seeding and she next faces Canadian Eugenie Bouchard who eased past China's Peng Shuai.

Williams played at the mixed teams Hopman Cup in Perth this month, but her appearance on Tuesday was her first outing on tour since a meltdown in losing the US Open



final to Naomi Osaka in September.

Japan's Osaka, seeded four, begins her campaign in the night match on Rod Laver Arena against Poland's Magda Linette following Novak Djokovic's first outing.

Sixth seed Karolina Pliskova easily progressed, as did Williams' sister Venus, who incredibly played her first Grand Slam tournament 22 years ago.

Unseeded, she booked a place in round two by beating 25th seed Mihaela Buzarnescu over three tough sets.

Seventh seed Karolina Pliskova, who has made the quarter-finals in her last two appearances at Melbourne Park, also went through, but 10th seed Darya Kasatkina slumped out to Switzerland's Tímea Babcsinszky.

American Madison Keys, who reached the semis at the French and US Open last year, as well as the quarters in Melbourne, ensured she too lived to fight another day, crushing local wildcard Destanee Aiava.

Last year's beaten finalist and world number one Simona Halep plays Kaia Kanepi later.

Fourth seed Zverev, who is looking to win his first Slam title and establish himself as a serious threat to Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, cruised past Aljaz Bedene 6-4, 6-1, 6-4.

"I've had about 86 injuries and the ankle is still a bit swollen," said the 21-year-old.

"But I've done everything right in my preparation. Now I either play well or I don't."

Eighth seed Kei Nishikori, who won in Brisbane last week, looked down and out against little known qualifier Kamil Majchrzak, losing the first two sets before the Pole began badly cramping.

He bravely fought on before calling it a day after winning just two of the next 17 games.

(Source: AFP)



Carlos Queiroz, Srecko Katanec optimistic over Iran, Iraq clash

The battle for top spot in Group D of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 will see Iran and Iraq facing off to keep their undefeated record when they clash at the Al Maktoum Stadium on Wednesday, with both head coaches are expecting a 'good game'. Both sides booked their place in the Round of 16 after wins over Yemen and Vietnam, with Iran currently ahead on goal difference.

Iraq have also been impressive, coming back from a goal down twice to beat Vietnam 3-2 in their group opener, before confirming their spot in the knockout phase with an emphatic 3-0 win over Yemen.

Iraq head coach Srecko Katanec, while admitting his side is not the finished product, are confident of winning against Iran.

"We need grow together more as a team, to be more compact, and I know of many things that we need to do to improve.

"We are a good team, I have good guys and good atmosphere now (ahead of) game and I hope we will win."

The former Slovenia boss his players are now burden-free, having secured their place in the knockout phase, but he has demanded for a good performance.

"It will be easier because we are already in the second round, so the players can play without pressure. I didn't put any pressure (on them), they just need to try to do the things which we have talked about the past few days. If they do it, I am sure we will play a good game.

"We want to win, but my philosophy is like this; with good performances, I look forward to good games with good skills and many chances. When I see the team playing well, I am happy."

Adding spice to the clash is the fact that four years ago, the two met in the quarter-finals, with Iraq winning on penalties.

Iraq head coach Carlos Queiroz isn't bothered about the past and is eagerly anticipating the match with the 2007 champions.

"We are excited for the game because I am sure it will be a great game for both teams, and for the fans



of Iran and Iraq. So let's enjoy and have some fun," said Queiroz.

"Nothing in football comes again. You never play the same two games, never the same competition twice, never make a simple training session two times in your life.

"So the match is a new beginning, a new story, a new game. Something that the players, coaches, the referees must be ready to write another script about in the game.

"Of course we can't forget that we're in the Asian Cup, a difficult competition. Everybody comes here with dreams, and now it's time for us to express ourselves."

"What happened in the past doesn't win and lose games. It doesn't have any influence on our state of mind in this game, we're just here to enjoy good games.

"All of us need to know why we are here. We are here to play for the people, the values that I have shared with my players; do it with full commitment, honesty, good fighting spirit and be loyal to the team.

"This will not be different, doesn't matter if we play Iraq, who we respect, or Argentina. It's always to respect the team that's in front of us."

(Source: the-afc)

Australia earn late win over Syria



Australia earned a dramatic 3-2 win over Syria in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 at the Khalifa bin Zayed Stadium on Tuesday.

The Celtic midfielder Tom Rogic struck from 25 yards to finally beat a determined Syrian side, who looked set to secure a point for new coach Fajr Ebrahim and his team, and maintain their slim hopes of a place in the next phase.

But Rogic's goal not only ensured Australia progressed to the next round in second place in Group B but also eliminated the Syrians, who finished bottom of the group after Palestine picked up a point in their meeting with Jordan.

Syria looked set to earn a draw after twice coming from behind to level, with Omar Khrbin cancelling out Awer Mabil's opener and Omar Al Soma netting from the penalty spot after Chris Ikonomidis had put Australia back in front.

Australia were struggling to deal with the intensity of the Syrians and, on the half-hour mark, Ebrahim's team thought they had taken the lead when Mouaiad Al Ajaan's free-kick from distance found its way past Ryan, only for referee Cesar Ramos to rule it out for a foul on Mark Milligan in the build-up.

That let-off gave the Australians a boost, Ikonomidis finding the hands of Ibrahim Alma with his long range attempt before the Syrian keeper twice denied Jamie Ma-

claren. Mabil, meanwhile, saw his effort blocked by the defense.

In the 41st minute, though, Mabil ensured the Australian pressure paid off with a perfect curling left foot strike that gave Alma no chance as the ball arced its way inside the keeper's right post.

The lead was to last less than two minutes, however, as Al Ajaan seared down the left flank beyond Rhyann Grant and sent in a cross that Khrbin headed goalward. Ryan made the initial save, but Khrbin converted the rebound.

Nine minutes after the restart, though, Australia were back in front.

Rogic's sweeping ball from the left slid past Hussein Al Jwayed to land at the feet of Ikonomidis, who steered his effort over the line despite a despairing dive from Omro Al Midani. The Syrian defense thought Al Midani had kept the ball from crossing the line, but referee Cesar Ramos awarded the goal to the Socceros.

Substitute Giannou Apostolos then hit the post 15 minutes from time as the Socceros sought to kill the game, and five minutes later Syria were level after referee Ramos pointed to the spot and Al Soma converted.

The points looked destined to be shared until Rogic intervened three minutes into added time with a superb strike, beating Alam to his left with a blistering effort from distance.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Jordan held by Palestine



Already qualified Jordan rounded off their AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 group stage campaign with a 0-0 draw against Palestine on Tuesday, a result which helped maintain their unbeaten record and left their opponents waiting to see if they will claim one of the four best third-placed positions.

The stalemate made it eight points from nine for Jordan - quarter-finalists in 2004 and 2011 - as they finished top of the Group B standings to set up a Round of 16 meeting with the third-placed team from either Group E, C or D in Dubai.

With Australia dramatically beating Syria in the group's other game, a gallant Palestine duly finished third on two points, some four points behind runners-up Australia but crucially one ahead of fourth-placed Syria.

Minus the suspended Mousa Suleiman Al Tamari, Jordan started brightly at the Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium, Mahmoud Wadi deflecting Baha' Abdel Rahman's free-kick narrowly wide of his own post and Ahmad Ersan forcing goalkeeper Rami Hamada into action inside the first five minutes.

Despite Jordan's early dominance, Palestine came close to breaking the deadlock themselves in the 17th minute when custodian Amer Shafi produced a fine fingertip save to keep out Abdallatif Al Bahdari's flicked attempt from a Tamer Seyam corner.

Abdel Rahman then flashed a shot inches over the bar from distance, before, in the final moments of the first half, Jordanian captain Shafi acrobatically punched clear with striker Mahmoud Wadi lurking.

Within six minutes of the restart, Palestine threatened again, this time Oday Dabbagh failing to find the target with a header from Musab Battat's pinpoint delivery.

Moments later, Abdallatif Al Bahdari's towering header from another Seyam set-piece was gathered on his line by Shafi, and Ersan's 68th minute piledriver at the other end brought another super stop from Hamada.

It proved to be the last genuine goal-mouth action on a day when Jordan were left to look forward to the next round and Palestine made to wait to discover their destiny.

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(Source: the-afc)

India coach Stephen Constantine resigns after Asian Cup exit

Englishman Stephen Constantine has resigned as India's head coach after they were knocked out of the AFC Asian Cup following a 1-0 defeat by Bahrain in Sharjah on Monday.

Needing a draw to progress to the knockout stage, India finished bottom of Group A after conceding an injury-time penalty that allowed Bahrain to leapfrog them into third place.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) confirmed on its Twitter account that the former Millwall coach, who took over the job in 2015 for a second stint with the team, had stepped down.

"We haven't received any official communication from him yet but we accept his decision & thank him for his contribution to #Indianfootball," AIFF general secretary Kushal Das was quoted as saying.

Constantine said he was stepping down having achieved the target of helping India qualify for the continental showpiece after an eight-year gap. The side also broke into the top 100 in the FIFA rankings for the first time



ever last year.

"My objective from day one was to qualify for the Asian Cup," said Constantine, who first coached India from 2002-2005, told reporters after the match.

"I've done that and I'm exceptionally proud of the players for everything they have given. I think my cycle has finished. I did what I was asked to and a little bit more and, after four years, it's time to leave.

"I'm sad to be leaving, the players and staff have been fantastic throughout... even those who failed to make the final squad.

"It's my wife's birthday today and I haven't been back to my house in six years. I've only seen my three daughters every three or four months and the time has come for me to move on."

Constantine's team started well thumping Thailand 4-1 but defeats by hosts United Arab Emirates and Bahrain dashed their hopes of making the knockout stage for the first time.

Hosts United Arab Emirates topped the group ahead of Thailand following their 1-1 draw. Both teams advanced to the knockout stage while Bahrain also progressed as one of four best third-placed teams.

(Source: Sky Sports)

Colombia officials travel to Dubai to finalize Carlos Queiroz's deal

PLDC - The Colombian Football Federation (CFF) executives will travel to Dubai, the UAE in the coming days to personally talk to Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz.

According to the Colombian media, the Iran current coach has reached an agreement with Colombia to take charge of Tricolor.

One of the CFF officials said that they will not hide their interest in hiring Carlos Queiroz. But they have to wait because they have negotiated with six other coaches.

CFF will announce the name of the new head coach until February, the official added.

CFF officials held talks with Queiroz during the Libertadores final match between River Plate and Boca Juniors in early December. However, RCN Radio says Queiroz is the only option to take charge of Colombia.

The Colombian football federation is waiting for the Portuguese coach for more weeks since he is under contract with Iran football federation until the end of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup underway in the UAE.

Team Melli are favorites to win the title after 43 years.

Nigerian forward Patrick Friday links with Esteghlal

TASNIM - Nigerian striker Patrick Friday Eze has been linked with a move to Iranian popular football team Esteghlal.

The 27-year-old forward will reportedly join Esteghlal in Antalya camp to participate in the training.

Friday started his playing career at Africa Sports in 2011 and has also played at Serbian clubs Napredak Kruševac and Mladost Lucani, Emirati Al-Fujairah and Turkish football team Konyaspor.

Esteghlal coach Winfried Schaefer is going to sign him as a replacement for Alhaji Gero.

The Blues are preparing for the second half of the Iran Professional League (IPL) season.

Esteghlal are the favorites to win IPL title as the team sit fifth in the table, six points behind the leaders Sepahan.

Esteghlal will start the IPL season second half with a match against Paykan on February 3.

Persepolis target Gucci close to joining Tractor Sazi

Persian Football - Iranian media reports suggest that Reza Ghoochannejhad 'Gucci' is on the verge of joining Tractor Sazi football team.

The APOEL striker had been linked with a move to Iranian giants Persepolis but two parties didn't reach an agreement over financial terms. Now, the 31-year-old striker has reportedly met Tractor Sazi owner Mohammad Reza Zonouzi in Istanbul to talk about transferring to the Tabriz-based football team.

Tractor Sazi recently appointed ex-Belgium coach Georges Leekens as new head coach.

The Iranian top-flight football team completed the signing of former Milan midfielder Kevin Constant in early January.

Jonathon Milne ready to make more history

Jonathon Milne revived Para archery in Australia by making history at the Rio 2016 Paralympics. Now he is leading his country's charge toward June's World Championships in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands.

By taking bronze in the men's individual compound open, Milne won Australia's first Paralympic medal in the sport in 32 years. It was a sign that his country's work in building up the Para archery program is paying off.

"Going into Rio I wasn't aware of the fact Australia hadn't won a medal in that long, I wasn't even aware of the last time we had an Australian archer qualify for the Paralympics," Milne reflected.

"Winning the bronze has definitely been a good thing for Para archery in Australia and we have had a lot of people start competing and training hard to try make the team for the World Championships in 2019."

All about archery

The 2019 World Para Archery Championships take place from 3-9 June and mark the first time that athletes can earn qualification slots for their countries at Tokyo 2020.

With his first world medal at stake, as well as Paralympic slots, Milne is all in for archery in 2019.

"My training is just about to ramp up at the start of 2019," the 32-year-old said. "I resigned from my job in the archery store I was working in for the last three and a half years to train as a full-time athlete leading up to the Para World Championships," Milne said.

"I'm really looking forward to being able to dedicate all my time to training and see where I can get my score too. I am training weekly with a team of Para athletes which I really enjoy."

Milne's long-time coach Ricci Cheah, who guided him to Paralympic history, is in charge of the national team preparing for the 2019 Worlds.

Milne is supporting Cheah, but coaching is not his forte.

"I'm still training and competing regularly, and I have started doing some coaching with other archers that have come to me for help," Milne said. "I'm really enjoying seeing them improve."

"I try not to put any expectations on myself leading into a tournament," Milne added. "I know if I shoot to my potential and follow my shot process for each arrow, I will do well."

"I really want to help and support my teammates as well, so we can all qualify for the Paralympics in 2020."

Family support

Throughout all the trainings and competitions, Milne has had unwavering support from his wife Sarah, who saw how pivotal Para sports were in his recovery from a swimming accident in 2012.

"Sarah thought archery was a bit of a weird choice as I had never showed any interest in it before my accident, but if it wasn't for her I would probably never have accomplished everything I have," Milne said.

"She works extremely hard in her job which allows me to not have to work full-time and train. She also loves to travel so if I do well I get to travel around the world, which is a good excuse to come with me."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who is negligent, is deprived of rights, and he who listen to a tell-tale, loses a friend.

Imam Ali (AS)

Pulitzer Prize winning play “night, Mother” on stage at Tehran theater

A R T TEHRAN — American playwright Marsha Norman’s Pulitzer Prize winning play “night, Mother” is on stage at a Tehran Theater based on a Persian translation by Hamid Ehya.



A poster for “night, Mother” by Melika Razi and Peyman Yaquti.

Melika Razi and Peyman Yaquti co-direct the play starring Leila Mirzai and Azam Erfani.

Speaking to the Persian service of Honaronline on Tuesday, Razi who has previously directed Ingmar Bergman’s “Persona” and “The Operetta of Orang’s Deceit” by Seyyed Hashem Khan Shafe, said, “In all the plays I have ever staged, I have always regarded women and their issues and feelings that are ignored.”

The play, which won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, is about a daughter, Jessie, and her mother, Thelma. It begins with Jessie calmly telling her

mama that by morning she will be dead, as she plans to commit suicide that very evening.

“The kind dialogue between the mother and her daughter pushed me to stage the play telling the story of a woman who is suffering from mental problems due to her boring life,” Razi mentioned.

“The mother has great empathy with her daughter and this gives a psychological atmosphere to the performance,” she added. Her troupe has spent over three months rehearsing to perform the play, which will be on stage until February 8.

“night, Mother” appeals to Iranian stage directors. Ehsan Foka, Mahshid Babai and Saeid Zakizadeh have previously directed the play in Tehran.

A group directed by Mohammadreza Samifar also performed a reading of the original play in English at Tehran’s Mostatil Theater from January 9 to 12.

Iranian photographers shortlisted for AIPS Sport Media Awards

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian photographers Amin-Mohammad Jamali, Maryam Majd and Naeim Ahmadi are among the finalists of the first edition of the AIPS Sport Media Awards from Asia and Oceania, the organizers have announced.

The awards will be presented in various categories, including audio, blog, photography, video and writing during a ceremony in Lausanne, Switzerland on January 21.

Adel Ferdowsipur, the host of “90”, Iran’s most popular TV program on soccer, has been also shortlisted for the best video documentary series.

Iranian journalists Azadeh Pirakuh, Shokufeh Sadat Musavi and Behnaz Mirmotaharian and blogger Hamidreza Zirakdidar have also received nominations at the competition.

The International Sports Press Association (AIPS) Sport Media Awards, which is the highest international accolade in the sport media industry, will be awarded to the best sport writers across all media platforms from five continents.

“Barefoot, Naked, Heart in His Hand” coming to Tehran theater

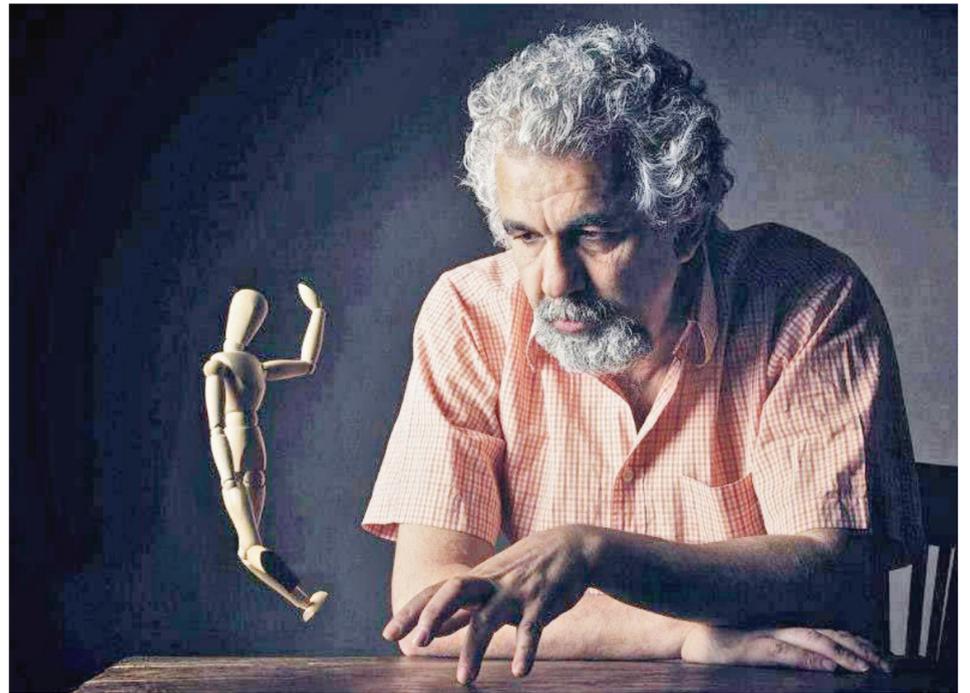
A R T TEHRAN — The Cologne-based Iranian director and playwright Alireza Kushk-Jalali plans to stage his play “Barefoot, Naked, Heart in His Hand” on racial violence at Tehran’s Divare Chaharom Theater on January 21.

The play narrates the story of a Turkish Muslim migrant living in Germany who loses his family and house in a fire rooted in a racist attack.

Written in the German language in 1993, the play has previously been performed over 650 times in different countries, including Iran, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Ukraine and Russia.

The play was last staged in Tehran by director Yasser Attar in December 2017 in the Turkish language, while in 2016, Masumeh Hobabi staged it by Kushk-Jalali in Istanbul.

Misaq Zare is the lone actor in the monologue and the play will be running for one month.



Iranian director and playwright Alireza Kushk-Jalali in an undated photo.

Iran, Mongolia to expand cultural ties

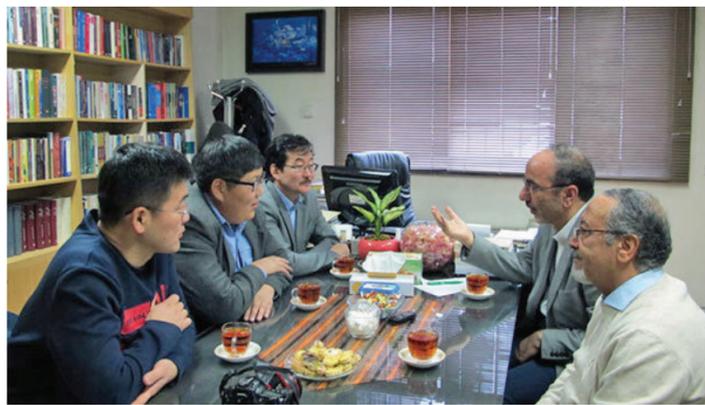
A R T TEHRAN — Iran and Mongolia plan to bridge the gap on culture between the two countries by collaborating on publications and organizing mutual cultural meetings.

The decision was made during a meeting held at the Book City Institute in Tehran on Monday.

P. Delgerjargal, the vice director of the Humanities Department of the School of Arts and Sciences at the National University of Mongolia, and history professor Danuu Ankhbayar met deputy director of the institute Ali-Asghar Mohammadkhani and scholar Mahmud Jafari at the meeting.

Mohammadkhani said that the institute has so far collaborated on publications and cultural activities with about 40 countries.

He added that Iranian people are not very familiar with Mongolia and its poetry and literature, while the Mongolian nation has little knowledge about Persian literature.



Mongolian scholars P. Delgerjargal (1st L) and Danuu Ankhbayar (2nd L) hold talks with Book City Institute deputy director Ali-Asghar Mohammadkhani (1st R) in Tehran on January 14, 2019.

For his part, Delgerjargal said that the National University of Mongolia has several departments on European and Asian languages including German, French, English, Japanese and Turkish, while there is no department for the Persian language.

He noted that works by Persian poets Ferdowsi and Khayyam are currently being taught for students studying Eastern literature, but this seems like nothing considering the widespread popularity of Persian literature.

He added that the only book translated into the Mongolian language is the book “Akhar-i Mughulan” compiled by historian scholar and manuscript expert Iraj Afshar.

In this meeting, he also introduced several Mongolian writers and publishers and hoped that the institute can help pave the way to introduce more Mongolian writers and poets, while it can help to provide opportunities to familiarize the Mongolian nation with Persian writers.

“Everybody Knows” receives nominations at Feroz Awards

A R T TEHRAN — Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi’s film “Everybody Knows” received six nominations at the 6th Feroz Awards in Spain, the organizers have announced.

Organized by the Association of Cinematographic Reporters of Spain, the award ceremony will be held in Bilbao on January 19.

The film has been nominated for the award for best dramatic film, while its stars Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz received nominations in the best actor and best actress categories.

Barbara Lennie is competing for the best supporting actress award and Eduard Fernández was nominated in

the best supporting actor category.

“Everybody Knows” has also been nominated for the best movie trailer award.

The film, which was shot entirely in Spanish on the Iberian Peninsula, is about Laura, who lives with her husband and children in Buenos Aires. When they return together to her native village in Spain for a family celebration, an unexpected event changes the course of their lives.

Spanish drama “The Realm” by Rodrigo Sorogoyen leads the nominations with ten nods. The film is followed by “Quién te cantará” by Carlos Vermut with seven nominations and “Everybody Knows” with six nominations.



“Everybody Knows” by Asghar Farhadi.

Fajr theater festival to unveil books by foreign writers

A R T TEHRAN — Persian translations of three books authored by foreign scholars on Iranian theater will be unveiled during the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

“Persian Theater, Iranian Play” by French researcher Adolphe Thalasso is one of the books.

Translated by Jalal Sattari, the book is a long article on Iranian theater during the late 19th century. It was published in the French magazine “la revue theatre” in 1905.

Also included are “Etudes Safavides” by French historian Jean Calmard, translated by Yadollah Aqa-Abbasi, and “The Awakening”, a play by Norwegian writer Julian Garner, translated by Davud Daneshvar.



A poster for the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival.

The festival also plans to unveil “Theater and Revolution”, a collection of articles compiled by Iranian scholar Mehdi Hamed-Saqaian.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from February 11 to 23.

Jon Snow - and death - take center stage in Game of Thrones trailer

LONDON (Reuters) — Final Season is coming - and it’s all about Jon Snow, and (just for a change) it portends death.

Or at least that’s the impression U.S. satellite network HBO chooses to give in the teaser for Game of Thrones that it unveiled on primetime TV on Sunday night.

The 1 minute 28 second clip trails the fantasy epic’s eighth and last series, which hits screens on April 14.

The scene takes place in the crypts below Winterfell, where we hear the voices of the late Ned and Catelyn Stark speak of Jon as he passes their statues.

Jon is joined by Sansa and Arya Stark, and as three of the surviving children of the show’s central clan walk



Actor Kit Harrington arrives for the world premiere of the television fantasy drama “Game of Thrones” series 5, at The Tower of London, March 18, 2015. (Reuters/Toby Melville)

further through the family crypt they arrive at a set of three statues that show ... themselves.

U.S. actors accuse Oscar body of intimidation over awards presenters

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The largest actors union in the United States on Monday accused the organizers of the Oscars of trying to intimidate celebrities not to present at rival award shows.

In an unprecedented statement, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) accused the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences of “graceless pressure tactics.”

The 160,000-member union said it was responding to widespread reports in Hollywood that the Academy was pressuring actors not to appear or present at award ceremonies other than the Oscars, which take place on Feb. 24.

The SAG statement was issued as the Academy is still without a host for the Oscars just six weeks ahead of the ceremony and is looking for big name presenters to draw in viewers.

Organizers of the Oscars, the last in a long round of award shows and red carpets in January and February, are trying to revamp the show after ratings for the most prestigious honors in the movie business hit an all-time low in 2018.

The Academy on Monday did not respond to a request for comment on SAG’s statement, which was released two weeks before actors hold their own SAG awards show in



24th Screen Actors Guild Awards — Show — Los Angeles, California, U.S., 21/01/2018 — Actor Morgan Freeman accepts the Life Achievement Award from actress Rita Moreno. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni/File Photo)

Los Angeles on Jan. 26.

SAG said it had received “multiple reports” of pressure from the Academy, as well as experiencing first-hand

what it called “attempts to control the awards show talent pipeline.”

“The apparent attempt by the Academy to keep our members from presenting on their own awards show is utterly outrageous and unacceptable,” SAG said in a statement.

“Actors should be free to accept any offer to participate in industry celebrations,” it added, describing the Academy’s tactics as “self-serving intimidation.”

The Oscars look set to go ahead without a host for only the second time in its 91-year history after comedian Kevin Hart dropped out last month two days after being announced when past anti-gay tweets surfaced. A brief attempt to bring him back, championed by comedian Ellen DeGeneres, failed earlier this month and no replacement has been announced.

The U.S. television audience for the 2018 Oscars hit an all-time low of 26.5 million viewers, prompting the Academy to pledge to shorten the show by about 30 minutes to three hours and to hand out some awards during commercial breaks.

Nominations for the 2019 Oscars will be announced on Jan 22.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Actor Mehdi Mahani named best at Moscow Indie Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian actor Mehdi Mahani has won the best actor award for his role in “Supine” at the 2018 Moscow Indie Film Festival, the organizers announced in December 2018.

He won the Best Matrioshka Actor award, and the Best Matrioshka Director Award went to Ye Zhou from China for “The Eighth of April on the Lunar Calendar”.

Written and directed by Shahram Asadzadeh, “Supine” centers on the life of a young drug addict named Shahrokh who is suffering from the direct consequence of addiction in his life.