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# Rivals launch political marathon in Afghanistan



© File photo

Ashraf Ghani

Abdullah Abdullah

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

Mohammad Hanif Atmar

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## Fruits, vegetables export up 54% in 9 months on year

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The value of Iran's fruit and vegetable exports during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2018) rose 54 percent compared to the same period of time in the past year, a director in Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced. Samira Mousapour, the director of fruit and vegetable desk of TPO, said

the country has exported \$993 million of fruits and vegetables during the mentioned nine-month period, TPO official website published.

The TPO director also said that the country's fruit and vegetable exports witnessed an 18-percent rise in terms of weight during the first nine months of this year from that of the previous year. ➔4

## Silver smugglers arrested in East Azarbaijan

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Intelligence Ministry has managed to arrest members of a silver smuggling band in East Azarbaijan province, Mehr reported.

In a statement on Sunday, the ministry announced that it has arrested 9 individuals for smuggling Chinese silver ornaments from Iraq into Iran.

The illegal activities of the smugglers have resulted in the closure of a number of workshops producing silver products in Iran, the statement said.

The arrested smugglers have confessed that they have illegally imported some 23 tons of silver-made jewelry during the past five years, it added.

## Syrian air defense repels Israeli attack in south: state media

Syrian military air defenses thwarted an Israeli attack on Sunday, shooting down several missiles in the south of the country, state media said.

"Our air defense systems thwarted ... an Israeli air aggression ... and prevented it from achieving any of its goals," a military source told state news agency SANA. It gave no further details.

An Israeli military spokesperson de-

clined to comment on the report.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said several missiles fired towards the northern Golan Heights were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system on Sunday afternoon.

Earlier on Sunday, at least three civilians were killed after a bomb exploded near a bus stop in Afrin, in Syria's northwest. Seven others were wounded in the attack. ➔13

## Tiger's claws in terrorists' nest; the battle of north Syria is coming soon

By Farzad Farhadi

**TEHRAN** — The Syrian army succeeded in striking a blow at the Takfiri group in their occupied territories and did away with the ISIS. Now, it is time to get rid of other terrorists, including Al-Nusra Front or Jabhat al-Nusra in the province of idlib in northern Syria as the Syrian Armed Forces are seeking to wrap up the terrorists chapter in Syria.

Recently, terrorist groups have violated the agreement on a weapon-free zone in Idlib and its surroundings and have taken provocative action against the Syrian Army who supports civilians in villages and settlements.

It seems that northern Syria, Idlib and its

suburb, is about to witness new developments as the Syrian Army is through with terrorists in other fronts.

Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group, headed by Al-Nusra Front, some takfiri terrorist groups, and foreign mercenaries are in Idlib and northern suburb of Hama while they receive their training abroad.

When Tahrir al-Sham won a battle against a group called Nooruddin Zangi, they imagined they could take over Idlib region. The Nour al-Din al-Zenki group was defeated in five days and escape to Afrin in the north leaving all their arms and ammunition depots behind.

### The terrorists that Turkey couldn't tame

The weapon-free zone promised by Turkey seems to have had little success as Al-Nusra Front leader Abu Mohammad al-Golani greatly disappointed Turkey and violated the area. The Turks did not succeed in pushing the Takfiris back from borders. As Tahrir al-Sham group and its ally did not bow down to Ankara's demand, they brought their own downfall.

Some analysts believe it would be unlikely for Ankara to bring Turkish-backed arm groups against 30,000 Tahrir al-Sham terrorists whose half of them is from the Al-Nusra Front. ➔7

## Religion is not in conflict with IR theory: Prof. Askari

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Professor Hossein Askari, an expert on Saudi Arabia who also teaches international business at the George Washington University, says "I agree wholeheartedly that religion is not in conflict with international relations theory."

"Religious, sectarian, ethnic and tribal dimensions of international relations have become increasingly important and these dimensions have to be integrated into any universal theory," Hossein Askari, who served as special advisor to Saudi finance minister, tells the Tehran Times.

He adds that "Introduction of religious and sectarian variables can explain many facets of international relations that traditional theories cannot."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ When did the religious issues become a matter of great significance in Theorizing of International Relations?

A: To the best of my knowledge, as I am an economist, the study of international relations as a separate field of study emerged after WWI. Theories of international relations emerged about two decades later. It all depends what you mean by a field of study. There are some who trace go as far back as Aristotle, Cicero, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Rousseau or Kant. When did religion enter the field is tough to answer also. If you mean into formal theories, then we are talking in the last fifty or so years. There is an excellent edited volume (Religion and International Relations Theory) by Jack Snyder (2011) which answers your question more precisely. But to my mind Rousseau, Kant and Adam Smith were the precursors of

all of this, especially Smith with his devotion to a theocentric world as in The Theory of Moral Sentiments. There are some developments since WWII that have sort of brought religion more directly into international relations theory from the backdoor. For instance after the birth of Israel, books written on the Jewish lobby in the United States; rise of religious extremism; the rise of sectarianism; and the Iranian Revolution.

■ Some argue that if the theory of International Relations means a constitutive and critical theory, then bringing religion into International Relations is possible, but if the theory of International Relations is an explanatory-empirical theory, the theorizing religion in International Relations is not possible and, in fact, there is not theological positivism theory in International Relations. What is your opinion? ➔7



## ARTICLE

**Sondoss Al Asaad**  
Political analyst from Beirut

## Why Marzieh Hashemi?

Marzieh Hashemi, aka Melanie Franklin, is a veteran American-African journalist who has converted to Islam, in the wake of the 1979's Islamic revolution and has worked as a journalist in the Islamic Republic of Iran, since 2008.

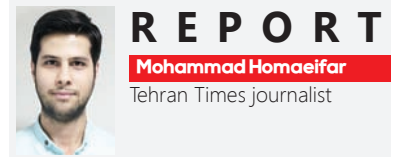
Last week, Mrs Hashemi was abducted by those who day and night preach on freedom and democracy. In her recent flight to the U.S., in which she wanted to visit her ailing brother, Mrs Hashemi has fallen the victim of Washington's racist, bigoted and arrogant imperialist practices. Her rights have been blatantly infringed firstly as a citizen (specifically black), secondly as a Muslim woman and thirdly as a journalist.

One who knows Mrs Hashemi recognizes her distinct humanitarian sense and great personality. She has been inspired by the political and social tremor that shook humanity in the early eighties; led by Imam Khomeini, the founder of the system, which sponsors human rights, supports the oppressed and empowers women.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was an outlet for an active woman such as Mrs Hashemi, who is sincerely concerned about others and their righteous causes. On Press TV, she has frequently appeared to transparently and objectively dissect and analyse news and political events. She has often interacted, shown her passion and cried over the subjugated and the oppressed because she is a human being who embodies the principles of sympathy, consideration and compassion, and which are specifically authentic Islamic values.

A revolutionary woman, with every sense of the word, who has armed herself with the Hijab in the course of her missionary work. She has been keenly aware of the greatness of this crown that has singled out Muslim women and reflects their moral, religious and political identity. Mrs Marzieh Hashemi has not limited herself to journalism; however, she has devoted her youth and strength to the Islamic missionary work and to reflect the oppression of African-Americans.

Mrs Hashemi has worked to disseminate the values of authentic Islam and refuted all the radical currents that violate the core teachings of this religion. She is a beacon of resistance for her determination, perseverance, courage and patience. ➔7



## REPORT

**Mohammad Homaeifar**  
Tehran Times journalist

## Khashoggi, Bin Salman's nightmare

While the Khashoggi case has recently subsided in the media and Mohammed bin Salman all along has been keen to overcome any challenge, but it seems that the American Senator Lindsay Graham has not been indifferent and has launched a blistering attack on the Saudi Crown Prince.

Khashoggi, the Washington Post columnist, visited the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in early October last year and was killed shortly afterwards. For 18 days the Saudis denied involvement in the disappearance of the prominent Saudi critic when he entered the consulate allegedly to gather paperwork for his upcoming marriage. Riyadh eventually acknowledged the murder under international pressure. Turkey says Khashoggi was killed by a team of 15 Saudis. The remains of the insider turned critic of the kingdom have yet to be found, three months after this murder.

Riyadh has denied any claims of MBS's involvement but the case has caused strains with Washington. Earlier this month the trial of 11 of the accused opened in Saudi Arabia with the attorney general seeking the death penalty for five defendants.

■ A case that was resurfaced

Republican Lindsey Graham, an influential ally of President Donald Trump, has previously said that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was complicit in the grisly killing of the journalist.

"I have concluded that the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States cannot move forward until MBS has been dealt with," Graham said, using the initials for the crown prince. Graham also threatened on Saturday new sanctions against those suspected of involvement in the murder during a press conference in Ankara.

"We will start sanctioning those involved in the killing of Khashoggi. We'll make a definitive statement that MBS knew about it and is responsible for it and come up with a series of sanctions," the South Carolina lawmaker said. Graham acknowledged that he had earlier been "enthusiastic" in his support of MBS but accepted he had been "wrong".

In an article referring to Lindsay Graham's current position, Ray Al-Youm wrote: "Graham reiterated that Jamal Khashoggi's assassination has become the focus of attention. ➔7

## Protestors urge release of Iranian journo from U.S. jail

**TEHRAN** — Iranian protesters on Sunday rallied outside the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which represents American interests, to condemn the detention in Washington of Press TV journalist and news presenter Marzieh Hashemi.

During the demonstration, the participants demanded the immediate release of the American-born journalist, who has been imprisoned in the United States without charge for a week.

University students, media workers and activists were among the protesters, who were chanting slogans and holding posters reading "Free Marzieh Hashemi."



© Tehran Times / Mohammadreza Abbasi



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Office of VP for women's affairs raps Hashemi detention

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Office of Iran's vice president for women and family affairs has denounced the detention of Press TV anchor Marzieh Hashemi, who has been arrested by the FBI as material witness in an unspecified case.

In a statement published on Sunday, the vice president's office expressed its support for the inalienable humanitarian rights of Hashemi, calling on Iranian officials to do their best to secure her release, Press TV reported.

Also on Sunday, Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said the U.S. administration has once again trampled on its own principles by detaining Press TV's anchorwoman.



Iran condoles with Mexico blast victims

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi in a statement on Saturday expressed sympathy with the families of the victims of the Mexico pipeline blast, wishing swift recovery for all the injured.

Expressing sympathy with the Mexican government and nation over the deadly incident, Qassemi said Iran is standing alongside the Mexican nation and government and is ready to render any help it can, IRNA reported.

According to Reuters, at least 66 people were killed after a pipeline ruptured by suspected fuel thieves exploded in central Mexico, authorities said on Saturday.



Lawmakers amend soil protection bill

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — In order to gain the approval of the Guardian Council, the parliamentarians on Sunday gave their seal of approval to amend an article of a bill against soil smuggling.

The amendment of the article, which is related to punishing those individuals who try to smuggle soil out of the country, received 141 votes. 9 voted against and 10 abstained.

The amended article states that transferring soil abroad is illegal and perpetrators will receive grade 5 discretionary punishment of the Islamic penal code.



'Reformers sought to repair ties with Leader by endorsing Rouhani'

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Hossein Mar'ashi, a leading member of the Construction Party, has said by endorsing Hassan Rouhani in the 2013 presidential elections the reformist camp sought to mend its relationship with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"In the 1392 (2013) elections, we chose Dr. Rouhani as a person who was the Supreme Leader's representative in the Supreme National Security Council in order to take steps toward reforming the country's affairs and mending the reformists' relationship with the Supreme Leader," Mar'ashi said, ILNA reported on Sunday.

He also said, "We, the reformists, must admit our mistakes."



Twitter suspends IRIB's account

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Twitter has suspended the account of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) after it published a documentary about last year's widespread protests.

According to the YJC, the documentary, dubbed Failed Plot, was broadcast by the IRIB on Saturday night, focusing on the role of some labor movements in the previous year's protests as well as this year's protests in Shush.

The documentary also includes confessions by Sepideh Qolian and Esmail Bakhshi with regard to recent protests of the Workers Union of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro Industrial Company.



We're battling ISIS for Russia and Iran, Trump claims

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — U.S. President Donald Trump defended on Saturday his decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, claiming that the American forces are killing ISIS for Russia and Iran "that are not necessarily in agreement with us."

"Who are we killing ISIS for? You know, the worst enemy of Russia, Iran, Syria is ISIS. We are killing ISIS for people that are not necessarily in agreement with us, let's put it that way. We have gone into Syria, and in two years, we have reduced it to about 99 percent of the territorial caliphate," Trump said, Washington Examiner reported.

# Larijani deplores U.S. mistreatment of Press TV anchor

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani has condemned the United States for the "illegal treatment" of Press TV anchor Marzieh Hashemi, likening the move to the killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The American regime's illegal treatment of Press TV anchor showed that America only preaches others about human rights while binding to the approach of Khashoggi's killers, Larijani said in an address to the parliament on Sunday.

He was referring to the gruesome assassination of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 at Riyadh's Istanbul consulate, which is widely believed to have been ordered by the kingdom's U.S.-backed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The parliament speaker further said if Iran had been involved in incidents of far less intensity than the U.S. mistreatment of Hashemi or the French government's crackdown on protesters, they would have raised deafening alarms about human rights violations by Tehran's government.



"This is another example of America's deceitful policy on the global stage," he added.

Hashemi, an American-born Muslim convert, who has been based in Iran for many years, was arrested by the FBI without any charges at St. Louis Lambert International Airport in Missouri last Sunday.

Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh claimed on Sunday that Hashemi's arrest was made based on an "illegal order" by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"We will definitely pursue this issue through international circles," he asserted. "For whatever reasons the Press TV anchor was arrested, this measure is contrary to the American domestic laws and international regulations," Falahatpisheh argued.

He added that the U.S., which has always been claiming to protect democracy and freedom of speech, has arrested the journalist merely due to Trump's order.

Falahatpisheh, who himself was a journalist, added Hashemi has not violated the principles of professional journalism in any way.

## U.S. Army study of its Iraq invasion concludes Iran was 'the only victor'

The U.S. Army has described Iran as "the only victor" in its two-volume, 1300-page study of its brutal invasion of Iraq.

The report, complete with over 1,000 declassified documents, is a comprehensive assessment of the U.S. mistakes and successes during its destructive war effort.

It spans the 2003 military occupation of Iraq through the U.S. withdrawal, the rise of Daesh (ISIL) terror group, and what it refers to as the influence of Syria and Iran.

"At the time of this project's completion in 2018," Iran seems to be "the only victor," the authors wrote in the concluding chapter of the study published by the U.S.-based Army Times on Friday, according to Press TV.

The study -- commissioned by former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno in 2013 and continued under current chief Gen. Mark Milley -- was postponed for release since 2016, when it was originally completed.

The report noted that the postponement was due to concerns over airing "dirty laundry" about decisions made by some leaders during the conflict.

It further identified the authors as Col. Joe Rayburn and Col. Frank Sobchak, both retired.

"The Iraq War has the potential to be one of the most consequential conflicts in American history. It shattered a long-standing political tradition against preemptive wars," the authors wrote. "In the conflict's immediate aftermath, the pendulum of American politics swung to the opposite pole with deep skepticism about foreign interventions."

In his foreword to the study, Odierno wrote that "those who rejected the idea that there is an operational level of war in counterinsurgency were wrong."

He further noted that following the war, the U.S. entered "another historical cycle" like wars in the past, where civilian and military leaders debate the utility of land power. He then pointed directly to an overtaxed Army at even higher troop levels than they are now.

According to the report, one issue raised repeatedly in the study is the lack of troops -- within the deployed brigade combat teams, available for other operations

such as the war in Afghanistan, and lack of an operational reserve in theater for responses to major events.

Highlights of the study, the report added, include validations of criticisms made at the time the war was being fought, and others that were not foreseen and only understood in the years that followed.

Study authors further noted that technology could not always make up for manpower shortages, that coalition warfare was "largely unsuccessful" for several reasons, that failing to account for a lack of understanding of the inner workings of Iraqi politics and group struggles meant some military unit actions did exacerbate problems.

In early 2003, the U.S., backed by the UK, invaded Iraq under the pretext that the regime of Saddam had hidden weapons of mass destruction (WMD). No such weapons, however, were ever found in Iraq.

More than one million Iraqis were killed as a result of the invasion, and the subsequent occupation of the country, according to the California-based investigative organization Project Censored.

## Iran denies charges levelled by German media

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman has rejected recent allegations by some German media outlets against Tehran regarding the arrest of a person who they claimed was spying for Iran.

Bahram Qassemi dismissed the claim that an Afghan-German national has been apprehended on charges of spying for Iran, rejecting that the alleged person has had any connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"We are not surprised to hear such news amid baseless accusations fabricated by those who seek to ruin Iran-Europe relations at

this important and sensitive juncture," said Qassemi.

"We have said it time and again that there are some people who are opposed to the age-old relations between Iran and many European countries, especially the European parties to the JCPOA, people who spare no effort to press charges and make allegations in order to strain these ties," Qassemi explained.

The reaction comes days after unconfirmed reports in the German media suggested that a 50-year-old Afghan-German dual national who worked for the German military had

been arrested on suspicion of transferring sensitive military data to Tehran.

Germany's federal prosecutor's office said on Tuesday that Abdul Hamid S. had been remanded in custody pending an investigation.

The German defense ministry did not confirm the report although it said it was aware of the espionage case involving a member of the military.

The reports come following a decision by the European Union to add the names of two Iranians and an Iranian intelligence unit to its terrorist list. Iran has strongly condemned

the move, saying it has been based on fake claims that Tehran was seeking to kill its opponents on European soil.

Iranian authorities believe the renewed wave of accusations against Tehran is directly linked to a move by U.S. President Donald Trump in May last year to pull out of the JCPOA. They say those accusations are meant to heap more pressure on European signatories to the JCPOA, namely Britain, Germany and France, as they try to preserve the deal through offering special financial mechanisms that could protect trade with Tehran from U.S. sanctions.

## Parliament sends CFT bill to Expediency Council

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Parliament (Majlis) on Sunday sent the CFT bill, which the Guardian Council says there is still 19 faults with it, to the Expediency Council.

CFT is a convention to combat financing of terrorism.

117 MPs out of 197 legislators present in the parliament voted for sending the bill to the council.

On October 7, 2018, the parliament voted in favor of the CFT. At the time, a total of 143 lawmakers out of 268 ones present in the parliament voted in favor of the bill. However, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill by finding 22 faults with it.

Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh told reporters on Sunday that 3 of the faults have been corrected.

To become a law, the Guardian Council should vet the bill for compliance with the Constitution.

According to the constitution, in cases



when the parliament and the Guardian Council disagree on a bill the issue is referred to the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

### Iran has right to set conditions on CFT

Falahatpisheh also said that the parliament voted that Iran should have the right to set conditions in order to join the CFT.

He said that the first condition is that Iran cannot do anything contrary to its constitution in implementing the CFT.

The second condition is that the article 6 of the CFT should not prevent Iran from setting conditions.

## Iraq to discuss sanctions waiver with Washington

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Amer Al-Fayez, an Iraqi MP, has said that the Iraqi government intends to send a delegation to Washington to discuss Iran sanctions waiver for Iraq.

In an interview with the al-Maloomah news agency, he said Iraqi President Barham Salih may head the delegation.

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

The U.S. initially granted Iraq a 45-day waiver to allow

it carry on buying electricity and gas from its neighbor.

In December, the U.S. granted Iraq a 90-day Iran sanctions waiver to allow it to continue to import electricity from Tehran.

The U.S. has granted waivers to several buyers to meet consumer energy needs.

## Nuclear technology not dependent on others: Salehi

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Sunday that Iranian engineers have mastered the nuclear technology and this industry is not dependent on any other country.

The technology does not depend on others

and the country can develop it constantly, he told reporters, according to ISNA.

Elsewhere, he said that Iran will decide on staying in the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, based on its interests.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 2015 nuclear deal

in May and ordered sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6 and the second round, which targets Iran's oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

In an interview with the European Council on Foreign Relations published on January 11, European Union foreign

policy chief Federica Mogherini said that the EU is working with the rest of the international community to keep alive the landmark nuclear agreement.

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





# Beirut summit: Arab leaders discuss free trade, Syria refugees

The Arab Economic and Social Development Summit has kicked off in Lebanon's capital, overshadowed by political rifts and poor attendance among Arab heads of state, many of whom pulled out at the last minute.

The 20 countries taking part in the summit on Sunday aim to make a joint statement on a 29-item agenda that ranges from discussions on an Arab free trade zone and the economic effect of Syrian refugees on host countries.

The summit takes place amid increasing political and economic instability in Lebanon, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

The economic meeting is a prelude to the actual Arab League (AL) summit taking place in Tunisia in March.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani left Beirut after a few hours of attending the summit on Sunday morning. "The emir was here only to attend the opening session, listen to President Michel Aoun's speech, and note his support for Lebanon," the Lebanese Presidential Palace's media office told Al Jazeera on Sunday.

The brief visit snubbed speculations that circulated across Lebanese media on Saturday that Qatar would pledge coverage of all the summit's costs as well as a deposit of \$1bn in Lebanon's Central Bank.

In his opening speech, President Aoun reiterated calls for the "safe return" of Syrian refugees to their homeland "without linking this return".

In addition to the Qatari head of state, only Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz joined Aoun at the official summit meeting. Other countries have sent prime ministers and foreign ministers as representatives at the meeting.

The summit has been marred by divisions among Lebanese politicians and regional leaders over the reinstatement of Syria into the



22-country Arab League and the status of Syrian refugees in host countries.

Although it has a lower profile than the Arab League summit, the meeting has attracted heads of state in previous years since its launch in 2009.

But after Libya decided to boycott the summit following an incident which saw members of the Amal party tear down and burn its flag near the summit venue last week, leaders' attendance began to trickle.

Amal, is opposed to Lebanon having ties with Libya because of the disappearance of Imam Musa Sadr, the movement's founder, during an official visit to the country in 1978,

then under Muammar Gaddafi's rule.

Speaking at the opening of the summit, Aoun said that Lebanon would suggest solutions for safe refugee returns in the meeting's final statement.

President Aoun hopes his initiative will help set up a funding structure to rebuild Arab countries devastated by wars. The discussion during pre-summit meetings have focused on the rebuilding of Somalia and Yemen, although the fund is expected to include Syria as well.

A major point of contention before the summit has focused on whether Syria should be reinstated as a member of the Arab League

following Syrian President Bashar al-Assad taking control over most of his foreign instigated war-torn country.

While Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil called for Syria's return to the Arab League during a pre-summit meeting on Friday, the group's Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit told journalists at a press conference that there was no agreement over Syria's return.

Part of the contention around Syria also relates to Article 13 of the proposed summit statement, which discusses the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland.

While Lebanon, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, called on Friday for their return to Syria, other countries have been divided over the wording of the article with some Arab ministers insisting that this discussion must be linked to a political solution in Syria.

The summit takes place amid increasing political and economic instability in the Mediterranean country.

A civil society group and the Lebanese Communist Party plan to stage a march at noon from Sunday from Babir, a deprived area in Beirut, to the Ministry of Finance.

The demonstrators say they want an end to the dire economic situation in the country, which they believe the summit will do little to alleviate.

With legislators unable to agree on a new cabinet since a general election in May, Lebanon's economic challenges have been compounded by its political instability. Protests demanding change have been ongoing for months.

Observers believe the summit's poor attendance reflects a missed opportunity on Lebanon's part to improve its economic and political standing.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Two killed as Saudi-led coalition intensifies air raids against Yemen's Sana'a Province

The House of Saud regime-led coalition has carried out deadly air raids against 15 targets, including a food factory, in Yemen's west-central Sana'a Province, prompting condemnations from officials in the capital.

At least two people lost their lives after the coalition struck a sponge factory in the province overnight, Yemen's al-Masirah television news reported. Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television channel said the attack had targeted the province's Jadar Village, and that five people had also been injured as a result.

Al-Masirah said Sunday's bombings destroyed a food production facility as well as a plastic factory in Sana'a, also damaging neighboring houses.

"The aggression (the Saudi-led coalition) also launched four raids on September-21st Park" in the capital, according to the news network. Yemen's Human Rights Ministry condemned the stepped-up attacks on the capital, saying the raids came at a time when the city was hosting many people, who have fled the Saudi regime-led strikes in other parts of the country.

It said the "escalation" was in violation of international human rights law, calling on the United Nations to take a position and condemn the bombings.

Yemen's popular Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, which has been defending the country against the Riyadh-led invaders, described the aerial attacks as a joint "U.S.-Saudi" act of aggression. "The U.S. has directed and prepared for these operations in Sana'a and other areas," said Ali al-Quhoom, a member of Ansarullah's Political Bureau.

"We will escalate in response," said the official, adding that the Yemeni nation and Houthi-led armed forces will continue to defend the country's people, territory and identity in the face of the Saudi-led military campaign.

The coalition has killed tens of thousands in the poorest country among Arab states, trying unsuccessfully to restore power to Yemen's former Riyadh-allied government.

The United States has been lending generous arms and logistical support to the coalition, turning a deaf year to nu-



merous calls by international rights groups to drop that policy.

This latest escalation could jeopardize the ongoing United Nations peace efforts that brought the two sides together in Sweden for the first time last year, where they reached an agreement on a truce in the lifeline port city of Hudaydah.

■ **Yemeni snipers kill 14 Saudi troops in retaliatory attack**

Meantime, Yemeni army snipers have killed 14 Saudi troops and injured two others in retaliatory operations in the kingdom's southwestern border region of Jizan.

Video footage released on Saturday by the military media of the Yemeni army showed the moment when the Saudi regime-backed militants were killed and injured in the attacks that targeted several sites of the southern border front of Jizan.

The army's sniper unit, supported by fighters from allied Popular Committees, have over the past few days inflicted heavy losses on the Saudis in the Jizan front, where four Saudi soldiers were killed on Tuesday in a sniper attack.

(Source: Press TV)

## Cuba, Colombia face standoff over extradition request for ELN rebels

Cuba has sidestepped the Colombian government's request for it to extradite 10 Marxist rebel commanders on the island for peace talks after Bogota blamed their National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional/ELN) for a car bomb on Thursday that killed 21 people.

Cuba's foreign minister said in a tweet late on Friday the country would respect the protocols of the negotiations it had been hosting and was consulting with both parties and the guarantors of the talks.

The protocols provide minimum security guarantees for guerrilla leaders to return to mountainous or jungle areas of Colombia with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross, providing security from military attack for an agreed period. Colombian President Ivan Duque said on Saturday that its extradition request did not come within the context of the abortive peace talks in Havana, but rather in response to a

"criminal act that violates human rights."

"No act of this nature merits any kind of protocol that would avoid justice being done, for that reason we call upon this government to hand over these criminals in order for justice to be done," the right-wing leader in a televised address.

Colombians, including Duque, planned to join in a march on Sunday to protest against the car bombing.

The ELN, which was formed by radical Catholic priests in 1964, has not claimed responsibility or issued a public statement on Thursday's car bombing that was the worst in Colombia in almost 16 years.

It did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

In the attack, a car broke through checkpoints onto the grounds of the General Santander School in the Colombian capital Bogota before detonating, killing at least 20 police cadets as well as the driver, whom the government has

identified as ELN explosives expert Jose Aldemar Rojas.

In November, Colombia had asked Cuba to capture ELN rebel commander Nicolas Rodriguez and provide information about the presence of other ELN commanders in Cuban territory.

It had also asked Havana to act on an Interpol Red Notice on Rodriguez. The Cuban government did not respond publicly to that request, nor to multiple Reuters requests for comment.

Peace talks with the ELN began in February 2017 under former President Juan Manuel Santos, but Duque has put them on hold until the rebels free all their hostages and stop attacks on military and civilian targets. Cuba had previously hosted talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which resulted in a peace agreement in 2016.

(Source: Reuters)



**ALUMINUM FLAT ROLLING INDUSTRIES COMPANY**  
**ALURIN**

**International Call For Identification of EPC+F Contractors**

ALURIN intends to launch an international call for identification and qualification of qualified contractors (technically & financially), having strong background and related experiences in order to design and construct the Aluminum wide FRP Complex with annual capacity of 200,000 (235,000 tons of slab) tons per year of flat rolled product in different application range: CBS, CES, Foil based on of EPC+F contract type including all of the Enginnering,Procurement,Construction and Financing phases.

- **Site location:** South of FARS province , LAMERD Energy Intensive Industries Special Zone, in IRAN close to SALCO Project.
- **Estimation of work duration:** 42 months for provisional acceptance, training and operation of the plant.

Price of documents: 50 million IR. Rials

Alurin's Bank account information: 8531655157, Mellat Bank,

Date for dispatch of documents: One month from Saturday, February the 2nd, 2019.

Last date for receipt of duly filled up tenders is Wednesday, May the 8th, 2019.

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**ALURIN**  
[info@alurin.com](mailto:info@alurin.com)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	165575.1
IFX	1992.07

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,751 rials
GBP	54,074 rials
AED	11,439 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$54.04/b
Brent	\$62.70/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.63/b
Gold	\$1,283.25 /oz
Silver	\$15.46/oz
Platinum	\$812.45/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



**‘Mechanisms to receive gas export payments under investigation’**

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Oil Ministry, National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) and Central Bank of Iran (CBI) are working on ways for receiving payments from the importers of Iranian gas during sanctions, ISNA reported quoting an oil official.

According to Deputy Oil Minister Hassan Montazer Torbati, who is also the managing director of NIGC, all previous gas dues have been cleared and regarding the payments for the exports after the reposition of the U.S. sanctions NIGC is awaiting CBI decision.

As reported, Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Armenia are currently importing gas from Iran.



**Completing semi-finished projects top priority of IMIDRO**

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has accomplishing semi-finished projects as its top priority, the state-run organization’s head Khodadad Gharibpour announced in a meeting, the official portal of IMIDRO reported on Sunday.

Addressing the difficulties for financing such projects, Gharibpour, who is also the deputy industry minister, added that domestic mining sector has the capacity to absorb 16 quadrillion rials (about \$380 billion) of the wandering liquidity.

“Mining sector relies on domestic knowledge and production equipment so it will be least affected, in comparison with other sectors, by U.S.-led sanction,” he added.

Fruits, vegetables export up 54% in 9 months on year

**1→** Mousapour further announced that exports to Iraq and United Arab Emirates (UAE) increased 60 percent and 61 percent, respectively, while exports to Russia rose 136 percent in the nine-month period of current year.

Iraq, UAE, Russia, Afghanistan, Qatar and Oman are the main export destinations of Iranian fruits and vegetables.

According to the data previously released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of agricultural products and foodstuff exports from Iran rose four percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2018).

Iran exported 6.13 million tons of the mentioned products worth \$5.93 billion in the past year, indicating five percent growth compared to its preceding year. Agricultural products and foodstuff accounted for 13 percent of the country’s non-oil exports during the past year.

Iraq, Afghanistan, and UAE were three major destinations of these products in the previous year and over half of the exports has been to these three countries.

Once ‘fragile’, Indian economy now world’s fastest-growing: PM Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the country had transformed from among the “fragile five” nations to the world’s fastest-growing economy. He was addressing the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) booth-level workers through video-conferencing and was speaking against the backdrop of the “#5yearchallenge” currently trending on social media platforms.

“Earlier, Indian governments used to remain in national and international headlines for scams. Nowadays, there is no discussion on scams, but on new schemes,” Modi said, adding that the country had moved from scams to schemes in the last five years.

Five years ago, the world saw India as a nation from where news about scams, electricity shortage and financial crises emanated, the prime minister said.

This perspective, he added, had changed and the world now viewed the country with “vishwas” (belief and trust).

Touching on the topic of Maoist violence, Modi said the menace was once overpowering but now, had been contained and restricted to very few districts.

(Source: The Economic Times)

Iranian private sector calls for government support in sanctions era

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie said the government should allocate more financial support for the country’s private sector producers during the sanctions era, the portal of ICCIMA reported.

Speaking in an ICCIMA representatives gathering, which was participated by Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, at the place of ICCIMA on Sunday, the official noted that the limitation of financial resources in the current situation – considering the U.S. sanctions economic pressures - requires that the manufacturing sector gets a larger portion of the country’s budget for the upcoming year.

The ICCIMA head further called on the

government to draw up the next year’s budget plan based on goals such as supporting domestic production, creating a competitive opportunity for the private sector and developing export from the country’s productive sectors.

“The government was expected to provide a special program for reducing costs for the country’s production sector considering the current economic situation and sanctions....a program to support domestic production and develop exports to create a competitive opportunity for the private sector.” Shafeie said.

According to the official, eliminating the tax exemptions which some particular organizations and institutions get, could provide a good source for compensating the financial limitations that the private sector is facing.



ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie (R) speaking in an ICCIMA representatives gathering participated by Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani (L) at the place of ICCIMA on Sunday

Shrimp exports to reach 30,000 tons by March 20

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s export of shrimp is anticipated to reach 30,000 tons by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), Hassan Salehi, the head of Iran’s Fisheries Organization, announced.

In an interview with IRNA on Sunday, the official also said that over 24,000 tons of shrimp have been exported since the beginning of current calendar year (March 21, 2018).

Salehi put the shrimp output at near 38,000 tons in the

past year, of which about 26,000 tons were exported at the price of \$4.5 to \$6 per kilo.

He also put the country’s annual worth of shrimp exports at \$150 million.

As Arsalan Qasemi, the managing director of Iranian Sea Creatures Production and Export Union, has previously announced, Iran’s production of different types of fish is planned to reach 400,000 tons by the end of current Iranian calendar year.



Trump says deal ‘could very well happen’ with China

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Saturday there has been progress toward a trade deal with China, but denied that he was considering lifting tariffs on Chinese imports.

“Things are going very well with China and with trade,” he told reporters at the White House, adding that he had seen some “false reports” indicating that U.S. tariffs on Chinese products would be lifted.

“If we make a deal certainly we would not have sanctions and if we don’t make a deal we will,” Trump said. “We’ve really had a very extraordinary number of meetings and a deal could very well happen with China.

It’s going well. I would say about as well as it could possibly go.”

Chinese Vice Premier Liu He will visit the United States on Jan. 30 and 31 for the next round of trade negotiations with Washington.

That follows lower-level negotiations held in Beijing last week to resolve the bitter dispute between the world’s two largest economies by March 2, when the Trump administration is scheduled to increase tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods.

According to sources briefed on the on-going negotiations, cited exclusively by Reuters on Friday, the United States is pushing

for regular reviews of China’s progress on pledged trade reforms as a condition for a trade deal - and could again resort to tariffs if it deems Beijing has violated the agreement.

“The threat of tariffs is not going away, even if there is a deal,” said one of three sources briefed on the talks who spoke with Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Chinese negotiators were not keen on the idea of regular compliance checks, the source said, but the U.S. proposal “didn’t derail negotiations.”

A Chinese source said the United States wants “periodic assessments” but it was not

yet clear how often.

“It looks like humiliation,” the source said. “But perhaps the two sides could find a way to save face for the Chinese government.”

The Trump administration has imposed import tariffs on Chinese goods to put pressure on Beijing to meet a long list of demands that would rewrite the terms of trade between the two countries.

The demands include changes to China’s policies on intellectual property protection, technology transfers, industrial subsidies and other trade barriers.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia enters top 5 on national gold reserves list beating China

Russia entered the top five in the world ranking of countries with largest gold reserves, surpassing China, data of the Russian Central Bank revealed on Friday.

Last year, the Bank of Russia increased reserves of monetary gold by 14.9 percent, or almost 275 tonnes, to 2,112 tonnes (67.9 million ounces), buying the precious metal on a regular basis throughout the year, the data showed. In December, it purchased 9.3 tonnes of gold.

At the same time, China’s central bank bought gold for reserves only once, over the past two years, last December. As of the end of December, the gold reserves of the Central Bank of China, amounted to 59.6 million ounces (1,690 tonnes), according to

official data.

The United States has 8,130 tonnes, Germany has 3,370 tonnes. Italy is ranked third with gold reserves of 2,450 tonnes and France is fourth with 2,440 tonnes.

The Bank of Russia Governor Elvira Nabiullina repeatedly stated last year that the regulator was pursuing a policy of diversifying the investments of international reserves, taking into account all the risks, including financial, economic and geopolitical. The bank began selling US Treasuries in April, when Washington imposed new sanctions on Moscow. By early fall, investments, which in 2010 amounted to \$176 billion, were reduced to \$14 billion.

(Source: Sputnik)

Eurozone economy ‘shifts down a gear’ as output slows

The latest economic data from the eurozone, released yesterday, confirmed that the 19-member bloc appeared to be moving towards a period of slower output growth, putting the European Central Bank on notice over its plans to raise interest rates.

Industrial production fell 1.7pc in November from October and was down 3.3pc from a year earlier. The numbers showed the declines were across all countries and included consumer durables and capital goods as well as cars and energy.

“For now, we think the eurozone probably eked out a small increase in GDP in the fourth quarter because the retail sales figures for October and November were positive and the business surveys still suggest that output was not falling sharply. But the eurozone has clearly shifted down a gear,” said Andrew Kenningham, Chief Europe Economist at Capital Economics.

Any fall-off in activity in the bloc will be of deep concern to the European Central Bank, whose meeting minutes from December showed some rate setters were worried its economic forecasts were too optimistic.

The ECB has now stopped adding to its €2.6trn of bond purchases and has said it expects to be in a position to increase interest rates this year. One risk for Europe’s trade-dependent economy is that it gets caught in the crossfire between Washington and Beijing and hit by a slowing global economy.

A separate release yesterday showed that the bloc’s goods trade surplus shrank in the third quarter to €68.7bn from €80bn in the second quarter and €91bn a year ago, which appeared to show slowing demand.

(Source: Irish Independent)

A burst of good news can’t hide the economic hazards ahead in 2019

**BY Phillip Inman**

Almost as soon as the world’s most eminent economic doomsayers began to warn about an impending slump, possibly as soon as 2020, policymakers were out of the blocks, racing to avert the worst effects.

The new year message from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a string of similarly gloomy commentators struck a chord, apparently within weeks of sounding the alarm that a global recession and possibly a credit crunch to rival 2008’s was on the way.

First to recognise the danger was the US Federal Reserve, which slammed the brakes on ever-tighter monetary policy. No more interest rate rises this year and possibly a review of the Fed’s sale of \$3.7tn of assets, the unloading of which has done so much in the last 18 months to push up long-term interest rates charged by US banks and other lenders to commercial borrowers.

The People’s Bank of China brought similar cheer to investors after it loosened credit rules to allow small- and medium-sized businesses to borrow more freely. Almost overnight, an economy that was slowing dramatically and taking Germany, the US and much of Asia down with it, was back on the path to solid growth.

Politicians played their part. Donald Trump’s advisers spotted that his tariff war with China was as a serious drag on US trade.

Suddenly the aggressive bickering that governed trade talks last year between Trump and the Chinese premier, Xi Jinping, began to calm noticeably. In the past week, China’s chief trade negotiator, the vice-premier, Liu He, has said he would travel to the US to “work together to further implement the important consensus reached by the two state leaders”.

Beijing also pledged to cut taxes “on a larger scale” to boost business activity. Against a backdrop of disappointing



industrial production figures and the first drop in car sales for almost three decades, the state council was following an almost Trumpian route to boosting growth. City analysts lapped up the news.

Since the Christmas break, the S&P 500, the broadest stock market index tracking major US corporations, has climbed back to 2610 from a 2018 low of 2416. Even the FTSE 100, battered by Brexit uncertainty, regained its composure and rose 300 points.

Other disputes featured on the IMF’s risk register. The row between Rome and Brussels over the Italian budget deficit and the danger it posed for the eurozone’s stuttering recovery was one. Likewise, there was the potential for a no-deal Brexit to spread chaos in financial markets.

After the Italian government found a way to compromise and the British parliament made clear it wasn’t prepared to countenance a no-deal Brexit, both these risks faded, or at least in the minds of investors.

However, the Cassandras are not giving up just yet. One reason is that the cost of the US/China trade war – in lost economic activity and falling levels of business confidence

– has almost wiped out the benefits of Trump’s \$1.2tn tax cuts. Going forward, the president’s recalibration of his rhetoric on trade with China has come too late and not gone far enough.

The US must also contend with a colossal policy mistake courtesy of the Fed, which raised interest rates four times in 2018 and has already offloaded hundreds of billions of dollars of assets. Its recent pause notwithstanding, the extra borrowing costs already imposed by the Fed will continue to hurt businesses and consumers. A third policy mistake is the shutdown currently gripping the federal government.

Meanwhile, in China, the ameliorating effects of Xi’s tax cuts and credit easing are likely to be short-lived, with knock-on effects in the US and Europe.

Diana Choyleva, a China expert at Enodo Economics, said last week that 2019 was shaping up to be a more challenging year than the last “as the trade war with the US morphs into a tech war and Beijing struggles to keep China’s rebalancing on track amid much weaker growth and mounting debt”.

The doomsayers at Fathom Consulting are sticking by their prediction of a global recession in 2020. At the consultancy TS Lombard, they see a move by JP Morgan as a canary signalling trouble ahead.

The US bank, which has played a major role in the lending bonanza of recent years, has increased the reserves it sets aside to cover loan losses. It has also tightened its lending criteria.

Could it be that America’s biggest bank has stopped dancing in the financial disco even while the music continues to play? That’s a big call when there is still money to be made from shovelling out cheap loans. Surely it means there is trouble ahead.

(Source: The Guardian)



# How OPEC is helping U.S. oil reach a tipping point

The U.S. Energy Information Administration has published its first detailed monthly oil forecast for 2020 and it shows something that should strike fear into the hearts of OPEC ministers — from the fourth quarter, America will export more oil than it imports.

This won't make the U.S. independent of the global supply chain. It doesn't mean that it will stop shipping in crude from the Middle East and Latin America, or bringing refined products from Europe and Asia. But it does show that the transformation of the country's oil sector through the extraction of crude held in shale rocks is not yet over. Some of the thanks should go to the OPEC ministers who have helped make it possible.

The transformation is profound and will mean that members of the OPEC+ group are likely to have to keep restricting their own output for much longer than they are currently planning if they are to avoid global inventories soaring again.

By December 2020, the EIA forecasts that America will be exporting 1.2 million barrels a day more crude and products than it will be importing. Just a decade earlier it was buying in 9.4 million more than it was selling overseas. That is a shift in net flows of more than a million barrels a day each year for a decade.

## Reversing the flow

The U.S. was briefly a net exporter in November, when crude and products exports outstripped imports for a solitary week. That may be repeated intermittently over the course of 2019, but toward the end of next year it is likely to become the norm,



rather than a rarity.

America's march towards this new status was slowed to a virtual halt by the collapse in oil prices in 2014 and only resumed in 2017, after the U.S. shale oil industry had slashed costs and OPEC output cuts began to lift prices to a level at which their operations became profitable again.

## Dividing the spoils

Soaring U.S. production, driven by the extraction of oil from shale, has transformed the country's prospects. Two years ago, when the EIA first started publishing its detailed forecast for 2018, it saw U.S. output ending the year at 9.44 million barrels a day. It now sees last month's figures at a

staggering 11.8 million.

Its most recent forecast shows the growth trend slowing for much of 2019, before picking up again in 2020, following the expected start-up of new pipelines to carry oil from the Permian Basin to the Gulf coast in the second half of this year. A similar pause in growth was forecast for the summer of 2018, but it didn't materialize. The EIA has consistently underestimated the U.S. production rate, and could do so again.

## Rising expectations

More U.S. output would boost sales abroad (either of crude or of refined products, if that additional oil is processed in domestic refineries). Not only would America's net

export position by the end of 2020 widen, but the date at which it becomes a net seller to the rest of the world would also be brought forward.

The U.S. is already by far the world's biggest consumer of oil, using roughly one in every five barrels produced worldwide. If the EIA's forecast is correct, it will soon be one of the biggest net exporters. Outside of the OPEC group of countries, there only five who achieve more than a million barrels a day — Russia, Canada, Norway, Kazakhstan and Qatar.

This won't make the U.S. energy independent, though. The country will still be a net importer of crude to feed its massive refining industry. It will continue to need the heavy, high sulfur oil produced in the Middle East, Canada and around the Caribbean to get the best from the refineries its companies have built along the Gulf coast. And, more than ever, it will need the overseas markets for the growing volume of excess products those plants will produce.

For the OPEC+ countries, the growth in U.S. exports will compete directly with their own sales and could force them to extend their output restraint yet again. Their original deal to cut output to rebalance supply and demand was supposed to have done its job by the middle of 2017. It is now set to run to the middle of 2019 and there is already talk of extending it further.

What thanks will OPEC get for its help? Only angry tweets from the U.S. president and the threat of litigation under proposed NOPEC legislation.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Germany will not stop buying Russian gas after switching to renewables



Germany will not cease purchasing natural gas from Russia after 2050 when it is expected to switch to renewable energy sources to generate electricity as the country's chemical industry will still require gas supplies, First Secretary of the Department for Economy and Science of the German Embassy in Russia Matthias Dehner said. "There will certainly be no ban on [gas] deliveries as the chemical industry requires natural gas supplies. But the export of Russian gas used to generate electricity will stop. Today it accounts for approximately a quarter, and is expected to grow to 40

percent by 2040 but will drop again later," Dehner told reporters, adding that after 2050 it would become too expensive to generate electrical power from fossil fuels.

Dehner said on Thursday that coal-fired power plants could be shut down in Germany in 2035-2038.

According to the energy strategy approved by the German government, the share of renewable energy sources in the country's energy balance should increase from the current 20 percent and reach at least 80 percent by 2050.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Nigeria's state oil company seeks \$4.1 billion to lift output



Nigeria's state-owned oil company said it's in talks with financiers to raise as much as \$4.1 billion and will seek to sign service deals to increase production from three leases.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corp., or NNPC, is in discussions with Lagos-based Sterling Oil Exploration & Energy Production Co. to raise \$3.15 billion and CMES-OMS Joint Venture Ltd. for \$991.1 million, the company said in a statement. The funds will be used to develop oil leases holding more than 400 million barrels of crude reserves, which are operated by the NNPC's Nigerian Petroleum Development Co. unit, it said.

Nigeria pumps about 1.78 million barrels of oil a day while the state oil company's exploration and production unit averages about 240,000 barrels per day. It wants to more than double daily output to 500,000 barrels and boost daily gas production to 1.5 billion standard cubic feet by next year.

The NNPC has paid \$993.7 million of outstanding cash contributions by September to joint venture partners including Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Total SA and Eni SpA, it said in the statement. The company still owes \$3.95 billion in arrears.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Lethal pipeline blast sharpens focus on Mexico fuel theft plan

A blast at a gasoline pipeline in Mexico that killed at least 73 people has put renewed attention on the government's strategy to stop fuel theft, with some relatives saying fuel shortages stemming from the plan led people to risk their lives.

Fuel thieves punctured the Tula-Tuxpan pipeline a few miles from one of Mexico's main refineries on Friday. Up to 800 people flocked to fill plastic containers from the 7-meter (23-ft) gasoline geyser that ensued, officials say. A couple of hours later, it exploded.

Half a dozen people interviewed by Reuters on Saturday said their relatives went to the leaking duct in Tlahuelilpan district in Hidalgo state because they struggled to find fuel elsewhere and were desperate to fill up cars to get to work or run their farms.

"A lot of innocent people came here, perhaps their car didn't have enough gasoline for tomorrow, and they said I'm just going to go for a few liters," said farmer Isidoro Velasco, 51, who was waiting for news of his nephew Mario Hidalgo, who he believed likely dead. Hidalgo turned 34 on Saturday.

Late last month, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador launched a programme to shut down an illegal fuel distribution network that siphons off about \$3 billion worth of fuel annually from state oil firm Pemex.

The plan, which involves shutting off pipelines compromised by gangs who fit valves to drain fuel, led to widespread gasoline shortages in central Mexico in



January, including in Hidalgo, to the north of Mexico City. On Saturday, most gas stations in Tlahuelilpan were closed.

## Scrutiny

Polls show the measures have until now enjoyed fairly broad public support, despite the difficulties and long lines at gas stations.

The disaster in Tlahuelilpan, however, has brought renewed scrutiny of the strategy. Lopez Obrador has faced repeated questions about the disaster, demanding he explain why soldiers deployed to guard the duct did not chase people away from the leak and how quickly supplies to the duct were cut after Pemex detected the leak.

Pemex CEO Octavio Romero on Sat-

urday said a valve had been closed at the pipeline once a drop in pressure from the leak had been noted, but he did not say at what time that happened. Fuel spurted from the pipeline for around two hours before it exploded, with no visible loss of pressure.

Romero said about 10,000 barrels of high octane gasoline were in the section of the pipeline between the Tula refinery and the village when it blew up on Friday.

The defense ministry and Lopez Obrador said there were only 25 soldiers present and the army did not want to repress the crowd. Critics say authorities should have been firmer in controlling the crowd and sealing the area, and should have called

for reinforcements.

"Part of the blame goes to the people (at the ruptured pipeline) but the bigger blame lies with authorities who let them go there knowing it was dangerous," said Velasco.

The Tula-Tuxpan pipeline delivers fuel to other central states, raising the possibility that its closure for repairs after the explosion could worsen fuel supply problems, including in car hub Guanajuato.

Romero said the pipeline had been out of service since late December as the government tried to secure it from gangs who had hit it 10 times in Tlahuelilpan municipality. Since they began reopening it on Jan. 16 it had been hit four times he said.

In response to a question about whether cartels present in Hidalgo, which include Los Zetas and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, might have caused the disaster in revenge for the clampdown, the president said all possibilities were being investigated.

However, one federal police source in Hidalgo said he believed the hole in the duct was made by local criminals not major cartels.

Lopez Obrador said the disaster had hardened his resolve to fight fuel theft and the government was looking at ways to strengthen ageing pipelines to make it harder to illegally suck fuel from them. Meanwhile, he said, Mexico was buying more tanker trucks for road distribution.

"Even though it hurts a lot, we have to carry on with the plan, to end fuel theft," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

## BP bets big on the Caspian Sea

UK oil and gas giant BP is planning to launch an ambitious two-year exploration and drilling program in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea aimed at confirming new oil and gas reserves for export, a spokesperson for BP in Baku has confirmed to Eurasianet.

The company's plans for this year involve drilling four new exploration wells in three separate blocks, all of which are thought to hold substantial gas reserves, and to conduct seismic surveys of a fourth block, thought to hold either oil or gas.

Another three exploration wells are planned for 2020, added the spokesperson, Tamam Bayatli.

The spokesperson cautioned that all the exploration wells are by their nature "exploratory" and there is no guarantee that commercial volumes of oil or gas will be discovered.

However, BP and Azerbaijani officials have long predicted that some of the fields to be explored hold substantial reserves of gas, with seismic surveys of one of them, the Shafag-Asiman block, suggesting reserves of up to 500 billion cubic meters. If those projects are borne out the block would be the second-largest gas field discovered the Caspian, behind only the Shah Deniz field and its estimated 1.2 trillion billion cubic meters of gas.

"Alongside Brazil, Azerbaijan stands out in terms of the areas of focus for the next few years," Gary Jones, BP's regional president for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, recently told Bloomberg. "It's a very significant exploration program for us, which demonstrates the confidence and the role that we see in the Caspian." BP potentially could "take this source of supply of gas well into the middle of the century," Jones added.

Two of the planned wells will be drilled this year in the Shallow Water Absheron Peninsula block, about 30 kilometers southeast of Baku, which BP owns in an equal partnership with the Azerbaijani state oil company, SOCAR. A third well in that block is slated for exploration next year.

A third well planned this year is in the Shafag-Asiman block in deeper waters about 125 kilometers southeast of Baku, which BP also shares with SOCAR. The fourth well slated for this year is the Gobustan block, in an inland field about 50 kilometers west of Baku, in which BP owns a 61 percent share, with SOCAR and the Geneva-based Vitol owning the rest.

In addition, BP will this year conduct seismic surveys of Block D230, a deepwater area 135 kilometers north of Baku, with a first exploration well slated for 2020.

Also planned by BP for 2020 is a first exploratory deep well into the existing Shah Deniz gas field. Shah Deniz has been producing gas since 2006, now exporting it to Turkey via the South Caucasus Gas pipeline. Exports onward to Europe, via the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), are due to start in 2020.

However, BP officials have long predicted the existence of a second "deep" gas reservoir below the existing Shah Deniz field, which the planned well is expected to confirm.

While company officials emphasize that the drilling is only exploratory, well-drilling — in particular deep-water drilling — is an expensive business, and the new program indicates some confidence that new reserves can be located. The new reserves would seem to be earmarked for export to Europe, given the excess capacity available in TANAP. That pipeline, constructed at a cost of \$8.5 billion, has a total capacity of 31 billion cubic meters per year and Azerbaijan currently is producing only enough gas to fill half of it

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Canadian oil surge fails to lift producers out of the doldrums

Alberta's crude curtailment plan has caused a dramatic rise in the price of heavy Canadian oil. But for shares of energy companies, it hasn't been as much of a help.

Since the production curtailment was unveiled early last month, Western Canadian Select crude has almost doubled to about \$43 a barrel, narrowing its discount to benchmark U.S. oil to an almost decade-low of \$6.95 a barrel on Jan. 11. Yet in that same time, the S&P/TSX Energy Index is up less than 4 percent.

Driving the stagnant performance are the forced cuts in output among the larger producers as well as a series of conservative moves by smaller drillers who are less affected by the program. Overall, the industry is dialing back spending and waiting for better days — a strategy that analysts have lauded as prudent but that investors have found less than compelling.

"Certainly the curtailment program has helped the cash flows, but it's sending a clear signal: 'You can't grow. Don't even try,'" said Laura Lau, who helps manage C\$1.4 billion (\$1 billion) in assets at Brompton Corp. in Toronto.

The larger producers that are most affected by the curtailment, such as Suncor Energy Inc., Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. and Cenovus Energy Inc., are all planning on flat or reduced spending next year.

Smaller drillers who aren't forced to cut as much output are following suit. Whitecap Resources Inc. said last month that it's keeping spending in line with last year's levels and heavily weighting it to the second half. Crescent Point Energy Corp. said this week that it's slashing its spending by C\$500 million to about C\$1.3 billion and trimming its dividend.

The frugality has even spread beyond the oil industry to gas producers, much of whose output goes to fuel oil-sands operations. Peyto Exploration & Development Corp. this week set a capital budget of C\$150 million to C\$200 million for the year, down C\$100 million from the forecast it gave in November, and cut its dividend.

While many of those moves were cheered by analysts, investors were less enthused. In the first trading session after announcing their plans, Peyto slid 11 percent, Crescent Point fell 1.3 percent and Whitecap dropped 6.8 percent.

The message that companies are sending to investors is that they don't have confidence that the long-term problems the industry is facing — such as the inability to get new pipelines built — will be fixed, Lau said. And even though the curtailment program is achieving its goal of boosting Canadian crude prices, the fact that it was even needed sends a negative signal to investors, she said.

"If Alberta, which I'd argue is the most entrepreneurial of the provinces, is seeking government intervention, it just shows things are really bad," Lau said.

(Source: Bloomberg)



## 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.

**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*)

## Make a deal, save the dreamers

We can recite many reasons Democrats should spurn President Trump's Saturday afternoon offer to end the government shutdown. He should not be rewarded for having taken the government hostage. Any piece of a wall would reinforce his hateful, anti-immigrant rhetoric. He's unreliable, having made and withdrawn similar offers in the past. This one isn't good enough; "dreamers" need a path to citizenship, not merely a three-year reprieve.

Those are serious objections. But here is something serious on the other side of the equation: Real people. Real people, with real lives that depend utterly on what Congress and the president do now.

These are the dreamers, hundreds of thousands of young people who have played by the rules, studied, worked, made lives in this country. They are American in every way but in the eyes of the law, having been brought here as children — as first-graders, on average. Thanks to a dispensation from President Barack Obama, many of them have come out of the legal shadows and are contributing to this country. If no deal is reached, the Supreme Court is likely at some point to end that dispensation, as Trump has demanded, and they will be sent back into the shadows, or to countries of which they have no memory.

These are, as well, the hundreds of thousands of Haitians and Central Americans who were allowed to stay here after natural disasters in their countries. They, too, have made lives here, legally, in many cases having children who are U.S. citizens. Trump has ordered an end to their "temporary protected status." After all these years, that would be cruel. It would also be foolish, as these U.S. residents help support, with remittances, countries that would only send more illegal immigration to the United States if their economies took another blow.

This is a merciful nation, committed to the idea of a statute of limitations: For all but the most serious crimes, prosecutors will not go after you if enough time has passed. Why, then, would we consider a patriotic, hard-working 25-year-old an unforgivable criminal for having been brought across the border by her parents when she was 5?

Trump's offer should be welcomed but not accepted as the final word. There should be room to talk about the amount of money; how border security will be defined and enhanced; which categories of dreamers and TPS beneficiaries are covered; what their legal status will be, and for how long. But to refuse even to talk until the government reopens does no favors to sidelined federal workers and contractors.

Unquestionably a deal would contain galling elements for both sides; that's the nature of compromise. But a measure of statesmanship for a member of Congress now is the ability to accept some disappointments, and shrug off the inevitable attacks from purists, if it means rescuing the lives of thousands of deserving people living among us.

(Source: *The Washington Post*)

# Erdogan's plans in Iraqi Kurdistan may backfire

By Fazel Hawramy

For about 10 years, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which controls Erbil and Dahuk provinces in Iraq, has enjoyed close working relations with the Turkish government on trade, energy and security. The main architect of this opening has been the KDP's Nechirvan Barzani. The KDP, unlike other Iraqi Kurdish groups, has also acted as a counterweight since the 1990s to the formidable Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrilla movement — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's archenemy — by allowing Turkey to establish a number of military bases to monitor PKK activities.

However, Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since 2012, was not nominated by the KDP to form the next KRG Cabinet. This is causing Erdogan to worry about the fate of a 50-year secretive energy deal made with Barzani in 2014.

In short, the KDP has been a critical partner for Erdogan. He was in Venezuela early last month when the news about Barzani broke and phoned from Caracas to find out more about what was happening in Erbil. According to two sources briefed about the conversation, Erdogan was concerned. "It took several minutes for Nechirvan to convince Erdogan that he should not worry about the changes," one source told Al-Monitor. Another source said Erdogan directly asked Barzani, "Are you happy with the changes?" While Barzani told Erdogan that the decision to nominate his cousin Masrour Barzani as prime minister has been based on consensus, foreign diplomats and sources close to the KDP say the switch was not easy and fairly acrimonious.

The changes involving the powerful Barzani family are not only a family affair but also a regional issue that Turkey and Iran are watching closely. In recent years, the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Syria has taken up a lot of the thinking space in Erdogan's brain. Turkey is currently fighting Kurds across the four parts of Kurdistan, Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

On several occasions, Turkish jets have bombed the fighters of the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) — a guerrilla group affiliated



**Erdogan's overzealous drive to strike hard at opponents in and around Turkey will undoubtedly win him votes inside the country, but Turkey is bound to be troubled by the Kurdish issue for years to come.**

with the PKK — sources close to the PJAK say. Turkish security forces fight the PKK in Turkey's southeast and have constructed dozens of bases across the border inside Iraqi Kurdistan to restrict the movement of the PKK.

Turkey invaded the Kurdish enclave of Afrin in Syria last year, and as Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Jan. 10, Turkey will attack the Syrian Kurds regardless of the U.S. withdrawal. Whether President Donald Trump delivers on his threat to devastate the Turkish economy if Turkey attacks the Syrian Kurds is not clear.

Turkey does not want to see another self-administered Kurdistan on its doorstep that spends millions of dollars annually on lobbying in Washington and other Western capitals. Since 1992, Turkey has faced numerous problems with the Iraqi Kurds from whose territory PKK fighters cross the border into Turkey and attack Turkish security

forces and their Kurdish collaborators. In the first decade of Kurdish rule in northern Iraq, Turkey enticed Kurdish peshmerga to fight a bloody battle against the PKK fighters in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan; still, the Iraqi Kurds, feeling more anchored and connected internationally, have become more independent actors.

The issue of the Syrian Kurds is a big headache for Erdogan; another one involves the activities of the PKK in the Sulaimaniyah area, the seat of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Since August 2017, when the PKK abducted two senior officials of the Turkish intelligence agency near Sulaimaniyah, Ankara has placed tremendous pressure on the PUK to limit PKK activities. Turkey also has continued a ban on flights through its airspace to the Sulaimaniyah airport that started after the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum in September 2017.

Ankara says there is no coherent rule in PUK-controlled areas, unlike in KDP-controlled areas under Barzani. A Turkish diplomat told Al-Monitor that this has created a vacuum the PKK has exploited to increase its activities. A Turkish diplomat told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the main stumbling block is "financing and sending new recruits to the mountains, which is done in safe houses in Sulaimaniyah." Still, the PUK has intensified its crackdown on PKK activities, leading to the arrests of dozens of people affiliated with the groups close to the PKK in Sulaimaniyah. Turkey is allegedly prepared to lift the ban on use of its air space for flights to Sulaimaniyah later this month following the recent visit of Iraqi President Barham Salih, who is a senior member of the PUK.

Turkey apparently also has concerns about PKK activities in KDP-controlled areas as well as the activities of Gulen educational institutions. "The KRG has taken over all our institutions, and we are not operating anything there," a Gulen movement official who operated in Kurdistan until two years ago told Al-Monitor via Facebook from a Western capital. Erdogan's overzealous drive to strike hard at opponents in and around Turkey will undoubtedly win him votes inside the country, but Turkey is bound to be troubled by the Kurdish issue for years to come as demonstrated by the changing U.S. position on the Kurds of Syria.

The PKK is a powerful transnational armed organization and further pressure from the PUK on its activities and activists in Sulaimaniyah area could propel the group into reacting, which could have devastating consequences for the stability of the Sulaimaniyah region.

As for the formation of the next KRG government, negotiations are dragging on. Erdogan's ally Nechirvan Barzani has been nominated to be KRG president, a post that is expected to be less important than prime minister. There is no clear indication as to how he and his cousin Masrour Barzani will share power.

(Source: *Al Monitor*)

## We just don't know how: The yellow vests are going to change France By inaugurating a national "grand debate," can Macron harness the concerns of citizens without undermining his government's own mandate?

By Rachel Donadio

This past week, President Emmanuel Macron inaugurated a vast national debate, a kind of ongoing town hall and airing of grievances that will unfold across France for the next two months. The grand débat, as it's called, is the government's response to the "yellow vest" protest movement that began in November with citizens protesting a fuel-tax hike and has grown exponentially into a massive groundswell of popular discontent, peppered with occasional flare-ups of violence.

By organizing these discussions, which will be mediated by mayors, the government is essentially acknowledging that frustrations now run so deep that they can't be ignored. Much of the anger has been aimed at Macron, who was elected on a platform of change but has come to be seen as arrogant, imperious, and tone-deaf to the concerns of the less fortunate. The French leader didn't exactly dispel that perception when he sent an open letter to the nation outlining the themes of the debate — the environment, taxes and public spending, political representation and public services — essentially saying, "We can talk about anything you want, as long as it's what I want."

That's one reason this national conversation may quell tensions for a while but probably won't end the yellow-vest movement for good. The gilets jaunes, so named for the roadside safety vests that drivers must keep in their vehicles at all times, are here to stay precisely because the movement is so inchoate in form, so leaderless in organization, and so diffuse in its demands. And also so successful in driving the debate. Political parties across the spectrum and labor unions have been trying to channel the movement's momentum, but so far to no avail. That puts France in uncharted political territory.

That is what makes this grand débat all the more complex. Normally, elections are held to gauge political sentiment. But how do you harness the concerns of citizens without undermining the government's own mandate, at a time when the government's only significant political opposition comes from the far right and the far left?

Some political scientists are calling Macron's approach an unprecedented step in representative democracy, a step toward greater citizen engagement and more direct democracy while still keeping France's august hierarchical structures in place. It's the country's attempt to capture some of the anger of the moment without forcing an array of issues into a Brexit-like referendum, a yes/no question whose answer doesn't solve any of the underlying problems.

The philosopher Bruno Latour this week compared France today to Britain ahead of the 2016 Brexit vote, when vague questions of national identity coalesced around membership in the European Union. The French situation has had its own elements of strange political theater, though, and Latour sees the grand débat as more of a kind of poll than a means of changing the government's program. We have "the yellow vests who don't know exactly what they want and a government that's completely incapable of listening," Latour told French radio.

As part of the national debate, citizens can register their



**The French situation has had its own elements of strange political theater, though, and the philosopher Bruno Latour sees the grand débat as more of a kind of poll than a means of changing the government's program.**

concerns in cahiers de doléances, or grievance logs, a practice first put into use during the French Revolution. An online forum that polled citizens' concerns showed a vast range of issues: Some wanted to change unemployment compensation, or increase taxes for the rich and on second homes, or proposed the elimination of bank fees; others were upset that the government had reduced the speed limit to 80 km an hour. For his part, Macron asked his constituents to consider which public services they wouldn't mind reducing. That's something of a taboo in France, where citizens of every political persuasion rely on the state for all manner of support — the exact opposite of American-style mistrust of government.

"This grand debate is a kind of reality test," Étienne Balibar, a Marxist philosopher and scholar, said at a debate last week in Paris, where he expressed his enthusiasm about the yellow-vest movement. If the discussion unfolds the way the government hopes it will — peacefully, leading to constructive proposals that don't contradict the ones on which the government was elected — it will raise a tricky new question: What should the government do? "In what circumstances can a political power decide to choose not only to use chaos as blackmail, but to choose chaos as a political strategy?" Balibar asked.

Balibar's enthusiasm for the movement is indicative of how some on the left see in the yellow vests the potential for revolutionary promise, a chance to bring about more social equality and to increase awareness of regional inequalities — some of the same factors that led to the Brexit vote in Britain and the election of Donald Trump in the United States. But the yellow vests also seem to be anything and everything.

Socialists see them as a way to claw back the terrain they lost to Macron's centrist La République En Marche party. The far right wants to harness the anti-government sentiment into an electoral victory in the European parliamentary elections in May. So, for that matter, does Macron's party.

Much like the Occupy movement in the United States, the yellow vests haven't transformed party politics, but they're certainly driving the conversation. And they're driving it all over the place. There's a strong social element. Demonstrators have enjoyed the conviviality of their gatherings at traffic circles and don't want the party to end. Catholic-inflected social conservatives are piling on and want to use the national debate to defend the traditional family. While some want more social justice and greater openness to migrants, others have made anti-Semitic gestures that have gone viral, entertained wild conspiracy theories in online forums, or shown disgust and even outright physical violence toward journalists from the mainstream media, raising fears that the movement is essentially veering to the far right.

There has been an undeniable current of violence, with some demonstrators smashing the windows of shops and banks, and setting fire to cars and scooters in central Paris. French police have brought more than 5,300 people in for questioning across the country since the protests began, and have sent more than 150 to jail, according to Le Monde. More than 1,700 demonstrators have been wounded since November, the paper reported, and authorities have opened 71 investigations into police violence. In Le Monde, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, a political scientist, criticized the government for "criminalizing" dissent in ways she compared to the police crackdown during the student uprisings of May 1968.

Macron, the first French president whose political life wasn't in some way shaped by 1968, kicked off the debate last week by meeting with 600 mayors in a gathering outside Paris, and has since been traveling the country meeting with other mayors. For hours he listened as they described problems that had been building up over decades, and he often responded with an impressive command of public-policy details. One mayor, Dominique Chauvel — a former Socialist and the mayor of Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, a town of about 300 people in Normandy — told the president she was deeply disappointed in his government and afraid France was abandoning the safety net that has been an essential part of the French social contract here for decades. "My country has men and women, young people and old people, people of all colors, all beliefs, and it leaves no one by the side of the road," she said, adding that mayors, of which France has a plethora, were the "social backstop."

Macron watched Chauvel intensely. He sat with his legs spread wide, his hands on his thighs and elbows out, as if he were huddling for a fight. He seemed at times glacial, or tired, with occasional flashes of what might have been empathy. He seemed aware that the stakes were very high. He was elected to change France, to make it easier for companies to hire employees whose taxes will prop up the system. His majority is strong, but he is surrounded by critics, and enemies. How the grand debate unfolds will define his presidency.

(Source: *The Atlantic*)



# Why Marzieh Hashemi?

**1 →** For this reason, Mrs Hashemi is abducted today just like every woman who follows the line of Sayyedah Zainab (PBUH). The latter, 7th Century revolutionary heroine of A'ashura uprising, constitutes a role model for every Muslim women, they arm themselves by her brilliant stances and dedicate their lives like her to the service of their nation.

Obviously, Mrs Hashemi has revealed Washington's mask, which on daily basis allegedly claim to be sponsoring freedom and democracy.

She has revealed the hypocrisy of this Machiavellian administration, which unfortunately some still bet on. Mrs Hashemi has spoken loud about the atrocities committed by the imperialists.

It is now crystal clear who is behind fanaticism, terrorism and racism. It is the United States of America, the colonial imperialist empire, the cradle of Islamophobia. Today, Mrs Hashmi is unlawfully tried because of her Islamic principles, which never distinguish between a white and a black, between a woman and a man; which protects women and preserves their rights since the 7th century.

No one will move today to exploit Hashemi's case, along with Esra al-Ghomgham (Saudi activist), Hajar Mansour, Amira al-Qasa'ahmi (Bahraini activists) and the wife of Sheikh al-Zakzaki, and many other women who are illegally detained, in the dungeons of the arrogant regimes, as they have exploited the runaway Saudi teenager Rahaf al-Qunni's case.

Regardless of the credibility of what this teenager claimed; who was already living under a system that does not reflect the original Islamic teachings; she has sparked the hypocritical West's attention because her case is a good investment for twofold purposes: to 'milk' the Saudi regime and to misrepresent Islam. Rahaf takes no notice that she has moved from prison (A) to prison (B), where she would be protected by no one and where the phantom of Western 'Freedom' would cost her dear.

The Hijab of Mrs Hachemi, and other illustrious revolutionary women, is undoubtedly feared even before her right-



**Mrs Hachemi has been providentially freed by the authentic Islam that the Islamic Republic of Iran upholds; the Islam which relies on, empowers and honours women. This agitates the coloniser, who works studiously to fragment Muslim societies, through its Soft War propaganda.**

eous voice since she is perpetuating the steadfastness and resistance methodology of Sayyedah Zainab; put in her echoing words while addressing the arrogant oppressor of her time, "I swear by God that you shall never be able to erase our memories."

Mrs Hachemi has been providentially freed by the authentic Islam that the Islamic Republic of Iran upholds; the Islam which relies on, empowers and honours women.

This agitates the coloniser, who works studiously to fragment Muslim societies, through its Soft War propaganda. Just the opposite, Iran regard women as put

by Imam Khomeini's words, in which he equates women with the Holy Qur'an. The late Imam Khomeini maintains that both the Holy Qur'an and women "build the character of human beings."

Women, like Mrs Hachemi, tutor courageous scholars, leaders and devoted martyrs of truth. The U.S. administration wants to make women cheap commodities in its most dangerous war; the war of minds, as when women are absent, weakened and marginalised; the nation collapses and deteriorates.

Unlike the criminal terrorist Mariam Rajavi who led the terrorist Munafikin-e Khalq Organisation (MEK or MKO), who

has so far killed thousands of innocent people; Hashemi has always fought terrorism and racist policies in her own unique strategies. The terrorist Rajavi is backed and sponsored by the U.S. for she serves their interests; summarised by demolishing counties, spreading chaos and committing atrocities.

What Rajavi orchestrates is criminal conspiracies, whilst what is managed by Mrs Hashemi is a huge media project aims at uncovering the false allegations and refuting mainstream media fake news sponsored by American, British and Saudi governments. Mrs Hashemi has been the sound of free journalists, who were murdered, merely for they had settled to tell the truth, such as her late colleague and compatriot, the American Press TV's correspondent Serena Shim.

Currently, there has been speculation that Mrs Hashemi is incarcerated in connection with her latest documentary, entitled 'Black Lives Matter.' For God's sake, tell me if highlighting the sufferings of her African-Americans fellows is crime, what shall we call, for instance, the August's U.S. supplied airstrike that killed 40 children on Yemen school bus, in which a 227kg laser-guided bomb made by Lockheed Martin was used?

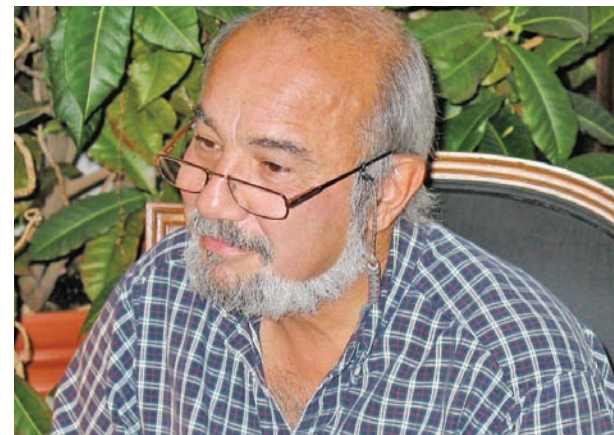
What shall we call selling the Saudi criminal regime billions of dollars worth weapons? What shall we call the murder of Jamal Khashoggi?

Today, Mrs Marzieh Hashemi is persecuted in the same brutal way that her African-American ancestors were persecuted. Her freedom of expression and faith are shamefully violated in flagrant breach of the international conventions that guarantee freedom of belief and conscience.

In addition, she is unlawfully prosecuted without any clear and explicit charge.

Whatsoever, this great journalist has now become a thrust to each and every journalist to confront arrogance and its tools with utmost strength, determination and perseverance; armed with their full Zainabi Hijab. Our least duty is to be her voice, to tell her words and to reflect her persecution until her freedom, Insha'Allah.

## Religion is not in conflict with IR theory: Prof. Askari



**1 →** A: Again, as an economist, I look at these things from a different lens. In today's world, nation states no longer provide an unchallenged lens for assessing all dimensions of international relations. For me, tribalism and religious (and sectarian) divisions are becoming increasingly important and have to be incorporated into any meaningful theory. But please let me be clear, these divisions are becoming more important because rulers, politicians are using them to divide, get support and stay in power. For instance, the Al-Sauds use the Shia-Sunni dispute going back to the passing away of the Prophet Mohammad (sawa) to isolate and demonize their own Shia Muslims and by extension all Shia Muslims, to brainwash Sunnis that Shia are a threat and must be discriminated against in order to keep opportunities and wealth for the Sunni. This is not propagated only within Saudi Arabia but is at the heart of Al-Saud international relations policy in order to win international support for the Al-Sauds in the Muslim World and beyond.

■ Some scholars such as "Michael Allen Gillespie" in the book "The Theological Origins of Modernity" believe that modernity was not initially against religion, and in later years, as a result of social, cultural and political conditions, it has led to secularism. So Based on this conception, religion is not conflict with modernity, so can it be said that religion is not conflict with the International Relations theory stemming from modernity?

A: I agree that religion is not in conflict with modernity. It all depends how the religion is perceived. Without dogma and if free debate and discussion is encouraged or at least tolerated. I agree wholeheartedly that religion is not in conflict with international relations theory. As I have just said, it is at the heart of Saudi international relations and as such it is a reality that must be integrated into a widely applicable theory.

■ Some argue that the current International Relations theory cannot explain some of the current phenomena of international relations and we need a religious theory of International Relations, especially with regard to religious issues. What is your opinion? In general, theorizing Religion in International Relations is feasible?

A: Clearly many actions of state and non-state actors cannot be explained within the confines of prevailing and prominent theories of international relations. Religious, sectarian, ethnic and tribal dimensions of international relations have become increasingly important. These dimensions have to be integrated into any universal theory.

■ If theorizing Religion in International Relations is possible, can a religious theory in International Relations explain all the unresolved issues and problems?

A: Nothing can explain ALL unresolved issues. But I believe that the introduction of religious and sectarian variables can explain many facets of international relations that traditional theories cannot. Just look at the international relations and policies of Muslim countries. Or those of the United States, Israel and non-state actors such as ISIS. Religious and sectarian divides are embedded in their policies.

## Khashoggi, Bin Salman's nightmare

**1 →** During a news conference in Ankara, he stated that MBS was responsible for journalist's murder and has tacitly referred to harsher penalties on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the death.

Graham is a fervent Trump ally and also a moderator of a move in Congress to cut off U.S. support for Saudi military operations in Yemen.

Graham has said he regrets any support of MBS. He emphasized that he and other members of the Senate will issue a statement in the coming days. They will emphasize that MBS was complicit in the murder of Khashoggi to the highest level possible and a series of punishments or sanctions may be imposed. But he did not speak of the nature of these sanctions

The question is whether Senator Graham and his colleagues can enforce penalties or punishment and persuade Trump to agree to them. Another question is how will the Crown Prince's react to sanctions. Would MBS resign from his office? But it remains unlikely that Graham and colleagues will succeed in exerting pressure on Trump, as he has been weakened by the various probes of his connections to Russia.

Ray Al-Youm added: "Bin Salman, the Saudi de facto ruler, dominates all matters in Saudi Arabia, especially security and military, and it is perhaps difficult to quit his position. His closest friends say that Bin Salman will confront power with the slightest betrayal."

The coming days may be tough for Saudi Arabia.



## Tiger's claws in terrorists' nest; the battle of north Syria is coming soon

**1 →** Other experts believe Turkey's agreement and perhaps its collaboration with Russia is to carry out direct attacks on the Tahrir al-Sham especially that the action is in line with the international community law to combat terrorism.

However, the most likely option is that the Syrian army, with the support of the Russians to determine Idlib's fate, particularly the Turks has failed to be committed to the deal. Damascus has decided to add more Syrian forces to the frontline. This is also in line with the Astana agreement, because the terrorists of Al-Nusra Front are not subject to the armed groups listed in the ceasefire agreement.

### ■ An invincible general to rout the terrorists

According to a Syrian military source, Brigadier General Suheil Salman al-Hassan, known as The Tiger, has visited the battlefields in the western suburbs of Hamah province.

In the past days, the Syrian Army is on standby on the fronts of the Hama and Idlib suburbs, as more forces and equipment are being dispatched on the northern front of Hama. In addition, General al-Hassan has summoned the Syrian Special Mission Forces.

### ■ The secret of the commander's presence in difficult missions on the front of Idlib and Hama suburbs

General al-Hassan is one of the most popular Syrian commanders who won't be defeated in any war. He was honored by the Russian commanders at al-Hamim Russian military air base in Syria. He is the one who broke the siege of the Aleppo and other sensitive sites around the city.

The influence of this general, his sense of patriotism, and loyalty to the Syrian army and Bashar al-Assad is exemplary. Since he is the closest commander to Bashar al-Assad, the most important and sensitive missions are assigned to him.

Known as a military commander who loves the battlefield, General al-Hassan has sworn not see his only son, age 5, until he reaches the ultimate victory. That shows the degree of his sincerity to his cause. General Al-Hassan is among the first to graduate from the Air Force College in 1991 and has some of the outstanding attributes of Syrian Former President Hafiz al-Assad.

He always appears in the photos and videos of the media on the battlefield supporting the wounded soldiers, lifting their spirit, and encouraging them to fight for Syria.

The Syrian general is a decisive and steadfast general committed to his military approach, and fights corruption and disorder, especially among forces under his command. He executes militants, who are accused of looting and plundering civilian homes during raids in the



conflict zones.

Commander Tiger's popularity is to an extent that Syrian troops wish to fight under his command. His military unit is composed of 80,000 soldiers who, according to experts, all have gone through necessary trainings.

### ■ What do the Zionists say about General al-Hassan?


On General al-Hassan, the Israeli News Agency Walla admits that he has very tough tactics. He liberated a military airport in northern Syria and has achieved significant success in the battlefield with the Syrian Armed Forces.

In fact, Commander Tiger has brought all victories to the Syrian Army. He successfully takes advantage of psychological warfare techniques by using large speakers to echo messages of fear and threat to enemy.

It appears that the new developments in Syria have been accelerating, because on the one hand, the United States and Turkey are discussing the creation of a secure area, and on the other hand, the fate of the east of the Euphrates region is still unclear as the terrorists' attacks in Hama and Idlib are intensifying.

Since the Syrian general has visited the northern suburbs of Hama and Idlib, evidently surprising developments are on the way. Of course, the battle will be tough since the most ruthless U.S.- and Western-backed terrorists are in the province of Idlib and they carry a chemical attack after each successful Syrian military operation.


We just have to wait and see what the fate of the most important front in Syria will be.



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# “DiaCare” national diabetes survey to get underway in Iran

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — A national diabetes survey entitled “DiaCare” will come on stream in Iran, aiming to combat and prevent the adverse effects of non-communicable disease, Afshin Ostovar, the Health Ministry’s director for non-communicable diseases has said.

This is an extensive survey collecting 13,000 samples from the patients suffering diabetes type 2 and is one of the largest scale programs nationwide, Ostovar said, IRNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes are a greater threat to the humankind, so that health policies should be designed in a way to address such conditions more affectively, he explained.

Iran’s health system is mostly geared to treat communicable diseases while non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancers and coronary heart diseases are greater danger to human communities, he added.

In order to control a non-communicable disease collecting data on the disease prevalence is a must, Ostovar said, adding that data collection should be administered during and after treatment regimens to assess them as well.



sess them as well.

He went on to say that “DiaCare” is planning on evaluating diabetes care services in the country by European standards, so that policy makers would allocate appropriate healthcare services and funds to the disease based on the sound, reliable data.

The survey aims at evaluating diabetes current status in the country, available treatment options, accessibility to healthcare services, diabetic patients’ quality of life, diabetes side effects, and diseases caused by diabetes, he added.

The pilot phase of the survey will be carried out in Mazandaran province, he said.

ried out in Mazandaran province, he said.

In a collaborative effort with national institute for health research (affiliated to the Ministry of Health), and Sanofi (a French multinational pharmaceutical company headquartered in Paris) 10 nationwide surveys will be conducted by the next year (starting on March 21) in various fields of health, he highlighted.

In mid-November 2018 Ostovar said that among Iranians over the age of 25, 11 percent suffer from diabetes type 2 and 18 percent are pre-diabetic.

Ostovar also regretted that diabetes has direct and indirect costs for Iran to the tune of \$4 billion per year.

Alireza Mahdavi, the director of National Program for Prevention and Control of Diabetes also said that annually, 1 percent is added to the population of diabetics in the country.

According to the World Health Organization, the number of people with diabetes has risen from 108 million in 1980 to 422 million in 2014. In 2015, diabetes was the direct cause of 1.6 million deaths and in 2012 high blood glucose was the cause of another 2.2 million deaths.

## Sit less each day to live longer

Researchers say even a few extra minutes off the sofa each day can add years to your life span.

“If you have a job or lifestyle that involves a lot of sitting, you can lower your risk of early death by moving more often, for as long as you want and as your ability allows -- whether that means taking an hour-long high-intensity spin class or choosing lower-intensity activities, like walking,” said study lead author Keith Diaz.

He’s assistant professor of behavioral medicine at Columbia University in New York City.

The new study involved nearly 8,000 American adults, aged 45 and older. Each wore physical activity monitors for at least four days as part of research conducted between 2009 and 2013. The investigators then tracked deaths among the participants until 2017.

The results: People who replaced just 30 minutes of sitting per day with low-intensity physical activity lowered



their risk of an early death by 17 percent, according to the study published online Jan. 14 in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

More intense exercise reaped even bigger rewards, the researchers said. For example, swapping a half-hour per day of sitting for moderate-to-vigorous exercise cut the risk of early death by 35 percent.

And even just a minute or two of added physical activity was beneficial, the findings showed.

“Physical activity of any intensity provides health benefits,” Diaz said in a university news release.

His team pointed to a recent study that found that one in every four U.S. adults sit for eight-plus hours per day.

Two experts in heart health believe that level of inactivity can be a killer.

“Exercise, at any risk level for cardiovascular disease, is shown to improve not only how long one lives, but also lowers the risk of heart attacks and strokes,” said Dr. Satjit Bhushri, a cardiologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

(Source: WebMD)

## Anti-vaccine movement ‘a top threat to global health in 2019’ says WHO

The anti-vaccine movement is one of the worst health threats facing humanity in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

Reluctance or refusal to immunize “threatens to reverse progress” made in tackling preventable diseases, the UN health body said.

The warning comes after a 30 per cent spike in measles cases worldwide, including in several countries where the virus had been virtually eliminated.

“The reasons for this rise are complex, and not all of these cases are due to vaccine hesitancy,” the WHO said. “However, some countries that were close to eliminating the disease have seen a resurgence.”

Measles cases hit a record high in Europe last year, with more than 41,000 people infected in the first six months of 2018. Thirty-seven of those died.

Nedret Emiroglu, director of the Division of Health Emergencies and Communicable Diseases at the WHO’s regional office for Europe, said the “partial setback demonstrates that every person who is not immune remains vulnerable no matter where they live, and every country must keep pushing to increase coverage and close immunity gaps”.

An estimated 110,000 people, mainly children, died from the vaccine-preventable disease across the world in 2017. The figure for 2018 is not yet available but is thought likely to be higher.

There were 913 confirmed measles cases in England in the first 10 months of last year, compared to 259 in the whole of 2017.

In November, England’s most senior doctor warned that myths pedaled on social media about vaccinations were putting children at risk.

Only 87 per cent of children in England have received both doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, compared to a target of 95 per cent.

The proportion of children being vaccinated has gone into reverse after a decade of improvements since the early 2000s, when disgraced researcher Andrew Wakefield stoked fears of a link to autism.

The WHO said the resurgence of measles globally was “of serious concern”.

“Vaccine hesitancy” was included in the WHO’s top 10 global health threats, a list it compiles each year.

Other key threats for 2019 include climate change, a global influenza pandemic, and ebola.

(Source: The Independent)

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## Iranians spend one hour and four minutes daily on social networks: official

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — Iranians spend one hour and four minutes daily on social networks, head of the Information Technology Organization of Iran, Amir Nazemi, wrote on his Twitter account, Mehr reported on Saturday.



The figures is stated according to a survey conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in the past Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018), he said.

The time Iranian spend on social media is 30 times more than the time they read newspapers and nine times more than the time they read books, he said.

Iranians spend four hours and 34 minutes per month on book reading, which includes non-curriculum books, and the figure is one hour and 27 minutes for reading newspaper, he said.

Writers, researchers and academics can consider social media as an opportunity not a threat to increase public awareness, he concluded.

According to a recent report released by the Information Technology Organization, 64 percent of Iranians above six years are internet users.

A survey was conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in both urban and rural areas during winter season of the past Iranian calendar year.

## Fund to provide facilities for knowledge-based firms

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The electronic support fund for research and development (ESFRD) of the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade will provide services and facilities for knowledge-based companies, ISNA reported on Sunday.



The knowledge-based companies can be introduced to ESFRD and apply for its facilities during a meeting at the Pardis Technology Park on Tuesday.

The fund provides financial facilities for knowledge-based companies active in the field of electronic industry including telecommunication, computer, automation, optoelectronics and consumer electronics.

## UV-emitting water bottle cap is made to smite microbes

Washing the inside of a reusable water bottle can be tricky, perhaps causing some people to wonder just how clean it actually is. Well, CrazyCap is designed to continuously kill microbes by replacing a bottle's existing cap with one that shines ultraviolet light into the water. It can even be used to purify water that's collected on the go.



Developed by Miami-based startup Microlyscs, CrazyCap should reportedly fit on most third-party 9, 12 or 17-oz "co-la-style" bottles.

When users want to check that regular tap water is free of nasties, they activate the cap's UVC-emitting LED by tapping a touch sensor on top of the device twice. In cases where they want to treat water collected from less trustworthy sources such as lakes or rivers, they tap it five times, causing the light to stay on for longer.

Exposure to the UVC rays should reportedly should kill up to 99.9999 percent of any bacteria, viruses, mold or algae present in the water.

Additionally, the light will automatically come on throughout the day, once every two hours for a 20-second period — this is presumably just to get any microbes that may have been introduced when drinking. A sensor in the CrazyCap detects when it's screwed into a bottle, so the LED won't come on when it isn't.

According to Microlyscs, one charge of the device's battery should be good for treating 45 liters (9.9 US gal) of tap water, or 18 liters (4 US gal) of lake/river water. A colored light ring on top of the cap indicates the battery's charge level.

Should you be interested, the CrazyCap is currently the subject of a Kickstarter campaign. A pledge of US\$38 will get you one, when and if they reach production. The planned retail price is \$95. (Source: newatlas.com)

# Chinese delegation seeks to boost ties with Iranian nanotech companies

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — A trade delegation from China held a meeting with four Iranian nanotech companies active in the field of polymer on Saturday, Mehr reported.

Representatives from the Chinese companies aimed to expand cooperation with the Iranian side in the field of nanotechnology in the near future.

During the meeting, which was held at the venue of the vice presidency for science and technology, the knowledge-based firms introduced their products to the Chinese counterparts.

Meanwhile, the head of Iran Nanotech China Center (INCC)

Amir Qorbanali explained about the history of the center and opportunities for Iranian companies in the Chinese market.

"The meeting is a great chance for China to be acquainted with Iran's achievements and potentialities in the field of nano industry," he said.

The meeting can start a new chapter in cooperation between the two countries, he concluded.

The Chinese trade delegation paid a visit to the permanent exhibition of nanotech products at Iran's National Nanotechnology Initiative of the vice presidency.

Iran has already established two branches of INCC in Guangzhou Science City, Economic & Technological Development Zone and Nanopolis Suzhou Company in Suzhou.

The centers aim to facilitate cooperation between Iran and China in the field of nanotechnology and to boost cooperation between Iranian and Chinese nanotech companies.



**Representatives from the Chinese companies aimed to expand cooperation with the Iranian side in the field of nanotechnology in the near future**

## 'ISA supports space-based businesses in maritime industry'



**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The director of Iranian Space Agency (ISA) has said that the agency supports space-based businesses which empower the maritime industry.

Over 90 percent of Iranian exports and imports is done through sea routes and the maritime industry has been turned into an important infrastructure for transaction of goods and energy, Morteza Barari wrote on his Instagram account on Saturday.

As satellite is the only maritime communication system, providing various communication services to this industry is one of the main aims of big companies which has led to economic boom in this field, he explained.

Having access to international waters and more than 5,800 kilometers of coastline is considered as a potential for space-based business and ISA supports cooperation in this field, he added.

## Majlis to mull over smart agriculture



**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian parliament (Majlis) will discuss activities of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in the field of smart agriculture and using IT in this industry.

ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi will attend a Majlis session to be held today by the agriculture, water and natural resources committee.

The ICT Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture signed an agreement in July

2018 to boost smart irrigation in a bid to help deal with water shortage in the country and helps the farmers to protect their fields for pest control through space technology.

According to the agreement, it is projected that at least 20 percent of the agricultural economy to be linked with the digital economy over the course of four years so that the private sector's contribution to smart agriculture would rise by 300 percent.



## 1.2m euros spent to build Payam satellite: minister

**TECHNOLOGY** **TEHRAN** — Iran has spent 1.2 million euros for manufacturing Payam satellite over a period of ten years, the information and communication technology minister wrote on his Instagram account.

Some people ask for transparency in the amount of budget allocated for manufacturing the satellite, he said.

The budget is not an expenditure but an investment, just like e-government, the remote sensing satellite will improve usage of water resources and methods of agriculture.

The team, which manufactured Payam, plans to make next satellite with an accuracy of 40 times higher and more efficiency.

Iran launched homegrown Payam satellite on January 15, however, the satellite's carrier rocket could not reach the "necessary speed" and so did not reach the orbit.

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

Manufactured by Amirkabir University of Technology, the image resolution of the Payam satellite was 45 meters and could stay in orbit for three years.

## Collection 1 breach prompts calls for security updates, investment

"The sheer size and almost certain impacts of 'Collection 1' are historic, but unfortunately not surprising," said Uniken CEO Bimal Gandhi, who noted that Albert Einstein's wisdom, "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results" applies to the security landscape.

"The continued reliance on outdated security methods such as using PII in authentication certainly fits that definition, given the proliferation of stolen and leaked PII now available on the dark web," said Gandhi. "These 700+ million email addresses and millions of passwords — many unhashed — will inevitably be used in credential stuffing attacks that greatly harm both consumers and the financial/merchant/payments ecosystem for years to come."

Adam Brown, manager of security solutions at Synopsis, recounted his own alarm after Security Researcher Troy Hunt revealed the Collection 1 breach. "I first saw this in the small hours and knowing what I know about security and how information is used in credential stuffing attacks I was unable to sleep until I'd checked my own credentials," said Brown, who tapped into Hunt's havebeenpwned.com site.

As vast as it is, the Collection 1 dataset is a microcosm of a larger sea of exposed data.

"As shocking as all this news may sound, these types of dumps are far more regular than most people would think. However, many so-called 'new' dumps often contain old data seen in previous breaches so even though the numbers sound scary often the volume of actual new data is significantly

lower," said CEO of Authlogics, Steven Hope, CEO of Authlogics, whose analysts have found subsequent "new" data dumps, dubbed Collections #-#5, that total more than 784 GB, or nine times that data found in Collection #1.

"New" is also a matter of perspective as it depends on the age of the other data you are comparing it to, however we will know more about these new Collection dumps in due course," said Hope.

What sets Collection 1 apart from other notable dumps is that the data came from a multitude of breaches and sources.

"Unlike previous high profile-data dumps, where the data all comes from one compromised party, this appears to be a carefully curated collection of dumps from a large collection of compromises," said Nick Murison, managing consultant at Synopsis. "A brief skim of the alleged sources suggest that these are smaller online entities that likely have not spent much time or resources on security. Some of them may not even be aware that they have been compromised some time ago, and that the data may originate from years earlier."

Credentials remain a valuable asset for hackers — the ROI for miscreants is lucrative and they aren't likely to stop nicking them anytime soon.

"Cyberattackers long ago discovered that the easiest way to gain access to sensitive data is by compromising an end user's identity and credentials," said Centrifify Vice President of Product Marketing Andy Smith, who cited a Forrester study that found that 80 percent of data breaches involve the use of privileged account access,

which essentially give would-be attackers all access and provides "a perfect camouflage for their data exfiltration efforts."

For years, said Joseph Carson, chief security scientist at Thycotic, "cybercriminals and hackers have been correlating each major data breach dump of email addresses and passwords so they can abuse to gain access into employees accounts to steal sensitive data, conduct financial fraud or blackmail into further access. Some of these are hidden in the dark net or shared directly between cybercriminals."

Carson suggested users "choose a password manager to make creating or generating a new password easier."

His colleague, Terence Jackson, CISO at Thycotic, agreed, noting "Many people still use the same passwords across sites for personal and business purposes because it's convenient until something like this happens and it's back in the headlines."

While "using unique passwords on each site isn't a magic bullet, but the goal here is to limit the damage that could be done in a credential stuffing or brute force type attack," Jackson said, "As a CISO, this type of attack would concern me because employees often use their corporate emails to sign up for services and often use the same passwords."

Brown took issue with the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) standard, which "now discourages routine password changing" which he said "could mean that stolen credentials potentially remain 'live' longer than previously could have been expected." But Brown said that very same standard "does prescribe the use

of threat intelligence and automation to alert users of credential breaches or 'pwnage', such as Troy's site. My advice: check your own credentials and do it now!"

The size and reach of Collection 1 should bring home to enterprises how important it is "to invest in security as part of their software development," said Murison. "This includes both establishing activities such as threat modelling early in development and penetration testing as part of ongoing operational activities, as well as investing in tools and automation to ensure security defects are discovered as part of regular development and testing phases."

He cautioned that "with data protection laws becoming increasingly strict (e.g. GDPR), there is no excuse for a company not to be thinking about the risk of data breaches in 2019. This goes for companies developing their own systems as well as companies that decide to outsource development; you cannot outsource the responsibility you have to safeguard your customers' data."

The same tried mitigation basics hold true for both organizations and individuals, said Bill Evans, a vice president at One Identity. Use multifactor authentication, better manage privileged access, improve governance and educate employees.

"You must stay abreast of your cybersecurity options. Enterprises must educate their users of the importance of cybersecurity," said Evans. "While not the most glamorous or exciting of activities, it has to be done, just like cutting the lawn or paying your bills."

(Source: scmagazine.com)



# Plants may not have ears, but they can ‘hear’ way better than we thought

The flowers are listening, according to new research – well, in a sense, at least.

Scientists have found evidence that plants can actually hear the buzz of passing bees and produce sweeter nectar in response to entice the flying insects in. And flowers are technically their ‘ears’.

Based on observations of evening primroses (*Oenothera drummondii*), the team behind the new study discovered that within minutes of sensing the sound waves of nearby bee wings through flower petals, the concentration of the sugar in the plant’s nectar was increased by an average of 20 percent.

This capability could well give some plants an evolutionary advantage, say the scientists, maximizing their chances of spreading pollen.

The scientists went into the experiments with a hypothesis in place: that plants can indeed pick up the vibrations of sound waves, and that this might be part of the reason many plants’ flowers are bowl shaped, to better trap the sounds.

■ **Primrose flowers**

Across several experiments involving more than 650 evening primrose flowers, nectar production was measured in response to silence, sound at three different frequency levels, and a recording of the buzzing noise made by bees.

Sure enough, both the field recording of buzzing bees and the low-frequency sounds that closely matched the recording were enough to change the mix of the nectar in just three minutes. The silence and the high



and mid frequency sounds had no effect. The team also tried the experiments with plants that had some flower petals removed. No change in nectar production was noted,

indicating that it is indeed the flowers that have the job of the ears.

“Plants have plenty of interactions with animals, and animals both make and hear

**Across several experiments involving more than 650 evening primrose flowers, nectar production was measured in response to silence, sound at three different frequency levels, and a recording of the buzzing noise made by bees.**

noises,” one of the team, Lilach Hadany, told Ed Yong at The Atlantic.

“It would be maladaptive for plants to not use sound for communication. We tried to make clear predictions to test that and were quite surprised when it worked out.”

■ **Feeding for longer**

Pushing out sweeter nectar means bees may well stay feeding for longer – increasing the chances that they’ll pick up pollen – and also makes it more likely that the insects will return to flowers of the same species in the future.

This sweetness boost needs to be timed perfectly though, to make it worth the flowers’ while – and that’s exactly what seems to be happening.

As yet the work hasn’t been peer-reviewed, and it’s not clear precisely how the vibrations are being decoded and turned into a trigger for sweeter nectar production, but it’s an intriguing first step into the study of how plants react to sounds around them.

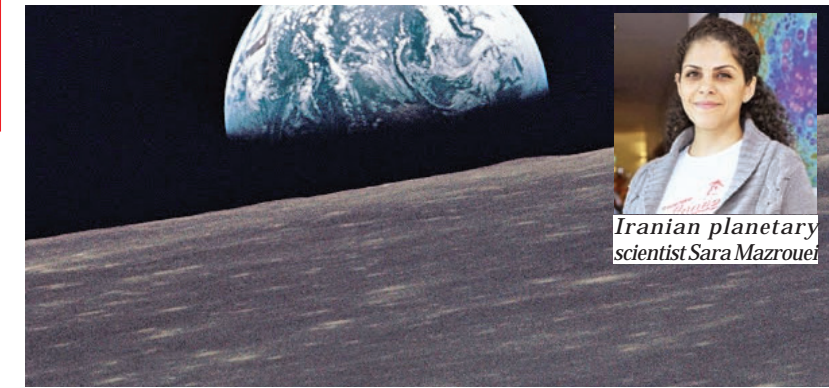
We’ve already seen past research into how plants respond to touch and daylight, and now we can add acoustic vibrations to the list.

Next, the researchers want to look at how plants might respond to other sounds and animals, including humans.

“Some people may think, how can (plants) hear or smell?” one of the study authors Marine Veits told National Geographic. “I’d like people to understand that hearing is not only for ears.”

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## Lunar craters show spike in Earth-pummeling space rocks: new study



Asteroid impacts have a bad reputation here on Earth – it’s the dinosaurs’ signature public relations victory – but it’s the moon that really bears the scars of living in our messy neighborhood.

That’s because Earth has an arsenal of forces that slowly wear away the craters left behind by impacts. And that’s frustrating for scientists who want to better understand the debris hurtling around our Solar System. So a new study uses the pockmarked lunar surface to trace the history of things smashing into both our moon and Earth, finding signs that our neighborhood got a lot messier about 290 million years ago.

“It’s a cool study that talks about our dynamic Solar System and it’s good that it’s out there,” Nicolle Zellner, a physicist at Albion College in Michigan who was not involved in the new research, told space.com. “It’ll get people thinking and testing it, so that’s exciting.”

■ **The Solar System scale**

Earth and the moon are close enough on the Solar System scale that stray asteroids should crash into each at about the same frequency. (Earth may attract a few extra with its stronger gravity, and Earth likely suffers more hits because of its larger surface area – but in terms of impact per square mile, they should be clocking in about the same.)

Scientists have identified only about 180 impact craters here on Earth, as opposed to hundreds of thousands of lunar impact craters. Earth wipes them away with winds and rainfall, oceans and plate tectonics. The “moon is perfect for studying craters,” Sara Mazrouei, a planetary scientist who

led the new research during her doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, told space.com. “Everything stays there.”

But in order to trace the history of impacts, scientists needed to not just identify craters, but also estimate their ages. And that’s much harder on the moon than on Earth, since geologists can’t currently sample lunar craters directly.

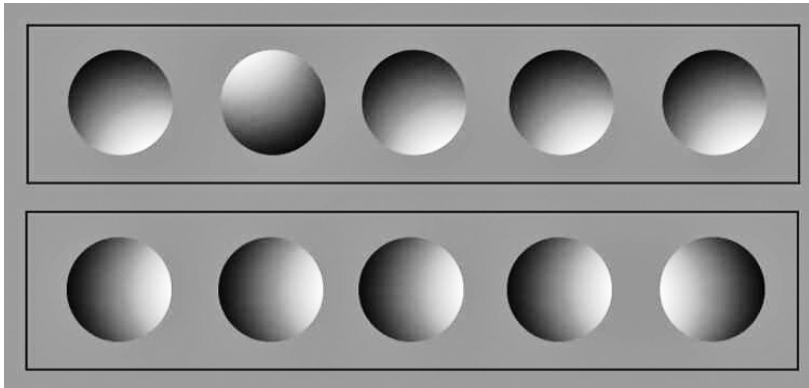
■ **Surprising measurement**

So the team behind the new research settled on what may be a surprising measurement: how well nearby rocks retain heat during the long, cold lunar night. That might seem like an awfully random measurement. But when a large impactor strikes the moon, it scoops out a crater and litters the surrounding landscape with boulders sourced from that material. Then, when that landscape transitions from a 14-day lunar day to a 14-day lunar night, it changes temperature at different rates. The “idea is that big rocks can hold heat throughout the night, whereas that regolith or sand loses heat,” Mazrouei said. “As craters get older, they become less rocky.” In turn, they cool off faster.

So Mazrouei and her colleagues looked at thermal imaging data from an instrument called the Diviner on board NASA’s Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, which has been circling the moon since 2009. The team identified 111 individual craters that they knew were less than 1 billion years old, analyzed their heat signatures and, using a model of how quickly lunar boulders disintegrate, estimated their age.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

## Our unconscious biases change the way we see objects, team says



AS the old saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But while we can appreciate that others might hold different opinions of objects we see, not many people know that factors beyond our control can influence how we perceive the basic attributes of these objects.

We might argue that something is beautiful or ugly, for example, but we would be surprised to learn that the same object is perceived as a sphere by one person but as a cube by another.

The process of visual perception is a best-guess scenario. When we look at something, the brain uses visual cues – sensory signals that convey information – to help work out what that thing is. This means that our perception of the world is not a simple reflection of sensory information, it is an interpretation of it.

Along with color and motion, the perception of depth is very important to help us visually perceive things. Depth helps us to understand the shape of objects and their location relative to ourselves.

We need to understand it to move around our environment and interact with objects. Imagine trying to pick something up if you don’t know what shape it is, or crossing the road if you can’t accurately perceive the distance of the cars.

To perceive depth, humans and animals rely on a number of brain processes and visual cues. One of these cues is shading information: we can perceive depth by simply interpreting the patterns of light and dark on the surface of objects, without needing to refer to any other information.

■ **The position of light**

In order to perceive depth from shading patterns, we must either know or assume the position of the light source that illuminates the object. By default, if the light source is not apparent, we assume that the light comes from above the object.

Look at the image above. The sphere on the left will most likely appear convex (protruding outwards). This is because it is lighter at the top, which reflects the patterns of light and dark that would be produced on a convex object if there was an overhead light source. The sphere on the right usually looks concave (recessed inwards) because it’s darker at the top. Again, if there was an overhead light source, a concave object would be darker at the top because the upward-facing portions of the object catch the light, and the downward-facing portions are obscured.

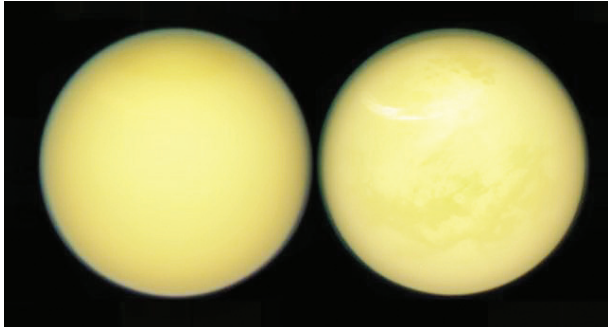
The light-from-above assumption isn’t very surprising, since we evolved in a world with an overhead light source – the sun. A less intuitive finding that scientists have made, however, is that light is assumed to originate from the upper left-hand side of space.

Experiments that measure electrical activity in the brain have also found that left-lit objects are more rapidly recognized than those lit from other orientations. This is demonstrated in the image below. Both the upper and lower rows of circles contain one that is different from the others—an oddball.

(Source: Newsweek)

## Astronomers find evidence of seasonal weather on Titan

Scientists watching Saturn’s moon Titan have finally gotten evidence that the planet experiences seasons like Earth. It’s subtle, but a shimmering region in the higher latitudes indicates that summer has started in Titan’s northern hemisphere. This discovery has been years in the making because of Titan’s exceedingly long orbit, but we have the dearly departed Cassini probe to thank.



We often talk about how much Titan and Earth have in common. They’re the only two objects in the solar system with permanent bodies of liquid on their surfaces. Titan also has a thick atmosphere just a little more dense than Earth’s.

Venus also has an atmosphere, but it’s about 90 times denser. Titan also has a stable axial tilt of 27-degrees, a bit more than Earth’s 23.5-degree angle. However, Earth and Titan aren’t exactly twins. Those lakes and oceans are liquid hydrocarbons instead of water, and the atmosphere is mostly nitrogen and methane. Still, the arrival of the Cassini probe gave scientists a chance to prove Titan experiences Earth-like seasonal weather.

Confirming seasons on Titan has been a challenge because the year is so much longer. Saturn’s massive gravity ensures that Titan is tidally locked. Thus, its day is 15.9 Earth days (the same as its orbit around Saturn), and a year is 29.5 Earth years (Saturn’s orbit around the sun). With the healthy axial tilt, scientists predicted that Titan should experience seasons about 7.5 Earth years in length.

Cassini arrived in 2004, and in 2009 Titan reached its spring equinox. In 2011, the probe spotted atmospheric changes in the southern hemisphere that looked like the onset of winter. However, corresponding hydrocarbon rains in the northern hemisphere remained elusive – there weren’t even any storm clouds.

That brings us to the latest discovery. Cassini dropped into Saturn’s atmosphere in 2017, but its data is still being analyzed.

The image comes from Cassini’s Visual and Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (VIMS) instrument, which can peer through the moon’s thick cloud layer.

(Source: extremetech.com)

## Scientists develop microrobot that can one day bring medicine straight to target tissues

A new microrobot that was modeled after bacteria might just revolutionize targeted drug delivery. In the future, people might need only to swallow tiny robots to get the medications straight to the target tissues.

A team of scientists from EPFL and ETH Zurich developed tiny elastic robots that are smart, flexible, and biocompatible. The microrobots can swim through fluids and change their shape when needed, so they can pass through complicated systems and narrow blood vessels with ease.

The robots are made of hydrogel nanocomposites, and were designed with a composition and structure that would allow them to adapt to the type of fluid that they are moving through. For instance, when the microrobot detects a change in viscosity, it will change its shape so that it can still move with the same speed. Furthermore, the microrobots can navigate on their own but they were also designed with magnetic nanoparticles so they can be controlled via an electromagnetic field.

Interestingly, the microrobots were actually inspired by bacteria. According to the scientists, they drew inspiration from nature wherein there are microorganisms with the capability to change their shape when needed, and depending on the environmental conditions. For instance, bacteria can change their shape and size over the course of their life cycle so as to optimize their movements, especially in complex environments.

(Source: techtimes.com)

## The speed of light is torturously slow, NASA scientist discovers

A series of new animations by a NASA scientist show just how zippy – and also how torturously slow – the speed of light can be.

Light speed is the fastest that any material object can travel through space. That is, of course, barring the existence of theoretical shortcuts in the fabric of space called wormholes (and the ability to go through them without being destroyed).

In a perfectly empty vacuum, a particle of light, which is called a photon, can travel 186,282 miles per second (299,792 kilometers per second), or about 670.6 million mph (1.079 billion kilometers per hour). This is incredibly fast. However, light speed can be frustratingly slow if you’re trying to communicate with or reach other planets, especially any worlds beyond our solar system.

Read more: Astronomers found a ‘cold super-Earth’ less than 6 light-years away – and it may be the first rocky planet we’ll photograph beyond the Solar System.

“My animations were made to show as instantly as possible the whole context of what I’m trying to convey,” O’Donoghue told Business Insider via Twitter. “When I revised for my exams, I used to draw complex concepts out by hand just to truly understand, so that’s what I’m doing here.”

O’Donoghue said he only recently learned how to create these animations – his first were for a NASA news release about Saturn’s vanishing rings. After that, he moved on to animating other difficult-to-grasp space concepts, including a video illustrating the rotation speeds and sizes of the planets. He said that one “garnered millions of views” when he posted it on Twitter.

O’Donoghue’s latest effort looks at three different light-speed scenarios to convey how fast (and how painfully slow) photons can be.

(Source: businessinsider.com)

## New class of solar cells, using lead-free perovskite materials

Lead-based perovskites already gained much attention as promising materials for low-cost and high-efficiency solar cells. However, the intrinsic instability and the toxicity of lead (Pb) have raised serious concerns of the viability of Pb-based perovskites, hindering large-scale commercialization of solar cells and similar devices based on these materials. As an alternative solution, Pb-free perovskites were recently proposed to counter the toxicity of lead based perovskites, yet it is of little use due to lower efficiencies.

A recent study, led by Professor Tae-Hyuk Kwon in the School of Natural Science at UNIST has taken a major step toward the development of a new generation of solar cells, using lead-free perovskites. With its promising electronic properties, the new perovskite material has been demonstrated to function as a charge regenerator with dye sensitized solar cells, thus enhancing both the overall efficiency and stability. Published in the November 2018 issue of Advanced Materials, their findings will open new possibilities for the application of lead-free perovskites in solar cells.

Among the various alternatives to lead, the research team used the vacancy ordered double perovskite (Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub>). Despite their promising outlook, the surface states of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> and their function remain largely unclear.

■ **The charge transfer mechanism**

Through this work, the team examined the charge transfer mechanism of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> with the aim of clarifying the function of its surface state. For this purpose, a 3 electrode system was developed to observe charge transfer through the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub>. Cyclic voltammetry and Mott-Schottky analyses were also used to probe the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub>, whose potential is related to its bandgap.

Their analysis demonstrated that the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> is highly redox active and can be effectively charged/discharged in the presence of iodide redox mediators. Besides, the preparation of a charge regenerator system based on Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> confirmed that charge transfer occurred through the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub>.

Based on this strategy, the research team engineered hybrid solar cells, using a Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> based charge regenerator

for organic dye-sensitized solar cells (DSSCs). Such solar cells generate electric current in the process where the oxidized organic dye returns to its original state.

“Due to a high volume of electrical charges in organic dyes that show high connectivity with the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub>, more electric current were generated,” says Byung-Man Kim in the Department of Chemistry at UNIST, another lead author of this study. “Consequently, Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> shows efficient charge transfer with a thermodynamically favorable charge acceptor level, achieving a 79% enhancement in the photocurrent density compared with that of a conventional liquid electrolyte.”

This study has attracted considerable attention among researchers, as it examined the charge transfer mechanism of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> with the aim of clarifying the function of its surface state. Their results suggest that the surface state of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> is the main charge transfer pathway in the presence of a redox mediator and should be considered in future designs of Cs<sub>2</sub>SnI<sub>6</sub> based devices.

(Source: eurekalert.org)



## First Announcement

**N.I.O.C**  
**1397.5557**

### Call for public tender (First/Second publish) **One Stage (semi compressed) tender** Subject of Tender: (Completion 10000 psi)

**National Iranian  
Drilling Company**

#### \* Tender descriptions:

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national elect onic tendering system	Tender No. /Indet No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3188219	TenderNo: PPP/KSH/97/002 Indet No: 48-22-9622049	24,438,900,000

#### \* Qualitative evaluation of tenderers

##### Method

Based on minimum scoring (60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.

1. The tenderers who have more than four (4) active contracts with NIDC are not allowed to attend in this tender.

2. The tenderers who have more than two (2) active contracts with same subject (exactly compliance with this subject) with NIDC are not allowed to attend in this tender.

#### \* Purchasing & Submitting

TenderDocumentDistributionby C ompany	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ends on the following tenth day thereof.	
	<u>Distribution Place</u>  Submitting Method	<p>A) Hall No : 316, 3th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS), National Iranian Drilling Company, After Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. B) Jonhouni street - yeghema alley nic: 8th building floor no : 04 room no 428 -tehran iran 021 66700249</p> <p>Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of ..... Iranian Rials under account number 4001114004020491 (Shaba No. IR520100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. Of Ir an Central Bank.</p> <p>Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents.</p>
DocumentsReceivingMethod	Closing date	14 Days after the last time of Purchasing.
	Address	<p>H Hall NO.107,1st floor, Tender committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569</p>

#### \* Tender Guarantee

Value of guarantee	1,222,000,000 Rial/ 25,460 Euro
Type of guarantee	<p>* Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non- bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.</p> <p>* Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran. "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.</p>
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for onetime in initial validity duration.

(Name of department)

More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on:

[www.nidc.ir](http://www.nidc.ir) [http://sapp.ir/nidc\\_pr](http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr)

تهران تایمز نویت اول ۹۷/۱/۱ نویت دوم ۹۷/۱/۲



# Syrian air defense repels Israeli attack in south: state media

**1→** The attack came on the anniversary of a Turkish military operation that evicted Kurdish fighters from the town, which is now under the control of Turkey-backed Syrian opposition fighters.

## ■ Powerful blast heard in Damascus: Syrian state TV

Meantime, Syrian media say a huge explosion has been heard in the south of the capital, Damascus, with initial reports describing it as a "terrorist attack."

The Syrian state TV said the blast took place "around the Southern Highway in Damascus" on Sunday morning, without providing more details.

The official SANA news agency also said the explosion was caused by an explosive device, and that it appears to have been a "terrorist attack."

An arrest has been made in connection with the incident, SANA reported.

Elsewhere, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said the attack took place near a military intelligence office, and that it had killed and wounded an unspecified number of people.

The Britain-based Observatory also said the blast was followed by shooting.

Damascus has largely been calm since March 2018, when the Syrian army liberated the city's Eastern Ghouta suburb, which used to serve as a bastion for terror groups, re-establishing full control over the capital.

The country has been infected by foreign-backed militancy since early 2011, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, displaced millions



more and wreaked havoc on most of Syrian infrastructure.

Syrian government forces, backed by Iran and Russia, have managed to wrest back control of most parts of the country from foreign-sponsored militants.

## ■ Syria urges Security Council to stop U.S.-led strikes on civilian infrastructure

Separately, the Syrian government has called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to put an end to airstrikes being carried out by the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri

terrorist group, saying the aerial assaults are targeting civilian and critical infrastructure in the country.

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, in two separate letters addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the rotating president of the Security Council, Francisco Antonio Cortorreal, on Saturday, censured the latest U.S.-led coalition strikes against al-Baghuz al-Tahtani village in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, saying the U.S.-led warplanes had targeted dozens of families, who were fleeing from areas controlled by ISIL.

Local sources, speaking on condition of

anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA on Friday that 20 people were killed when the U.S.-led warplanes bombarded residential buildings in the village.

"This new crime is in line with the criminal acts that the U.S.-led coalition is perpetrating systematically and on a daily basis against Syrian people, and in flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The activities of this alliance are illegal as it has been formed outside the UN framework. Such acts have only contributed to the expansion of extremist terrorist organizations, especially Daesh (ISIL). Cooperation and coordination between these terrorist groups and this alliance has been documented in numerous letters that Syrian Arab Republic has sent to the Security Council," the letters pointed out.

The ministry then condemned in the strongest terms the U.S.-led coalition's continued attacks against Syrian people and the conflict-plagued country's critical infrastructure, energy facilities and public and private property.

It also called on the UN Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities as regards to the establishment of international peace and security, and put an immediate halt to its crimes against humanity that were being carried out by this "rogue" coalition against Syrian civilians and infrastructure.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry demanded that the Council take necessary measures to set an international mechanism to punish the perpetrators of such crimes.

(Source: agencies)

## Merkel eyes closer cooperation in EU defense systems

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Saturday the European Union must deepen cooperation in defense and in particular weapons systems development, warning Germans that they may need to make compromises on strict export controls.

In a bid to counter growing euroskeptic nationalism before elections to the European Parliament in May, Merkel has stressed the importance of close cooperation within the bloc.

On Jan. 22 she signs an agreement with French President Emmanuel Macron that builds on a 1963 treaty of post-war reconciliation and is aimed at bolstering the EU.

In a speech to her conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) in the northern city of Rostock, Merkel said: "It is good that after several decades we want to develop a common defense policy ... We must develop weapons systems together," adding Europe had many more systems than the United States.

Arguing that EU countries should not compete among

themselves for new projects and fighter planes but develop products together, she said there would be a need to compromise on export rules.

"We have very strict export rules, others have less strict rules ... But anyone who develops an airplane with us would also like to know whether they can sell the plane with us," she said.

"We will have to make compromises, that is what we are talking about at the moment."

Last year, France stopped short of Germany's move to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

In her weekly podcast, Merkel stressed the importance of the French-German partnership at the heart of the EU, saying the friendship was "far from a given after centuries of military conflict between our countries."

"We want to give an impulse to European unity," Merkel said.



Although the two countries, traditionally the EU's main engine, differ on issues such as euro zone reform, the treaty envisages deeper cooperation in foreign and defense policy and in tackling terrorism as well as more cultural exchanges.

(Source: Reuters)

## Rivals launch political marathon in Afghanistan

A confident and relaxed President Ashraf Ghani launched his reelection campaign Sunday, registering as a candidate at the national election commission and then delivering a lengthy speech on peace, poverty and the need for a strong government to unite all Afghans and end 17 years of insurgent conflict in a "just and honorable" way.

The Afghan election, in which Ghani will face 14 contenders after five tumultuous years in office, is now scheduled for July 20 after being postponed from April. The race will be dominated, and in some ways overshadowed, by ongoing efforts to start peace talks with Taliban insurgents, who have so far refused to negotiate with Ghani's government and insisted on dealing only with U.S. officials, while continuing to wage attacks across the country.

Ghani's performance Sunday, the deadline for candidates to register, was bolstered by the presence of his surprise running mate for first vice president, Amrullah Saleh, a tough former national intelligence chief whom Ghani appointed as his new interior minister just three weeks ago. Saleh gave a briefer, sterner speech, vowing to end high-level "bullying" and "impunity" and to settle the war on terms that are "acceptable to all Afghans." Ghani's wife Rula stood silently at the president's side.

The president is expected to encounter stiff



competition, including several individuals who were once senior officials in his government. The most formidable is his former national security adviser, Mohammed Hanif Atmar, 51, a respected official who resigned abruptly in October. Atmar announced his candidacy on Friday with a stinging speech that blamed Ghani for running a failed one-man government and plunging the country into crisis. He has been endorsed by a variety of influential political figures.

A second senior member of Ghani's admin-

istration, chief executive Abdullah Abdullah, announced his candidacy Sunday morning, just in time to register as the nominee for the major opposition party, Jamiat-i-Islami. Speaking at the election commission, Abdullah said he hoped the race would create "hostility or humiliation," but he, too, criticized Ghani for "monopolizing" power and breaking promises, and he stressed that he would behave differently.

Abdullah, 58, was Ghani's top rival in the 2014 election, which was derailed by

massive fraud. They were forced to form a joint government to prevent a political crisis, but their relationship was strained. Fraud remains a major concern for the upcoming election, and both Abdullah and other candidates have called for a revamping and reform of the national election commission and the electoral complaint commission.

Other prominent candidates include Rahmatullah Nabil, a former national intelligence chief who leads an umbrella of reform-minded political and civic groups; Zalmay Rassoul, who served as national security adviser and foreign minister under President Hamid Karzai; Ahmad Wali Massoud, a brother of the late anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban militia leader Ahmad Shah Massoud; and Noor ul-Haq Oloomi, a former army general and member of parliament.

A wild-card candidate who entered the race on Saturday is Gullbuddin Hekmatyar, the former anti-Soviet militia leader who became a longtime fugitive after being accused of numerous abuses and sanctioned by the United Nations and the United States. He was brought back to Kabul last year under a peace deal with Ghani that officials hoped would inspire the Taliban to follow suit. A polarizing figure, Hekmatyar is as an independent.

(Source: Washington Post)

## Hamas slams U.S. aid cut to Palestinians as 'political blackmail'

The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement has condemned the United States decision to cut humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people as "political blackmail," urging international efforts to end Washington's anti-Palestine pressure campaign and pro-Tel Aviv bias.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in a statement on Saturday that the decision by the administration of the U.S. President Donald Trump to stop aid to the Palestinians "is in line with the 'deal of the century' that is aimed to liquidate the Palestinian issue."

He was referring to Washington's yet-to-be unveiled proposal aimed at resolving the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians have already rejected Trump's plan, which is said to be hugely biased towards the Israeli regime.

The statement came days after the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said it would end all its projects in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip on January 31 following the U.S. administration's decision to cut funding to the Palestinians.

"The Trump administration's decision to cut humanitarian aid provided to the Palestinian people is political blackmail reflecting the U.S. immoral demeanor towards the Palestinians and their just cause," Barhoum said.

He also urged international institutions to stand by the Palestinians and support them in the face of "the discriminatory behavior of the U.S. administration that is biased" in favor of the Israeli occupation.

"Hamas calls on all international, humanitarian, and legal organizations to condemn the U.S. policies aimed at pressuring the Palestinian people to accept its schemes in the region. Such organizations should shoulder the responsibility of mobilizing support for and siding with the impoverished Palestinians," he added.

Last year, the Trump administration ended all funding for UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), the United Nations agency that provides humanitarian aid to over 5 million Palestinian refugees.

The controversial move came after President Mahmoud Abbas said the Palestinian Authority (PA) would no longer recognize Washington as a mediator of Israeli-Palestinian talks amid anger over Trump's decision in late 2017 to recognize occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital" in defiance of international objections.

Analysts said the aid cut is meant to eliminate the Palestinians' demand for the right to return, warning that it would cause more hardship for those living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

On Thursday, Dave Harden, former USAID mission director and managing director of the Georgetown Strategy Group, said the U.S. administration's decision to cut aid to Palestinians "demonstrates again a lack of nuance, sophistication, and appreciation for the complexity of the situation."

USAID has been operating in the Palestinian territories since 1994, investing in infrastructure, medical services, and education.

(Source: Press TV)

## Tshisekedi declared DR Congo's president, but runner-up revolts

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) election crisis deepened early on Sunday when the Constitutional Court confirmed the win of Felix Tshisekedi, rejecting claims of fraud, and runner-up Martin Fayulu promptly declared himself the country's "only legitimate president".

Fayulu's supporters have alleged an extraordinary backroom deal by outgoing President Joseph Kabila to rig the vote in favor of the opposition after the ruling party's candidate did so poorly that a Plan B was needed. Neither side has acknowledged the accusations.

The court, however, said Fayulu offered no proof to back his assertions that he had won easily based on leaked data attributed to the electoral commission.

Fayulu urged Congolese to take to the streets to peacefully protest what he called a "constitutional coup d'état," accusing the court of validating false results. "It's no secret ... that you have elected me president," he said.

"I consider myself the only legitimate president of the Democratic Republic of Congo. I call on the Congolese people not to recognize someone who would take on that role illegitimately, nor to obey the orders coming from him," he said.

Neither Congolese nor the international community should recognize Tshisekedi, nor obey him, Fayulu added.

Tshisekedi said early on Sunday that the Constitutional Court's decision confirming him as the winner of the presidential election was a victory for the entire country.

"It is Congo that won," said Tshisekedi, speaking to his supporters after the court decision.

"It is not the victory of one camp against another. I am engaged in a campaign to reconcile all Congolese. ... The Congo that we are going to form will not be a Congo of division, hatred or tribalism. It will be a reconciled Congo, a strong Congo that will be focused on development, peace and security."

The largely untested Tshisekedi, son of the late, charismatic opposition leader Etienne, is set to be inaugurated on Tuesday. His supporters who had gathered outside the court cheered.

The court's declaration came shortly after the African Union in an unprecedented move asked DR Congo to delay announcing the final election results, citing "serious doubts" about the vote.

It planned to send a high-level delegation on Monday to find a way out of the crisis, fearing unrest spilling across borders of the vast Central African nation.

Congo's government replied it was up to the courts.

The court turned away Fayulu's request for a recount in the December 30 vote.

Government spokesman Lambert Mende quickly acknowledged the court's decision, congratulating Tshisekedi as Congo's fifth president.

The country of 80 million people, rich in the minerals key to smartphones around the world, is moving close to achieving its first peaceful, democratic transfer of power since independence in 1960.

But observers have warned that the court's upholding of the official results could lead to further unrest.

At least 34 people have been killed since provisional results were released on Jan. 10, the United Nations has said.

The court could have ordered a recount or ordered a new election.

(Source: agencies)

## Police fire tear gas as Greeks rally over Macedonia name deal

Police fired tear gas to disperse protesters outside parliament on Sunday as tens of thousands of Greeks rallied in Athens to protest against a name deal with Macedonia.

Central Athens turned into a sea of people holding blue and white Greek flags as thousands came from all over the country to rally against the accord to name the ex-Yugoslav state North Macedonia.

Many Greeks believe the name Macedonia implies a territorial claim over their country's own northern region of that name.

The issue evokes strong emotions among Greeks who consider Macedonia, the ancient kingdom ruled by Alexander the Great, to be an integral part of their homeland and heritage.

The accord, signed by the two governments, unblocks the ex-Yugoslav republic's desire to join NATO and the European Union once ratified by Greece's parliament.

"We cannot stomach this deal, to give away our Mace-



donia, our history," said pensioner Amalia Savrami, 67, as she waved a large Greek flag on Athens's Syntagma Square.

"Macedonia is Greek, period."

Locals said the Athens rally was the largest in decades, easily outdoing rallies against austerity in previous years.



## Former Man Utd midfielder Scholes in Oldham manager talks

Oldham Athletic are in talks with former Manchester United and England midfielder Paul Scholes regarding their vacant manager role. The League Two Latics are looking to appoint a successor to Frankie Bunn, who was sacked on 27 December.

Scholes, 44, has a lifelong affinity with the club and attended Saturday's 2-1 defeat by Sol Campbell's Macclesfield Town.

Since retiring in 2013, he has not managed in the English Football League. Academy boss Pete Wild has been in caretaker charge at Boundary Park. There could be an issue regarding Scholes' co-ownership of Salford City, who are third in the National League and chasing promotion to League Two.

United legend Scholes told BBC Radio Manchester he was interviewed previously for the Oldham job, when former boss Richie Wellens was appointed in October 2017.

Oldham dismissed Bunn last month following their 6-0 defeat by Carlisle United. He had only been appointed last summer.

Since then, under caretaker boss Wild, they have won two of their four league games and stunned Premier League side Fulham in the FA Cup third round.

Scholes made 718 appearances for Manchester United, including 499 in the Premier League, and scored 155 goals for the Old Trafford club. He also played 66 times for England, retiring after Euro 2004 to focus on his club career.

After he finished playing, Scholes was part of the five-strong Manchester United Class of '92 to buy a controlling stake in Salford City and was briefly joint caretaker manager, with Phil Neville, in 2015.

That, along with a short spell on the United coaching staff when Ryan Giggs took temporary charge following David Moyes' sacking in 2014, remains his only experience in the dugout.

(Source: BBC)

## Henry fumes at VAR glitch after Monaco lose again

Struggling Monaco's 5-1 home defeat against Strasbourg on Saturday left Thierry Henry fuming with the coach seen insulting an opposing player and lashing out at a malfunction of the Video Assistant Refereeing (VAR) system.

TV footage showed the former France international making an abusive remark to a Strasbourg player as the visitors showed no mercy in routing Monaco, who were reduced to 10 men after the dismissal of Naldo in the seventh minute.

The result left the club from the principality second from bottom of the league on 15 points from 21 games and still without a Ligue 1 victory at their Stade Louis II home this season.

Monaco were trailing 2-1 just after the hour mark when they were denied a penalty in an incident that a furious Henry thought had turned the game.

"When I asked the fourth official why he wasn't reviewing (what led to the potential penalty), he told me the VAR was not working," Henry was quoted as saying in French daily L'Equipe on Sunday.

"I would like to know why the VAR was not working and I hope you are going to ask why. We were 2-1 down at that moment and if we convert the penalty, it's 2-2. It would have been a game changer."

His Strasbourg counterpart, Thierry Laurey, confirmed there had been a problem with the VAR.

"We were told after the break that the VAR would not be working for a while," he said. "It has happened several times this season. I feel for Thierry Henry, but sometimes, technology does not work."

Monaco face a crucial game on Saturday when they travel to third-from-bottom side Dijon.

(Source: Goal)

## Vonn bombs out of Cortina Super G

American ski star Lindsey Vonn failed to finish the World Cup Super G at Cortina on Sunday when she took a corner too wide whilst trying to claw back time.

The 34-year-old was racing her third event in the Italian resort this weekend after completing two downhill races on Friday and Saturday, albeit finishing 15th and 9th, as she overcomes her latest knee injury. On this slightly slower but more technical Super G, a race she has won six times here, Vonn was chasing a pulsating time set by Tina Weirather when she lost control and went off the piste.

Vonn, with 82 World Cup wins to her name, has set herself the challenge of overhauling Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark's all-time record of 86 World Cup wins before retiring at Lake Louise next December.

(Source: AFP)

## Sharapova refuses to answer questions over meldonium use

Almost two years since Maria Sharapova returned from her doping ban, she has yet to regain her former authority on the court, and neither has she shown a hint of remorse.

Both of these points were driven home on Sunday. First Sharapova suffered a 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 defeat at the hands of Australia's local heroine Ashleigh Barty. Then she declined to answer a perfectly relevant question about the challenge of finding an alternative medication to meldonium, which was outlawed by WADA at the start of 2016.

When Sharapova first revealed the details of her positive test, she said that she had used the drug because of a magnesium deficiency and a family history of diabetes. Coincidentally or not, her effectiveness in deciding sets has fallen since she stopped taking it, from a 76 per cent success rate beforehand to 52 per cent thereafter.

Asked whether it is difficult to deal with the physical demands of a grand slam without her former medication, Sharapova put her hand to her forehead, then pursed her lips and replied "Is there another question?"

Sharapova seems to like acting as if she were the victim. But there are plenty of other players in the locker-room who have expressed dissatisfaction about her acknowledged use of meldonium for ten years. Her notoriety may also help to explain why the Melbourne fans booed her on Sunday, as she returned from what they saw as a tactical bathroom break at the end of the second set.

(Source: Telegraph)

# Federer knocked out by Greek wunderkind Tsitsipas

Roger Federer's bid for a hat-trick of Australian Open titles was crushed on Sunday as Greek wunderkind Stefanos Tsitsipas rose up to floor the Swiss master and become his nation's first Grand Slam quarter-finalist.

In a match pitting the oldest and youngest players left in the men's draw, the 20-year-old Tsitsipas overhauled Federer 6-7(11) 7-6(3) 7-5 7-6(5) under the lights of Rod Laver Arena, sparking delirium among Greek fans out in force at Melbourne Park.

The 37-year-old Federer, 20 times a Grand Slam champion, will rue his chances, having failed to convert any of the 12 break points he took from Tsitsipas over the course of a riveting clash laden with sparkling shot-making. Instead, it was Tsitsipas showing a wise head on young shoulders in a final tiebreak of unrelenting tension.

When given a match point after Federer slapped a forehand long, he converted it clinically, forcing a backhand error from the Swiss to announce himself on one of the game's biggest stages.

He raised his arms in triumph and roared at the terraces, bringing tears of joy to his brother's eyes in the players' box.

"There's nothing I can describe, I cannot describe it, I am the happiest man on earth right now," Tsitsipas said in his court-side interview.



"Roger is a legend of our sport, he showed such good tennis over the years. I have been idolising him since I was six.

"I didn't lose my patience, stayed in those rallies. It was very important to save those breakpoints."

Tsitsipas may be set for even bigger prizes, with a semi-final on offer should he beat 22nd-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut.

When the dust settles, Federer will note that he has been upset in the last 16 at the last two Grand Slams, having fallen to unseeded Australian John Millman at the U.S. Open.

## Nadal blows away Berdych to reach quarter-finals



Rafa Nadal routed Tomas Berdych 6-0 6-1 7-6(4) in a centre court masterclass to charge into the quarter-finals of the Australian Open on Sunday.

The 2009 champion was relentless at Rod Laver Arena, claiming the first two sets in an astonishing 51 minutes as the former world number four Czech suffered a dreadful start.

Berdych rallied to grab a set point off Nadal in the final stanza but an untimely malfunction of the serve clock rattled him during the ensuing tiebreak and he bowed out slapping a backhand into the net.

Bidding for an 18th Grand Slam title, second seed Nadal booked his 11th quarter-final at Melbourne Park and will meet unseeded American sensation Frances Tiafoe.

Tiafoe, the son of Sierra Leone immigrants, celebrated his 21st birthday on Sunday by upsetting Grigor Dimitrov at Melbourne Arena.

The match is certain to be billed as an intriguing clash of generations but Nadal has already shown disdain for hyped-up youth. He destroyed Alex de Minaur, the highly regarded 19-year-old local, in straight sets in the previous round.

"When you have younger players coming, they have always more attention to everyone," the 32-year-old told reporters.

"Of course, he's dangerous. He's in (the) quarter-finals. He won great matches during

the whole event. Going to be a tough one."

Untested by three Australian opponents at the tournament, Nadal may have been grateful to Berdych for belatedly finding his game.

The French Open champion Nadal fought off a break point in the first game of the match but that was the only pressure he felt in a woeful first set for Berdych, who landed barely a third of his first serves.

The big Czech double-faulted before meekly netting a backhand to fall 2-0 behind and lost the set in 34 minutes when the Spaniard swooped forward to lace a forehand down the line.

Nadal ploughed on to 3-0 in the second set before Berdych finally held, raising ironic cheers in the terraces.

The memory of Berdych's famous quarter-final win over the Spaniard at the 2015 tournament can never have seemed foggy for the 33-year-old, whose 2018 season was cut in half by a back injury.

To his credit, though, he dug in for the third, finding his monster serve and pounding forehand.

He saved two break points at 5-5 and prised a set point in the following game with a blazing forehand down the line.

Berdych battled on to lead 4-3 in the tiebreak but became rattled when the shot clock failed. After carping at the chair umpire, he committed two unforced errors.

(Source: Reuters)

## Pacquiao dominates Broner in unanimous decision win



The 40-year-old Filipino multiple world champion was quicker and more accurate as he controlled each round and cruised to the triumph to take his career record to 61-7-2. American Broner, 29, fought gamely and stayed upright despite being hit with several heavy combinations but was ultimately outclassed.

Retired great Floyd Mayweather attended the fight, fuelling speculation of a rematch against Pacquiao, who the undefeated American beat in 2015.

Two judges scored the bout 116-112 in favour of Pacquiao, while the third had the Filipino Senator a 117-111 winner.

"I'm so happy," said Pacquiao. "God gave me this blessing (of good health). At the age of 40 I can still give my best."

About the only person in attendance who disagreed with the outcome was Broner (33-4-1), who protested the result emphatically in his post fight interview.

"I beat him. Everyone out there knows I beat him," Broner said. "I controlled the fight, he was missing and I hit him clean more times."

It was difficult to take Broner's claims seriously on a night when he was relegated to the role of defensive fighter.

Pacquiao appeared the younger and more spry of the two as he The final few rounds were anticlimactic as Broner played it safe and Pacquiao stayed in control.

At the final bell, Pacquiao dropped to

serve cancelled for twice falling foul of the clock in the opening game. He had to stave off two break points to hold.

Sparkling winners sang off both racquets as the first set flew into an epic tiebreak of blown chances and brave saves.

Tsitsipas finally relented when he pushed a forehand wide, having been wrongfooted by a deep and venomous shot.

Lesser opponents might have fallen into a funk against the front-running Swiss but Tsitsipas stayed brave under fire.

He saved eight break points in the second set to keep Federer at bay yet had no such gifts on his opponent's serve.

The Greek stared down four set points when serving at 5-4 and finally held with a net-rush and a volley.

He fired a backhand crosscourt into the net-bound Federer's sneakers to earn three set points in the tiebreak, then converted the first with a crushing forehand winner that kissed the line in the corner.

Federer became concerned as more break points went begging in the third set, and he was soon clinging desperately on serve.

It came to a head at 6-5 down, with Federer's first serve going missing in four successive points and the set lost with a trio of unforced errors on forehand.

(Source: Reuters)

## Jose Mourinho: I've had three job offers but I don't park the bus

Jose Mourinho says he has turned down three job offers since being sacked as Manchester United boss and has rejected criticism of the team's playing style.

The Portuguese, 55, was sacked in December after the club said there had been no progress with results, style or developing young players.

Former United player Gary Neville said no-one should be able to shape their own philosophy at the club again.

"Gary Neville doesn't know my philosophy," Mourinho told Bein Sports.

"My philosophy depends. I would love to go to a club and have [the same] conditions that [Liverpool boss] Jurgen Klopp and [Manchester City manager] Pep Guardiola did. "I refused already three jobs because I didn't feel it was what I want."

Mourinho, who led Manchester United to League Cup and Europa League titles, is understood to have a non-disclosure agreement signed as part of his pay-off from the club, meaning he is not allowed to talk about his departure.

But he spoke about a range of subjects as a studio guest on Bein Sports, including:

- How one player recently asked him not to be critical in training
- How he doesn't park the bus

- How he was not supported like Guardiola or Klopp
- How the days of being an "all-powerful manager are over"

- How he hid in a laundry basket for a Champions League tie in 2005

At various points Mourinho was critical of winger Anthony Martial, full-back Luke Shaw and striker Marcus Rashford, who has been re-born under interim boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

But he outlined how one player asked not to be criticised in training which Mourinho thought was a sign of modern players being too sensitive.

"Recently, when I was coaching one player he told me and he was very polite, 'please when you criticise me can you do it in private'," he said.

"I told him why? 'Because of my stature, in front of the other players when you criticise me I don't feel comfortable'.

"Nowadays you have to be very smart in the way you read your players, and try to create the best situation."

He contrasted the situation with that of former Chelsea striker Didier Drogba, with whom he worked at Stamford Bridge when he twice won the Premier League in 2005 and 2006.

"With Drogba, he is the kind of player that the more

pressure from the manager, the more quality in his performance," Mourinho added.

"There are some players where if you squeeze them they answer in the best way."

Manchester City and Liverpool are 'well supported' Mourinho said that his philosophy depended on the team he was managing, but rejected accusations that his sides were defensive or 'parked the bus'.

He cited the football played during his first stint at Chelsea and said: "You know when the [parking the bus] reputation started?"

"It was when I was champions with Real Madrid with 100 points and 106 goals - the record of Spanish football."

He also hinted that he was not as well supported as Guardiola and Klopp.

That is despite spending a then world record transfer fee of £89m for Paul Pogba and £75m on striker Romelu Lukaku. In all Mourinho spent £400m on players during his time in charge at Old Trafford.

He said: "At Man City in the first season Guardiola was not a champion. In the second season Pep made great decisions but those that were supported. In the same summer he sold four full-backs and bought four backs."

(Source: BBC)





**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team defeated Oman 2-0 and booked a place in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals on Sunday.

In the match held at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the UAE, Oman striker Muhsen Al Ghassani was brought down in the penalty area in the first minute of the match by Majid Hosseini and Mexican referee César Ramos showed the penalty spot.

Iran goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand saved Ahmed Al Mahajri's penalty to keep Team Melli's fourth successive clean sheet in the competition.

In the 32nd minute, Alireza Jahanbakhsh took advantage of Oman defender's mistake and slotted home.

Eight minutes later, Iran striker Mehdi Taremi was fouled in Oman area and Team Melli captain Ashkan Dejagah converted the penalty with a right footed shot to the center of the goal.

The Iranian national football team could have scored more goals in the second half but their strikers wasted their chances.

Iran will face China on Jan. 24 at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium.

Team Melli have once again proven that they are shoos to win the continental championship after a long wait of 43 years.

The 2019 AFC Asian Cup is being held in the UAE from Jan. 5 to Feb. 1.

JANUARY 21, 2019

S P O R T S

# Iran into AFC Asian Cup quarters after beating Oman



## Lippi turns China fortunes around to send Thailand home

Xiao Zhi came off the bench to inspire a second half come back for Marcello Lippi's side on Sunday evening as China PR handed Thailand a 2-1 defeat to advance to the quarter-finals of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

Guangzhou R&F striker Xiao levelled the scores in the 67th minute after Supachai Chaided had given Thailand the lead just after the half hour mark and Gao Lin secured the win for China with a penalty 20 minutes from time.

Xiao's goal – the 100th of the tournament so far – was key for a China side that dominated the second half but were unable to find a way past Siwarak Tedsungnoen in the Thai goal until the arrival of the veteran forward, who finally ended Thailand's resistance.

In the end it was a deserved win for a Chinese side that welcomed back Wu Lei to the starting line-up after missing the 2-0 loss against Korea Republic with a shoulder injury while Thailand called up Supachai for the injured Adisak Kraisorn.

A tepid opening quarter of the game gave way to an increase in intensity from the 23rd minute. Teerathon Bunmathan saw his free-kick from wide on the Thai right tipped over the bar by Yan Junling while Tanaboon Kesarat saw his

speculative effort from distance soon after drift wide of goal.

At the other end, Wu Xi's lofted pass put Wu Lei in behind the Thai defense, but goalkeeper Siwarak Tedsungnoen was quick enough off his line to block the Shanghai SIPG man's goalward attempt.

Play quickly switched to the other end, with Supachai pushing his shot wide of Yan's goal after Teerasil Dangda's return header found the Buriram United man just the right side of Zhang Linpeng.

Supachai made amends in the 31st minute, however, as he gave Thailand the lead. The Chinese defense failed to properly clear Teerathon's corner and, after Thitiphan Puangchan's shot ended up at Supachai's feet. He made no mistake on the turn from seven yards out.

Five minutes later Supachai could have added a second, only to drag his attempt from distance across Yan's goal as the Chinese struggled in their attempt to win their first AFC Asian Cup knockout game since 2004.

Lippi's team grew increasingly desperate throughout the second half and Wu Lei's lack of match sharpness was becoming ever more apparent. The 27-year-old somehow

missed a straightforward chance three minutes after the interval from six yards out after fine approach play by Gao Lin down the left.

China continued to press, with Yu heading wide before Siwarak denied the Beijing Guoan man with his feet following Feng Xiaoting's cross, but eventually the equaliser came as Lippi intervened from the bench.

Yu Dabao made way for Xiao Zhi and, within three minutes, China were level as Zheng Zhi clipped his cross in from the right and Xiao scored on the rebound after Siwarak had saved the striker's initial downward header.

By the 71st minute China were in front when Gao Lin (pictured above) picked himself up to score from the spot after having his heels clipped in the area by Tanaboon, the veteran forward firing high into the top corner to give his team the lead their second half performance deserved.

China threatened to add to the scoreline as the Thais grew increasingly ragged, although a flying save from Yan deep into injury time following Pansa Hemviboon's shot ensured the East Asians progressed.

(Source: channelnewsasia.com)

## UAE determined to deliver, says Ahmad



United Arab Emirates midfielder Majed Hassan Ahmad has promised the team's fans that they can expect the best from the home side in the knockout stage of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

UAE face Kyrgyz Republic in the first of what they hope will be a successful knockout stage and Ahmad said the entire squad is focused on the challenges ahead.

"We know that our fans want us to win the title and the players are also determined to give it our best attempt. We have been working hard since confirming our spot and the fans can be sure of a good performance from us tomorrow," said Ahmad.

UAE are seeking to better their 1996 runners-up finish, when they previously hosted the Continental showpiece.

Although they topped Group A to advance, it was a mixed preliminary campaign with the win over India sandwiched by draws with Bahrain and Thailand.

Ahmad said the group stage is now in the past. "We are in a new stage, the knockout stage. We respect Kyrgyz Republic and congratulations to them for qualifying for their first AFC Asian Cup," said Ahmad.

"However, all 23 UAE players are determined to give their best for our fans, who are always behind us."

The Zayed Sports City Stadium is expected to be filled with local fans and Ahmad said the team is looking forward to delivering.

"The spirit of the team is very high and we promise the fans that we will fight till the last moment."

(Source: the-afc)

## Qatar's Almoez Ali closing in on goalscoring record



With excitement building ahead of his country's Round of 16 encounter with Iraq, Qatar hotshot Almoez Ali is on the verge of writing himself into the competition's history books thanks to the striker's impressive goalscoring exploits at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

Ali, who claimed the top scorer award at the AFC U23 Championship in 2018, has been in sensational form throughout the tournament, netting seven times in three matches – including a four-goal haul against DPR Korea – as Qatar claimed top spot in Group E en route to the knockout phase.

With at least one more game still to come, the 22-year-old Al Duhail SC forward's impressive tally has seen him

move to within one strike of the record haul by a player at Asia's premier event, one which was set by Islamic Republic of Iran legend Ali Daei when he scored eight at the 1996 edition, also in the United Arab Emirates.

The Qatari youngster is already level with Iran's Behtash Fariha and Korea Republic ace Choi Soon-ho who bagged seven goals apiece during the AFC Asian Cup in 1980.

Besides his 'super hat-trick' against the Koreans, Ali rounded off the scoring in Qatar's 2-0 win over Lebanon on Matchday One and grabbed both goals in last Thursday's 2-0 defeat of Saudi Arabia.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Shoot-out sees Vietnam beat Jordan, reach Asian Cup quarters

Vietnam sealed a place in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 quarter-finals, defeating Jordan 4-2 on penalties after their Round of 16 tie ended 1-1 at the Al Maktoum Stadium in Dubai on Sunday.

Up next for Vietnam will be the winners of the Japan-Saudi Arabia last 16 tie, with the quarter-final to be also played at Al Maktoum Stadium.

Both teams started positively as they went in search of an early goal with the first shot on target for Jordan and it came in the 17th minute when Baha' Abdelrahman forced Vietnam goalkeeper Dang Van Lam into action.

Three minutes later, Jordan came close again when Mousa Mohammad Suleiman lured three defenders out of position before his back-heel pass found the unmarked Feras Zeyad Shilbaya, whose cross to Yaseen Mahmoud Bakheet saw his effort going wide.

Vietnam's best chance came in the 35th minute with Doan Van Hau unleashing a left-footed strike after an exchange of passes with Nguyen Cong Phuong but Jordanian custodian Amer Shafi was quick to parry his shot.

Jordan took the lead in the 38th minute after Do Hung Dung brought Salem Alajalin down just outside the box,



and Abdelrahman scored from the resultant free-kick with a cracker into the top right corner of the net.

Park Hang-seo's Vietnam returned from the break a changed side as they held the lion's share of possession.

Their hard work paid dividends just six minutes into the

second half when Nguyen Trong Hoang sent in a curling cross in front of the goal mouth which Nguyen Cong Phuong squeezed past the Jordanian defenders for the equalizer.

Jordan survived a scare at the hour mark when Shilbaya failed to fully block Nguyen Quang Hai's through pass but before Phan Van Duc could connect, other defenders cleared to keep the score level.

Neither side managed to find a route to goal in the remaining minutes, forcing the first ever AFC Asian Cup last-16 tie to go into extra-time.

Neither side was willing to take unnecessary risks in extra-time, with both goalkeepers hardly called into action as penalties were needed to decide the tie.

It was a case of who would blink first in the shoot-out and Jordan were the first to miss with Baha Seif striking the crossbar which was then followed by Ahmed Saleh's effort saved by Vietnam goalkeeper Dang.

Vietnam's Tran Minh Vuong then failed to put the game to bed with Vietnam's fourth effort but Bùi Tien Dung made no mistake as the Southeast Asians marched into the quarter-finals.

(Source: the-afc)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY

TEHRANTIMES

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## Second half of IPL: Tehran derby date announced

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — The second half of the Iran Professional League (IPL) campaign will kick off on Feb. 14, with Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal has been scheduled for late March.

Iran's most popular two teams Persepolis and Esteghlal face each other in Tehran derby fixtures – a game that draws attention from the rest of the region because of the intense rivalry – on March 30 in Tehran's 80,000-capacity Azadi Stadium.

Two team played out a goalless draw in the first half played on Sept. 27.

Tehran derby is arguably the most important derby in Asia.

Branko Ivankovic's Persepolis are looking forward to win IPL title for the third successive year and Winfried Schaefer's Esteghlal try to bring an end to six-year title drought.

## USA takes final gold in Ostersund

The Para biathlon relay was the final race of the season's second World Para Nordic Skiing World Cup in Ostersund, Sweden. The relay teams were made up of athletes from across all three classes; sitting, standing and vision impaired, and the final gold on Saturday (19 January) went to USA.

The team was made up of all sit skiers with Aaron Pike, Kendall Gretsche, Oksana Masters and Daniel Cnossen racing together. Pike exchanged in third place to Gretsche who moved the team up to second place. Masters was able to hand over to Daniel Cnossen in first place and he held it to the finish giving Team USA the win.

That result made it a clean sweep of all six races for Daniel Cnossen in Ostersund with the USA skier winning the five individual sitting races in cross-country and biathlon as well as team gold in the relay.

■ **Silver and bronze to Ukraine**

There was a minimum of two athletes in each team with some choosing to race two legs each and other teams using four athletes each completing one leg of the relay. Ten teams lined up for the start. Ukraine were strongly represented with five teams in the race, and Ukraine 3 took silver.

The team was leading the race after the first two legs from Gregorij Vovchynskiy and Oleksandra Kononova. Their teammates Oksana Shyshkova with guide Vitalii Kazakov and Taras Rad were able to hold on to second place ahead their compatriots in third.

Ukraine 4 with a team of Iaroslav Reshetyskiy and guide Kostiantyn Yaremenko, Bohdana Konashuk, Iryna Bui and Vasyl Kravchuk took the bronze medal in a close battle with the French team who came home in fourth.

Poland, Great Britain and a mixed US/Great Britain team made up the rest of the field.

The World Cup season now takes a break as athletes will head to Canada in February for the World Championships which take place in Prince George from the 15-24 February.

Sapporo, Japan, will host the next and last World Cup of the 2018-2019 season from 13-17 March.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## Manchester City cruise to win over Huddersfield

Manchester City kept the pressure on Premier League leaders Liverpool with a routine 3-0 win at managerless Huddersfield.

Daniilo's deflected effort gave City a half-time lead before Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sane both struck in the space of two minutes early in the second period.

A fourth straight league win since their Boxing Day defeat at Leicester has lifted Pep Guardiola's side back to within four points of Liverpool in pursuit of back-to-back titles.

Huddersfield remain 10 points adrift of safety at the foot of the table after a ninth defeat in their last 10 league matches.

It was a sobering end to an emotional week for the West Yorkshire club following the departure of David Wagner, but caretaker-boss Mark Hudson can be proud his players gave him their all.

Hudson was clearly intent on stamping his mark on Huddersfield by making six changes.

But they had barely settled when Sergio Aguero, back in City's starting XI after a three-game absence, spurned an early chance as his side enjoyed plenty of early possession.

Huddersfield also created an early opening, but Adama Diakhaby, making just his third Premier League start, misdirected his header from Elias Kachunga's cross.

Sterling was furious when referee Andre Marriner waved away his appeals for a penalty after he appeared to have been fouled by Terence Kongolo. But City took the inevitable lead in the 18th minute with their 100th goal of the season in all competitions.

Daniilo's speculative drive from 25 yards struck Christopher Schindler's head and wrong-footed goalkeeper Jonas Lossl.

City were given a let-off in the 27th minute when Kyle Walker escaped with a yellow card for his reckless challenge on Chris Lowe as Town dug in.

The visitors failed to carve out a further chance until Ilkay Gundogan fired wide after good work from Kevin De Bruyne and Walker.

Town fans fell silent during the interval as they hung on every word of Wagner's farewell message played on the big screen.

But City took little notice and cruised through the gears to add two more goals in the space of two minutes.

Sterling dived to head home Sane's cross in the 54th minute and the latter stole clear on to Aguero's lay-off to shoot home from eight yards and seal all three points.

Terriers' substitute Steve Mounie lifted the home fans with a long-range curling effort that flew narrowly wide and then forced Ederson into a flying save with a header from fellow sub Alex Pritchard's cross.

Town were outclassed by a City side that rarely shifted into fourth gear, but avoided the pasting many of their fans had feared.

They would even have scored just their sixth home goal this season had Mounie not mis-kicked from close range after the ball deflected to him in the box in the final seconds. His miss summed up Town's season.

(Source: Rte.ie)



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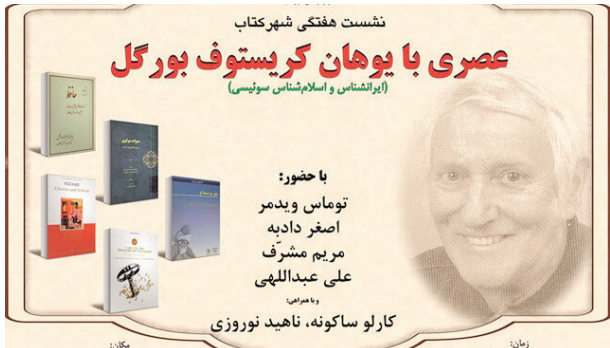


**GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

Guide to spiritual awakening  
 Enmity produces rancor and destruction.  
*Imam Ali (AS)*

## Book City to review works by Swiss Iranologist Burgel

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Book City Institute in Tehran will hold a session to review books and academic activities of Swiss Iranologist Johann Christoph Burgel on January 22.



A poster for "A Session with Johann Christoph Burgel".

"A Session with Johann Christoph Burgel" will be attended by Thomas Widmer, the second secretary of the Embassy of Switzerland in Iran, and several Iranian scholars, including Asghar Daadbeh and Ali Abdollahi.

Burgel, 88, has a Ph.D. from the University of Gottingen in Germany. From 1970 until his retirement in 1995, he was a professor and director of Islamic studies at the University of Bern. "Nightingales at God's Throne: Studies on Persian Poetry", "Iqbal und Europa", "Intoxication, Earthly And Heavenly: Seven Studies on the Poet Hafez of Shiraz", "Three Studies on Hafez: Goethe and Hafez" are among some noteworthy books by Burgel.

## "Sluggish Life" to go on screen at Chennai film festival

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mohsen Mehri's latest movie "Sluggish Life" will go on screen at the 6th Chennai International Short Film Festival, the Qazvin



"Sluggish Life" by Iranian director Mohsen Mehri.

branch of the Youth Cinema Society that is the producer of the film announced on Sunday.

The film is about the peculiar life of a sophisticated man. The festival will be held in the Indian city from February 16 to 24.

## Intl. 100-Second Film Festival receives over 2200 submissions

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The 12th edition of the International 100-Second Film Festival has received 2278 submissions, the organizers announced on Sunday.



A poster for the International 100-Second Film Festival.

Filmmakers from 119 countries, including India, the U.S., Turkey, England, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Canada, Russia, Germany and China have applied to the event.

The Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization is the organizer of the festival, which will be held in Tehran from February 27 to 29.

# 'Join the night knights to raise awareness of light pollution'

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — An expert who has been an advisor for the documentary film "Bright Death" on light pollution has asked people to join the guardians of the night whom he refers to as "the night knights" to raise people's awareness of light pollution.

"I ask you to join the night knights to help raise awareness of light pollution in society," Alireza Fathipur said during the premiere of the documentary by Masud Dehnavi at the Department of Physics at the University of Tehran.

"My first struggle against light pollution was when I was a student," Fathipur, 46, noted.

"A light located outside of our dormitory annoyed us. We called the relevant organization to remove the light, but we received no response. As result, I broke the light in desperation," he stated.

Fathipur pointed to praises made in the Holy Quran about night and said, "Life is defined in a balance between night and day and we should not to disturb the balance."

He asked the audience to be guardians of the night by publishing information about the documentary on the social networks.

"By this documentary, I did my duty against light pollution, but we need a radical solution

to the problem," Dehnavi noted.

He said that most people are not aware that light may be identified as a source of pollution. "Therefore, we intend to address the issue in this documentary; finding a solution for light pollution is the next step," he mentioned.

Hamed Mirza-Khalil, the writer of "Light Pollution", who is another advisor to "Bright Death" also attended the screening of the documentary.

In his brief speech, he said that the Tehran Municipality has created a system for people to report disturbing lights.

"Following a full investigation, we realized that no complaint has been registered in the system so far," lamented Mirza-Khalil, who is the founder and director of the Clear Light Community, a society that aims to raise awareness of light pollution.

"We also plan to make animations to foster awareness of light pollution," he said.

Produced at Khaneye Mostanad, a Tehran-based studio producing documentary films, "Bright Death" is scheduled to be broadcast from the Mostanad Channel, IRIB's network dedicated to screening documentary films.



A poster for Masud Dehnavi's documentary "Bright Death".

## Veteran curator Lili Golestan publishes her private collection



Lili Golestan poses in front of Golestan Gallery in Tehran in an undated photo.

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Veteran curator Lili Golestan who is in charge of Golestan Gallery in Tehran has published her private collection in a book.

"Lili Golestan's Private Collection" published at Cheshmeh Publications is scheduled to be unveiled during a ceremony on January 24 at the Hoom Center Gallery in Tehran, she announced in a press release on Sunday.

"I don't think any art collectors in Iran have published their works in a book yet. I personally talked with many collectors and proposed to them that they publish their works, but most of them said they do not want others to know what they possess in

their private collections," Golestan said.

"I found their attitude a bit odd. I think people should know what else other famous artists like Sohrab Sepehri or Hossein Zenderudi have created but they have not seen. I own a collection that has rarely been seen, and only those who come to my house have seen," she explained.

"I believe everybody must see all these works and I was determined to do it, so I held talks with Cheshmeh Publications and it happened. Of course, many cooperated with me in this way," she added.

Golestan said that the book contains 133 works with two introductions, one written by her and the other by art critic Javad Mojabi.

## Iranian photographer Mehdi Amiri wins grand prize at Cine-Books contest



A photo from "Breaking News" by Iranian photographer Mehdi Amiri.

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Iranian photographer Mehdi Amiri has won the grand prize at the Cine-Books Photo Stories Contest in Larnaca, Cyprus.

He received the prize worth \$3,000 for his photo story "Breaking News", the organizers announced on January 8.

"Breaking News" tells the story of an investigative journalist, Sam, who looks for justice but the wealth and power of the people he is investigating can control him.

"I Am Rohingya" by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan from Bangladesh received the prize for the Documentary

Photo Story category, while "With Love August" by Lisa Lyashenko won the prize in the Cinematic Story section.

The prize in the Photo Story without Text category went to "Flower of Hope" by Valerie Sagura and Andrey Shurpin, while the prized in the Photo Story with Text section was presented to "Luna, You Want to Be Mother" by Ivonne Garcia.

The competition is organized every year by the Cine-Books Entertainment, a Ukrainian startup based in Larnaca that offers cinematic books and stories with combinations of different media including photos, videos and audios.

## Mary Oliver, Pulitzer prize-winning poet, dies aged 83

**LONDON (Guardian)** — Mary Oliver, the Pulitzer prize-winning poet whose rapturous odes to nature and animal life brought her critical acclaim and popular affection, has died. She was 83. Bill Reichblum, Oliver's literary executor, said she died on Thursday at her home in Hobe Sound, Florida. The cause of death was lymphoma.

Author of more than 15 poetry and essay collections, Oliver wrote brief, direct pieces that sang of her worship of the outdoors and disdain for greed, despoilment and other human crimes. One of her favorite adjectives was "perfect", and rarely did she apply it to people. Her muses were owls and butterflies, frogs and geese, the changes of the seasons, the sun and the stars.

"In my outward appearance and life habits I hardly change there's never been a day that my friends haven't been able to say, and at a distance, There's Oliver, still standing around in the weeds. There she is, still scribbling in her notebook," Oliver wrote in Long Life, a book of essays published in 2004.

"But, at the center: I am shaking; I am flashing like tinsel."

Like her hero Walt Whitman, whom she would call the brother she never had, Oliver didn't only observe mushrooms growing in a rainstorm or an owl calling from a black branch; she longed to know and become one with what she saw. She might be awed by the singing of goldfinches or, as in the poem White Flowers, overcome by a long nap in a field.

Her poetry books included "White Pine", "West Wind" and the anthology "Devotions", which came out in 2017.



Mary Oliver in 2010. (Kevork Djansezian/Getty Images)

She won the Pulitzer in 1984 for American Primitive and the National Book award in 1992 for New and Selected Poems. In 1998, she received the Lannan literary award for lifetime achievement. Her fans ranged from fellow poets Stanley Kunitz and Rita Dove to Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush.

"Although few poets have fewer human beings in their poems than Mary Oliver, it is ironic that few poets also go so far to help us forward," Stephen Dobyns wrote of her in the New York Times.

Oliver was a native of Maple Hills Heights in suburban Cleveland, and endured what she called a "dysfunctional" family in part by writing poems and building huts of sticks and grass in the nearby woods. Edna St Vincent Millay was an early influence and, while in high school, Oliver wrote to the late poet's sister, Norma, asking if she could visit Millay's house in Austerlitz, New York. Norma Millay agreed and Oliver ended up spending several years there, organizing Edna St Vincent Millay's papers.

## Banksy artwork found on garage in Wales sold for six-figure sum

**LONDON (Guardian)** — A Banksy artwork that appeared on a nondescript garage in a Welsh town has been sold to a dealer for a six-figure sum.

The garage's owner, Ian Lewis, has sold the piece, Seasons Greetings, to the Essex-based Banksy expert John Brandler but it will stay in Port Talbot, at least for the time being.

Lewis, a steelworker, who has found it hard to sleep after unexpectedly becoming the owner of a precious piece of art, is said to be hugely relieved.

An estimated 20,000 people are thought to have visited his garage since it appeared just before Christmas and round-the-clock security has had to be introduced to protect the artwork. It created a cottage industry in souvenirs — mugs, coasters, keyrings — carrying the image of the work.

Brandler said Season's Greetings would stay in Port Talbot for a minimum of two to three years but might be moved into the town center. He said Lewis had turned down higher offers to keep the work in the town.

The Banksy appeared just before Christmas in Taibach, close to the Tata steelworks. From one angle, it shows a child in a bobble hat with a sled, apparently enjoying a snow shower and trying to catch the flakes on their tongue. But from another, it becomes clear that what is falling on the child is a shower of ash.

Banksy confirmed the work was his by releasing a video of the mural accompanied by the Christmas song Little Snowflake. The camera rises above the garage and shows Port Talbot's rooftops and the billowing



People gather to take pictures of the Banksy in December. (Matt Cardy/Getty Images)

chimneys of the steelworks and other industrial buildings.

Lewis was amazed when visitors began arriving in their droves and realized he would have to find a way of protecting the piece. A local operative company paid for it to be shielded in plastic and the actor Michael Sheen, who went to college in Port Talbot, stepped in to pay for security.

Lewis said: "The offer was less than others but this man agreed to keep it in the town. Other people wanted to take it away and bring it back from time to time. I didn't fancy that. I'm glad to have sold it — to be honest I'm fed up with it. It has been a strain."

He plans to spend the money on a "few holidays", and to replace the garage at the back of his home.

Lewis said: "I think the town has fallen in love with it, I think everybody loves it and it would have been a shame for it to move from the area. There were lots of offers, lots of options of what people wanted to do with it. There were art collectors, dealers, people who wanted to take it away basically.