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Parliament body suggests gasoline subsidy for each Iranian

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In its recent plan, Iran's Parliament Research Center has suggested the government to allocate 480,000 rials (about \$11.4) of cash subsidies, the present price for 24 liters of gasoline, to each individual Iranian monthly, Jam-e-Jam daily reported on Monday.

In case of not using the 24 liters of gasoline per month, individuals can receive the said amount in cash from the government, the plan suggests.

As reported, some assume that gasoline

will be sold at multiple prices in Iran as of the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2019) and the presented plan, if approved by the cabinet, would protect low-income earners from price increases.

In its budget plan for the next Iranian year, the government has not predicted any increase for gasoline prices but parliament members claim they have put forward the discussed plan to impede gasoline smuggling and to improve fair distribution of gasoline among Iranians and their purchasing ability in future.

Shamkhani: Polls remedy for crises in Palestine, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, says the Islamic Republic has gone into Syria in order to reinforce the Syrian defense infrastructure.

In an interview published on Monday, Shamkhani said so long as the legal government in Syria and Iraq ask for Iran's

help in fighting terrorism and establishing security in their countries, the Islamic Republic will stand by their side, Mehr reported.

He hailed the victories of Iran, Iraq and Syria against terrorist groups, calling on other neighboring countries to join hands with the three countries to reach "promising achievements". **→2**

Iraq's PMU warns Israel against possible attacks, pledges strong response

Iraq's pro-government Popular Mobilization Units, (PMU/Hashd al-Sha'abi), have advised Israel against "playing with fire" after the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hinted that Tel Aviv may attack the anti-terror volunteer fighters.

Moein al-Kazemi, a PMU commander, told the Iraqi Kurdistan's Rudaw television

network on Sunday that the force was ready to deliver a "strong" response to any aggression.

He said while Israel had yet to make a move, Israeli media were already testing the Iraqi government's reaction to a possible attack by publishing bogus reports on the issue. **→13**

Iranian female entrepreneur returns from U.S. to empower rural women

By Naghmeh Mizanian

TEHRAN — "If I am an Iranian what I have done for my country? Not considering the duties of the government, what is my responsibility toward my country?" asks Maria Saeedi, an Iranian craftswoman.

"I always ask myself: What am I giving others instead of all I have gained?" she continued to say in a phone interview with the Tehran Times on Sunday.

Maria Saeedi is an Iranian crafter who preferred living in a small village in a desert area in her motherland instead of residing in the U.S. aiming to empower Iranian rural women.

Nine years ago, just as a tourist, she visited the region and then she selected that area to live temporary in a clam and relax area.

Garmeh is a village in Nakhlestan Rural District, in the Central District of Khur and Biabanak County, Isfahan Province, Iran. In 2006 census, its population was 244, in 69 families.

Few months later she received here U.S. Green Card. Maria left Iran for the U.S. but the glamor the U.S. could not satisfy Maria and fulfill her great wishes. She was enthusiastic to teach art works to others and she was eager to empower Iranian women.

Nine years ago Maria selected the village

of Garmeh as her residence. She managed to communicate well with the villagers through her good management and proper behavior. One year later she started Kilim weaving classes at her home. Then she held a local exhibition of women's handicrafts. Making the women more encouraged, she began with the early-return crafts like knitting, crocheting, making jewelry and pendants.

Further, during the eleven-year period she was waiting for her U.S. Green Card, when many of her family members were living in the U.S., she learnt massaging, traditional medicine, handicrafts, in an attempt to start a job in the U.S. **→12**

Iran dealing major blow to U.S. influence in India, Iraq: Italian analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A prominent political expert based in the Italian city of Milan praised Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's recent visits to India and Iraq and said the Islamic Republic "is dealing a major blow to U.S. influence in those countries".

"Zarif's visit -- first to India then Iraq, and finally to Sulaymaniyah -- shows a coherent regional policy from Tehran, which seeks to expand its alliances and partnerships in order to circumvent the pressure imposed by the U.S. together with Israel and Saudi Arabia," Federico Pieraccini said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"Furthermore, by implementing important synergies with U.S. allies like India and Iraq, Tehran is dealing a major blow to U.S. influence in those countries," he added.

Pieraccini is an independent freelance writer and political expert based in Milan, Italy. He specializes in international affairs, conflicts, pol-

itics, and strategies. He has covered conflicts in Ukraine, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you know, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at the head of a high-ranking economic and political delegation recently made official visits to some regional countries, including India and Iraq. His trips come against the backdrop of Iran's efforts to boost its foreign trade in the U.S. sanctions era. What do you think about the objectives behind Zarif's visits? Is Iran moving toward its traditional allies?

A: Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's visit to India, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan is part of a broader Iranian strategy in the Middle East. The increase of U.S. pressure has obliged Iran to respond asymmetrically, using every tool at its disposal. Economically, Iran has intensified its contacts with India, selling oil and other commodities. New Delhi has responded favorably,

increasing oil imports and diversifying payments away from U.S. dollar and towards rupees and euros, partly thanks to the opening in New Delhi of a branch of an Iranian bank called Pasargad Bank that facilitates currency exchange. Of significant importance is the port in Chabahar, now operated by India and located in a strategic position, that will be used as a gateway for Iran and India to trade with Afghanistan and Asian countries. This new development should promote commercial exchange between Iran and India as well as create the necessary conditions to implement the rail-trade corridor between the north and south, thereby linking Russia and India.

In Iraq, Zarif paid particular attention to the diplomatic aspects of the relations between Iraq and Iran. In recent months, Baghdad and Tehran have increased cooperation and synergies, especially in antiterrorism. **→7**



ARTICLE

Hamid Bayati
Tehran Times journalist

Extreme right of Europe and Netanyahu's new mission to Rajavi Cult

Israeli regime is providing extreme right parties in Europe with covert support to create a rift in the continent.

It's years that extremist rightwing parties in Europe have found significant political power to the point that they have entered the parliaments of most European countries or either play a crucial role in making political decisions.

Today, Europe's dominant extremist rightwing trends have moved a bit away from their origin, i.e. traditional fascism, and reject racism selectively as a result of an ideological transformation (denial of anti-Semitism and spreading Islamophobia). This is a factor which brings Zionist leaders closer to these parties.

■ But which sources finance these emerging parties?

A report published some days ago in an Italian newspaper which in part answers this question. The European newspaper wrote in its report: the Vox, the extreme right wing of Spain, has been funded by the MKO (the terrorist group of Mojahedin-e Khalq). The party received € 800,000 in their 2014 campaign from MKO; a group which was enlisted as a terrorist organization in the United States till 2012.

According to this report, it is necessary now to study the sources which fund MKO.

The Guardian recently issued in a detailed report addressing the history of this terrorist group, and describe it as a tool in the hands of the United States against Iran. The report also says that Saudis are probably the source of this group's financing.

In this Op-Ed penned by Arron Merat, the members of MKO (before the Islamic Revolution) backed the revolution in Iran and then fought for Saddam. The United States and Britain used to condemn them for a time, but in the current situation, the group is a good option for the extremist policies of the Trump administration. John Bolton, the national security adviser to Trump and Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, are among those who pursue such a policy.

Under the leadership of Maryam Rajavi, the Guardian writes, the MKO has won considerable support from sections of the US and European right, eager for allies in the fight against Tehran. **→7**



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Relief foundation provides assist for fishermen

Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has supported fishing in Jask, a port city in the southern province of Hormozgan, to help local fishermen to get back on their feet.

The charity foundation has had a hand in funding 95 fishing schemes in the area.

Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation is a charitable organization, founded in March 1979, after the Islamic Revolution, to provide support for families who are struggling financially. The aim is to help such families regain financial stability. Boosting job creation is one of the primary objectives of the foundation.

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MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric likens
FATF bill to
Capitulation Law

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Head of the Army's Ideological and Political Office has criticized the FATF accession bill, saying the bill is a colonial move through which the U.S. is trying to return to Iran, Mehr reported on Monday.

Comparing the FATF bill to Capitulation Law during the Shah's rule, Hojatoleslam Abbas Mohammad-Hasani said the revolutionary and pious authorities and elites will not allow the U.S. to return to Iran through the window of the FATF.

"Hezbollahi representatives in the Majlis as well as revolutionary fronts and the grand maraji in Qom shout that this bill is a colonial bill," Mohammad-Hasani remarked.



Tehran boasts
friendly ties with
Algiers

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has said Tehran enjoys friendly relations with Algiers, whose revolution inspired "fights against colonial powers".

Iran's relations with Algeria are "positive and constructive" at all levels, which have resulted in signing some 70 memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between the two countries, Qassemi said, IRNA reported.

"Iran and Algeria are in constant talks and consultations about bilateral ties, regional and international issues," he said, predicting a "bright future" for bilateral relations "given the history of their ties and the two nations' interests."



Mogherini says
won't partake in
anti-Iran Warsaw
summit

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has expressed doubt that she would be able to attend an anti-Iran summit scheduled to be held in Warsaw next month.

"I guess I am traveling to the African Union Summit during those days and then, around that summit that is going to be held in Addis Ababa that was planned obviously long ago, I am going to have some other visits in the Horn of Africa so I am afraid I am not in Brussels that day or in Europe those days," Mogherini told reporters in Brussels on Monday.



UN official:
Guterres
concerned by U.S.
sanctions on Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Director of the UN Information Center in Tehran Maria Dotsenko said on Monday the UN secretary general is deeply concerned about U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and reimposition of sanctions on Iran.

In an interview with IRNA, Dotsenko said Antonio Guterres has stated that according to the IAEA reports, Iran had no deviation in its nuclear activities and accordingly other member-states of the JCPOA supported the agreement.

"The United Nations is working together with the Iranian government to reduce the impact of sanctions on the provision of assistance packages to the most vulnerable populations," she added.



Pompeo goofs up
while marking
end of hostage
crisis anniversary

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a tweet Sunday marked the 40th anniversary of the end of the Iran hostage crisis, but critics were quick to point out a problem-he had managed to get his numbers and dates wrong and the crisis had not even begun 40 years ago.

"40 years ago today, extremists in Iran released 52 American diplomats they held hostage for 444 days," Pompeo's tweet said.

Later on Sunday, Pompeo deleted the tweet and replaced it with a message that read "38 years ago today, extremists in Iran released 52 American diplomats they held hostage for 444 days."



White House:
Exiting JCPOA was
one of Trump's
achievements

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The White House has named U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in May as one of President Donald Trump's "historic results" in his first two years in office.

"President Trump announced a new Iran strategy to confront all of Iran's malign activities and withdrew from the horrible, one-sided Iran nuclear deal," the White House said in a statement on Sunday, counting Trump's so-called achievements.

It said all sanctions that had been lifted or waived under the deal have been reimposed, adding that the Trump administration has sanctioned more than 160 individuals tied to what it claimed was Iran's "support of terrorism, ballistic missile program, human rights abuses, and more."

‘Iran able to redesign Arak reactor’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Behrooz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), has said that Iran is redesigning the Arak heavy water reactor with China, however, if necessary, the country is able to do the project on its own.

"We are able to complete both reactors be it the former one with natural uranium and the one which is currently having been redesigned. If we want to rebuild the former reactor, we will do it better and faster," he told ISNA in an interview published on Monday.

He also said that redesigning the Arak reactor with China is supposed to become faster.

He added that Iran and China cooperate in installing the equipment in the redesigning process.

‘Iran not able to conduct PIE yet’
Kamalvandi also said that Iran is not still able to conduct the post irradiation examination (PIE).

It is being done outside Iran, he added. Conducting the PIE without having the



essential possibilities carries a high risk, the AEOI official remarked.

Kamalvandi went on to say that Iran will be the loser if it misses the chance to

make necessary advances in science and technology.

Asked if any change is needed in order to make advances, he said. "We need to

update our policies and not our principles and values."

Elsewhere, Kamalvandi said that Iran's nuclear program is "logical" and will not change even if the 2015 nuclear deal is revoked completely.

Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Sunday that Iranian engineers have mastered the nuclear technology and the industry is not dependent on others.

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.

Tehran denies Germany summoned envoy over alleged spy case

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has dismissed reports that Germany summoned its charge d'affaires over arrest of a German-Afghan dual national accused of spying for Tehran.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi told reporters on Monday that while the acting Iranian envoy had visited the German foreign ministry, local media reports that the visit was in any way related to the espionage case were false.

"We are not surprised to hear such news amid fake security accusations by those who seek to harm

ties between Iran and Europe at this critical stage," Qassemi said, according to the Foreign Ministry's website.

A few days earlier, German media reported 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.

The German federal prosecutor's office identified the man as Abdul Hamid S. and said he had been remanded in custody pending an investigation.

The German defense ministry did not confirm the

reports but said it was aware of an ongoing espionage case involving a member of the military.

One report specifically claimed that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had informed Germany of the alleged spy case.

The espionage allegation followed a decision by the European Union to put two Iranians and an Iranian intelligence unit on its terror list. Tehran has condemned the move, saying it was based on fake claims that Iran was seeking to carry out terrorist operations on European soil.

Cyberspace effective in fighting
corruption: Rouhani



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday that cyberspace is effective in boosting transparency and fighting corruption.

"The cyberspace is infrastructure of many economic and development movements, creates economic and social justice and is also effective in transparency and fight against corruption," he said during a meeting with the communications and information technology minister, his deputies and other ministry officials.

Rouhani noted that his government attaches great importance to transparency, fight against corruption and electronic government.

The president also said media is a tool

which should be used rightly.

Media can be turned into threat if it is not used correctly, the president remarked.

He also said that internet censorship has negative consequences for all.

"Neither extremism in cyberspace, which disgrace the people, nor blocking it are the solution to control the cyberspace," the president opined.

Rouhani also said that monopoly yields no result in any area.

Elsewhere, he said that information technology is the main basis of economy.

"Right use of media and cellphone is very important. ICT and IT are very important in today's society and main part of our economy depends on this technology," the president remarked.

Senior MP urges world to counter U.S.
violation of international law



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Kazem Jalali, chairman of the Parliament Research Center, said on Monday that the world should stand against U.S. for its violation of international law. Jalali made the remarks during a meeting with Japanese Ambassador to Tehran Mitsuo Saito.

Jalali said the United States violated international law by withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal.

The nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was turned into international law as the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution confirming it.

The MP said that the U.S. unilateralism in quitting the nuclear deal is harmful to the whole world.

He also said, "I hope Iran-Japan economic relations would be expanded despite the U.S. unfair sanctions."

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

Saito said that in spite of the U.S. sanctions, Japan will continue buying Iran's oil. Iran's oil plays an important role in Japan's long term plans, he noted.

"We held difficult and complicated talks with the U.S. on buying Iran's oil and a Japanese oil tanker berthed in Iran's port on Sunday in order to buy oil," Ambassador Saito said.

Shamkhani: Polls remedy for crises in Palestine, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen

1 → Criticizing Washington's hostile stance toward Iran, Shamkhani said, "They regard Iran's presence in Syria and Iraq, which is aimed to fight Daesh (ISIL), prevent the killing of innocent people in the region and help the legal governments, as

threatening policies."

"While on the other hand, they keep silent about the killing of innocent Yemeni people as well as attacks on the market and bus carrying students by Saudi fighters," the security chief regretted.

Shamkhani also emphasized that Iran's solution to all regional challenges, including those of Palestine, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, is "democracy" and "turning to the polls".

"We raised this issue in the beginning of the Syrian crisis as well, and said instead

of exporting terrorism to Syria and issuing [your] imposed prescriptions for this country, provide the Syrian people with a podium to speak," he remarked, pointing to Western countries' policies toward the Syrian conflict.

Iran tells Poland it won't tolerate hostile coalition
Polish official visits Tehran as Iran protests U.S.-proposed anti-Iran conference in Warsaw
‘U.S. demolishing diplomacy-forged JCPOA undermines their claim to Mideast security’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Maciej Lang visited Tehran on Monday for talks with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araqchi as Iran has strongly protested Poland for agreeing to host a U.S.-proposed conference on the Middle East with a focus on Iran.

The conference is set to be held on Feb. 13-14. During the Monday talks in Tehran, Araqchi told Lang and his accompanying team that Iran will not allow a coalition to form against its interests by any country in or outside the region.

Araqchi said the crisis in the Middle East lies in the occupation of lands by Israel.

"The most important problem of the region is the Zionist regime of Israel and its occupation and suppressive policies, and as long as the people of Palestine cannot gain their legitimate rights the region will not see peace."

Araqchi said Israel, as the root cause of the problems, not being on the agenda in the conference shows that the conference is "one-sided". It is clear that the U.S. seeking other goals, he added.

"Another problem in the region is America's adventurous policies. While America is after a complete demolition of the JCPOA, the sole fruit of diplomacy and dialogue

in this region, how could it claim to be trying to solve the region's problems?" Araqchi further noted.

He rejected the Polish government's justification for playing along with the U.S. in holding the conference, saying, "The Polish government should realize the true intentions of the American government by this conference and be careful about its consequences."

The Polish deputy foreign minister said that his country

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has always sought establihemtn of pace and security in the region and has proven this in campaing against terrorist groups such as Daesh (ISIS), but it will not allow coalition building against its interests by any country in the region and outside.”

backs the JCPOA and claimed that the Warsaw conference "is not against any country including the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Lang added that Poland considers Iran as an important player in the Middle East and that the aim of the conference is to help resolve problems in the region and "Poland as the friend of Iran will not allow any move against Iran."

On January 13, Iran summoned Polish charge d'affaires Wojciech Unolt in Tehran and called off a Polish film festival.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has described the move as "shameful" in light of the fact that Iran saved Poles during World War II.

"Polish Govt can't wash the shame: while Iran saved Poles in WWII, it now hosts desperate anti-Iran circus," Zarif tweeted.

Iran has threatened if the summit goes ahead, the country will resort to unspecified "counter-action" towards Poland.

Tehran and Warsaw have had good relations. According to the Independent, the balance of trade between the two nations was \$230 million in 2017, up from \$80 million in 2015 when Iran and world powers agreed to a landmark nuclear deal.

Syria downed over 30 Israeli cruise missiles, bombs: Russia

By staff & agencies

Russia says Syria's air defenses shot down more than 30 cruise missiles and guided bombs during Israel's aerial attacks in the early hours of Monday.

Russia's National Defense Control Center said Israeli airstrikes targeting an airport in southeastern Damascus killed four Syrian soldiers and wounded six others, RIA news agency said.

The announcement came after the Israeli military claimed in a statement that it had struck what it said were Iranian targets in response to alleged rocket fire it blamed on regional power house Iran.

The so-called Syria Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a monitoring group sympathetic to militants, had also claimed that the Israeli air raids killed at least 11 pro-government fighters including two Syrians.

Israel reportedly launched an hour of air attacks over Damascus on a second consecutive night of military action in what appeared to be a face-saving attempt after Syrian air defenses thwarted an attack on Sunday.

The Sunday attack, launched by four Israeli F-16 jets, did not damage its targets, while Syrian air defenses shot down seven missiles fired at an airport near Damascus, Russia's control center said.

Syrian state media, citing a military source, said the country had endured "intense attack through consecutive waves of guided missiles" early on Monday, but had destroyed most "hostile targets."

The Israeli military claimed that Iranian forces operating in Syrian territory had launched a surface-to-surface rocket from Syrian territory aimed at the northern occupied Golan Heights.

Iran says it has military advisers in Syria on the official request of the Syrian government to help cleanse the country of foreign-backed terrorists. Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Israeli forces had carried out "hundreds" of attacks against Iranians in Syria and warned them "to get out of there fast."

Head of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Muhammad Ali Jafari dismissed Netanyahu's threats as "a joke" and warned that the Zionist regime "was playing with a lion's tail."

Israel launches airstrikes on Syria from time to time in what is widely viewed as an attempt to prop up terrorist groups that have been suffering defeat at the hands of Syrian government forces.

Last month, leading Israeli intelligence website DEBKAF refuted Tel Aviv's claims that a recent aerial raid in Syria had targeted Iranians and Hezbollah fighters, saying the attack actually hit Syrian army positions.

Russia has also warned Israel against carrying out airstrikes near the Damascus International Airport.

The London-based al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper on Friday cited Russian sources as saying that Moscow would not tolerate



further airstrikes in the area as it was seeking to renovate the airport.

In September 2018, a Russian reconnaissance aircraft with 15 servicemen on board was downed as Syria was responding to Israeli airstrikes.

Moscow held Israel responsible, saying the regime's pilots had intentionally used the Russian plane as cover to conduct air raids, effectively putting it in the crosshairs of the Syrian air defenses.

Russia stopped coordinating its airborne operations over Syria with Israel after the incident, and upgraded Syria's defenses with its S-300 missile systems.

■ Syria says its air defenses intercept 'most of Israeli missiles' fired on Damascus

Meantime, Syrian media reported on Sunday that the country's air defenses have thwarted an Israeli aerial attack on targets in the capital Damascus, intercepting and shooting down several missiles.

A military source told Syria's official news agency SANA that "at 01:10 o'clock (local time) on Monday, January 21, 2019, the Israeli enemy launched land and air strikes and through successive waves of guided missiles."

The source added that "immediately our air defenses dealt with the situation and intercepted the hostile missiles, downing most of them before reaching their targets as they continue their heroic response to the aggression."

■ U.S. has 'no plan for Syria' after pullout

Elsewhere, Washington's former anti-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group envoy said the United States has no plan for Syria as it proceeds with President Donald Trump's order to pull troops out of the country.

Washington's former anti-ISIL envoy, Brett McGurk quit in protest against the U.S. withdrawal, said.

McGurk, who was the envoy to the U.S.-led global coalition against ISIL, said on Sunday that "there is no plan for what's coming next" and this increases the risk to the U.S. forces.

He spoke in an interview with CBS's Face the Nation, after a suicide bomber on Wednesday killed four U.S. military personnel and 15 others in the northern Syrian town of Manbij.

It was the deadliest attack on the U.S. troops since their deployment in Syria in 2014 to assist the local forces fighting ISIL.

The bombing came after Trump's announcement last month that he was ordering a full withdrawal of the 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria, shocking allies and prompting the resignations of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis as well as McGurk.

■ Withdrawal began

Senior U.S. officials have since given contradictory statements about the U.S. intentions. On January 10, the Pentagon said the withdrawal process had begun. It started with the removal of equipment, not troops, according to the Pentagon. It is uncertain how long a full withdrawal will take.

Most importantly, said McGurk, the U.S. cannot expect "a partner" such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)-ally Turkey to take the place of the U.S.

Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal because, he said, ISIL had been defeated - something McGurk and other experts dispute.

McGurk has previously warned that the U.S. pullout would shore up Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and lessen the U.S.'s leverage with Russia and Iran.

■ Turkey ready to take over Syria's Manbij, Erdogan tells Trump

Moreover, Turkey is ready to take over security in Manbij, a town in northeast Syria held by Kurdish forces where four U.S. personnel died in a bombing last week, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told his U.S. counterpart in a phone call.

A statement by the Turkish presidency said Erdogan on Sunday told Trump the attack in Manbij was a provocation by ISIL, to influence the expected the U.S. troop withdrawal from the war-torn country.

Sunday's call came almost a week after another phone conversation between the two leaders in which they discussed the situation in northeastern Syria amid rising tensions

over the fate of Kurdish fighters in the war-torn country.

Located near the border with Turkey, Manbij has emerged as a focal point of tensions after Trump's decision to withdraw the U.S. forces whose presence has effectively deterred Ankara from attacking Kurdish fighters, Washington's main ground ally in its fight against ISIL.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia allied to the Washington-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (People's Defense Units/Yekineyên Parastina Gel/YPG), captured the town from ISIL in 2016. Ankara views the YPG as a "terrorist" group and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/PKK) that has for decades waged a separatist armed campaign in Turkey.

Last month, the YPG invited Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces into the area, hoping to prevent a Turkish assault.

In its description of the call, the White House made no mention of Erdogan's offer to take over security in Manbij but said the two men agreed to keep pursuing a negotiated settlement for northeastern Syria that meets both nations' security needs.

"President Trump underscored the importance of defeating terrorist elements that remain in Syria," Sarah Sanders, the White House spokeswoman, said in a description of the phone conversation.

"The two leaders agreed to continue to pursue a negotiated solution for northeast Syria that achieves our respective security concerns. They also discussed their mutual interest in expanding the trade relationship between the United States and Turkey," Sanders added.

Trump has previously warned Turkey not to attack the Kurdish fighters in Syria and appeared to threaten Turkey's economy if it did.

In response, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said "we are not scared of and will not be intimidated by any threats," adding that "economic threats against Turkey will get nowhere."

In its statement about the latest call, the Turkish presidency also said that the two leaders had agreed to accelerate discussions between their chiefs of staff about a safe zone in northeastern Syria.

Last week, Trump suggested creating a safe zone, without elaborating. The SDF said on Wednesday it was ready to help create a safe zone amid Kurdish fears the U.S. withdrawal would give Ankara the opportunity to mount a new offensive.

Turkey has said the U.S. administration has been incoherent about the withdrawal process since Trump's December 19.

■ Russian military police deliver humanitarian aid to Manbij residents

This is while Russian military police delivered humanitarian aid to civilians in the village of Dali Fa'r, Manbij area, on Sunday.

Massive backlash after Pakistani officers gun down family in 'counterterrorism act'

Over a dozen members of a police counterterrorism unit were arrested in Pakistan after footage, which showed officers riddling a car with bullets and killing four people including a teenage girl, surfaced online sparking protests.

Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) initially said the killings in Sahiwal, a city in Punjab Province, were lawful and happened after suspected terrorists opened fire at officers trying to apprehend him. But a video of the incident, which tells a different story, sparked outrage and made the incident a major national scandal in Pakistan.

The four people killed by the CTD on Saturday were identified as Mohammad Khalil, an owner of a grocery store, his wife Nabia, their daughter Areeba and a family friend, Zeeshan Javed. The car, driven by Javed, was stopped by police who claim they were acting on a tip from an intelligence agency which stated that the man was a jihadist loyal to the terrorist group ISIL.

The police initially said that Javed was a trained terrorist, who used the family as human shields and opened fire at the



officers, who returned fire and killed everyone in the car.

Witnesses said police chased the car, rammed it from behind and forced it to stop. They then removed three small

children from the vehicle, taking them to a police van, and gunned down the people remaining inside.

Footage of the incident, filmed by a bystander, supports the eyewitness accounts. Relatives of both men killed in the incident denied either of them had any ties to jihadists.

The video quickly went viral, was broadcast by the Pakistani media and resulted in a public outcry. Hundreds of people, including relatives of the slain family, took to the streets of Sahiwal to denounce the CTD. The crowds blocked a major road, but several hours later agreed to leave after police talked to the protesters.

Many others went to social media to express their anger and demand justice for the victims. Prime Minister Imran Khan wrote in a tweet that he was "shocked" by the incident and promised swift action and profound police reform in the province.

More than a dozen CTD officers were reportedly arrested as the investigation into the incidents geared up on Sunday. (Source: RT)

U.S. calls on Russia to destroy new missile system

The United States called on Russia Monday to destroy a new cruise missile system which it said constituted a "direct violation" of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and accused Moscow of destabilizing global security.

"Unfortunately, the United States increasingly finds that Russia

cannot be trusted to comply with its arms control obligations and that its coercive and malign actions around the globe have increased tensions," Robert Wood, U.S. disarmament ambassador, told the U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament.

"Russia must verifiably destroy all SSC-8 missiles, launch-

ers and associated equipment in order to come back into compliance with the INF Treaty," he said, reiterating the Trump administration's plan to withdraw from the 1987 pact in early February.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. man fatally shot after killing his parents, partner and infant

An Oregon man has been gunned down by local sheriff's deputies after killing four members of his family, including his infant daughter, and while trying to kill another.

The authorities reported the incident on

Sunday, saying they confronted the scene near the city of Woodburn in Oregon's Marion County after responding to an emergency call at 10.15 p.m. on the previous day.

The attacker has been named as 42-year-

old Mark Leo Gregory Gago. The victims were identified as his mother, stepfather, partner, and the infant, Gago's child with the partner.

Two people survived the attack, including an eight-year-old girl from the partner's

previous marriage, and the girl's roommate.

Reports say the attacker was divorced and had two prior assault cases against him dismissed, British paper Daily Mirror wrote. (Source: Press TV)

Afghan Taliban attack kills more than 100 security personnel in central Afghanistan

Taliban say they hold talks with U.S. Afghan envoy in Qatar



The Taliban killed more than 100 members of the Afghan security forces inside a military compound in central Maidan Wardak province on Monday, a senior defense official said.

"We have information that 126 people have been killed in the explosion inside the military training center, eight special commandoes are among the dead," said a senior official in the defense ministry in Kabul, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official said the assault began on Monday morning when the attackers rammed a car full explosives through a military check point and detonated the vehicle inside the campus of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces training center in Maidan Shahr, the capital of Maidan Wardak province.

Two gunmen entered the campus right after the explosion and shot at many Afghan soldiers before being gunned down during the clashes.

Defense ministry officials said the Taliban had used U.S.-made armored Humvee vehicles captured from Afghan forces as a car bomb in order to breach the military fortifications.

A second source residing in Maidan Wardak province said more than 100 members of National Directorate of Security (NDS) were killed in the complex attack.

"I have been in touch with the NDS official in the province and they told me that over 100 members of the NDS were killed in the big explosion," the former provincial official said.

Sharif Hotak, a member of the provincial council in Maidan Wardak said he saw bodies of 35 Afghan forces in the hospital.

"Many more were killed. Several bodies were transported to Kabul city and many injured were transferred to hospitals in Kabul," said Hotak, adding that "the government was hiding the accurate casualty figures to prevent a further dip in morale of the Afghan forces."

"The explosion was very powerful. The whole building has collapsed," he said.

Government officials in Maidan Wardak and Kabul declined to comment when asked if they were obscuring the death toll.

Two senior officials in the interior ministry said the exact casualty figures was not being disclosed to prevent unrest within the armed forces.

"I have been told not to make the death toll figures public. It is frustrating to hide the facts," said a senior interior ministry official in Kabul.

A senior NDS official in Kabul said at least 50 people were killed or wounded in the complex attack.

Abdurrahman Mangal, spokesman for the provincial governor in Maidan Wardak said 12 people were killed and 12 were injured when the car bomb exploded near the Afghan special forces unit.

President Ashraf Ghani's office in a statement said the "enemies of the country" had carried out an attack against NDS personnel in Maidan Shahr. "They killed and wounded a number of our beloved and honest sons."

In recent years the Afghan government has stopped releasing detailed casualty figures. Last year Ghani has said 28,000 Afghan police officers and soldiers have been killed since 2015, breaking the longstanding suppression on casualty data.

Taliban insurgents claimed responsibility for the attack. Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the hardline militant group said they have killed 190 people in the complex attack.

Last week, Taliban fighters set off a car bomb outside a highly fortified compound killing at least five people and wounding more than 110 Afghans and expatriates in the capital, Kabul.

■ Taliban kill at least 12 in car bomb attack on military base

Meanwhile, the Afghan Taliban killed at least 12 security force members in a car bomb attack on a military base in the central province of Maidan Wardak Monday, officials said.

Two gunmen who tried to enter the compound were shot dead, Mohebullah Sharifzai, spokesman for the Maidan Wardak provincial governor, said.

"A [second] car, packed with explosives, was also discovered and defused," he added.

Mohammad Saleem Asgharkhil, the province's health director, said 28 wounded members of the security forces had been taken to hospital.

"Looking at the damage, the number of casualties may rise and our health team is still searching for victims," he told Reuters.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said had killed or wounded dozens.

The insurgents have increased attacks in recent months in their effort to overthrow the Western-backed government and restore their version of headline law, even as talks with the United States to try to end the 17-year war have gathered pace.

Strategically located along the route connecting Kabul to the south, Maidan Wardak is a staging ground for suicide bombings in the capital by insurgents who control nearby mountain villages.

■ Taliban say they hold talks with U.S. Afghan envoy in Qatar

In another event, the Taliban met U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar on Monday, the militant group said in a statement, days after threatening to pull out of Afghan peace talks.

"Talks between Taliban leaders and U.S. officials have started today in Qatar," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said in a statement.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	161922.2
IFX	1970.93
Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir	

CURRENCIES	
USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,775 rials
GBP	54,045 rials
AED	11,439 rials
Source: cbi.ir	

COMMODITIES	
WTI	\$54.16/b
Brent	\$62.70/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.63/b
Gold	\$1,280.95 /oz
Silver	\$15.32/oz
Platinum	\$801.30/oz
Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com	

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Some 400 million liters of oil and related products are transferred via pipelines throughout the country per day, the managing director of Iranian Oil Pipelines and Telecommunication Company announced.

In an interview with IRIB, Abbas-Ali Jafari-Nasab also informed that 66 billion liters of crude oil is transferred via 14,000 kilometers of pipelines in the country per year.

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The value of foreign investment in Iran's capital market has reached 13.7 trillion rials (about \$326 million), IRNA reported on Monday quoting the head of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO).

Shapour Mohammadi made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with the members of the parliament's Economic Committee.

As previously announced by Hamid Rouhbakhsh, the director of public relations and international affairs of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), foreign investors are present in 36 industries in TSE.

The first trading code was issued for a foreign shareholder in Iranian calendar year of 1373 (1994-95) to let it commence its activity in Iranian capital market.

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E C O N O M Y **TEHRAN** — Over 55.4 million tons of commodities were loaded and unloaded at Shahid Rajaei Port, in south of Iran, during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2018), according to the director general of Ports and Maritime Department of Hormozgan Province.

Allah-Morad Afzipoor said that of the mentioned figure, 36.8 million tons were the non-oil products, IRNA reported.

The official has previously announced that the annual loading and unloading capacity of Shahid Rajaei Port stands at 100 million tons, 25 percent of which belongs to minerals.

"Some 80 million tons of cargos were loaded and unloaded at the port in the preceding year with minerals accounting for 20 million tons of the amount," he said.

In last February, the third phase of the development plan of Iran's biggest container port, Shahid Rajaei Port, was launched in the presence of President Hassan Rouhani.

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UK households gloomy for 2019, lower inflation eases near-term worries

British households' hopes for their finances over the year ahead remain near a five-year low, due to growing concern about job security ahead of Brexit, though easing inflation pressures have offered some short-term cheer.

IHSMarkit said its monthly Household Finances Index picked up to a three-month high in January, on the back of households' perception that their living costs were rising at the slowest rate since October 2016.

The official measure of consumer price inflation dropped to its lowest in nearly two years in December at 2.1 percent.

But households' expectations for their finances over the year to come, when Britain is due to leave the European Union, remained close to their lowest level since early 2014.

"Political deadlock over Brexit merely adds extra uncertainty to an already unfavorable financial environment for UK households," IHS Markit economist Joe Hayes said.

Prime Minister Theresa May suffered a historic parliamentary defeat over her Brexit plans last week, raising the prospect that Britain could leave the European Union on March 29 with no transition agreement to ensure trade continues smoothly.

(Source: Reuters)

Following fellow Asian buyers, Japan resumes shipping in Iranian oil

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced on Monday that Japanese refiners have resumed imports of Iranian oil after receiving waivers from U.S. sanctions on Tehran, IRNA reported.

"After China, South Korea, India and Turkey, Japan also started the process of importing Iranian oil," Abdolnaser Hemmati said.

Hemmati further noted that despite U.S. sanctions the revenues from oil exports are gradually entering the country's trade cycle.

Japan is the last of the four biggest Iranian oil buyers in Asia to resume imports after receiving a waiver from U.S. sanctions on crude imports that started in November.



China and India maintained their imports after November while on Saturday, South Korea received its first Iranian oil cargo in four months.

In a report on Monday, Reuters also quoted a spokesman of the Japanese refiner Fuji Oil Co that the refinery has lifted a cargo of Iranian crude oil over the weekend.

"The very large crude carrier Kisogawa loaded about two million barrels of Iranian oil on Sunday and is expected to reach Japan on Feb. 9, according to the Fuji spokesman and Refinitiv Eikon data", the report read.

"It took a while for us to resume imports of Iranian oil," the spokesman said, adding that the biggest hurdle was to get banks to agree to handle payments to Iran.

Saffron output increases 15%

E C O N O M Y **TEHRAN** — Production of saffron in Iran since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018) stands at 400 tons which is 15 percent more than the figure of the previous year's same period, according to the vice chairman of National Saffron Council.

Gholamreza Miri also said that saffron export has risen 46 percent during the first eight months of the current calendar year (March 21-November 21, 2018) compared to the same time span of the previous year, Mehr news agency reported on Monday.

Iran's exports of saffron increased about 55 percent in the past Iranian calendar year compared to its preceding

year, breaking the record of exports in the past ten years.

According to Kaveh Zargaran, the chairman of the Agricultural Committee at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), some 236 tons of saffron worth over \$326 million were exported to the destination markets in the mentioned period.

UAE, Hong Kong, Spain, Afghanistan and China were the top importers of Iranian saffron while the top three namely UAE, Hong Kong and Spain accounted for over 77 percent of the total exports, Zargaran said.

Iran's annual saffron production stood at 326 tons during the previous year.



Case Study: Identifying the relationship of gold to crypto

By Luke Fitzpatrick

Since the beginning of modern history, gold has been an important means of storing value. In the past 200 years, the gold sector has remained relatively unchanged. However, there have been some interesting developments implying that change is just around the corner.

Over the years, gold has proven to be a suitable alternative to both fiat currency and cryptocurrency. The real question is, could it perhaps be both? In this article, we will be looking at three different trends and what this really means to the whole world of crypto: bitcoin, stablecoins and legislation.

■ **Bitcoin could serve as a replacement for gold**

During a recent Bitcoin summit in Israel, Nick Szabo stated that "Central banks will end up using bitcoin as a reserve currency." In a Q&A session, Szabo also said, "I think it will be one of the many reserve currencies that can be used to underpin value on other

things. There doesn't have to be only one anymore."

In an interview with MarketWatch, Inton said, "If cryptocurrency were to displace gold's investment case, the implications for gold prices would be devastating. 40% of gold demand relates to investment, so a shift in investment from gold to cryptocurrency would be a seismic shock." If this event were to come to pass, the repercussions would send shockwaves throughout the world's global economy.

Felix Hartmann from the crypto hedge fund Hartmann Capital says, "Bitcoin bridges the gap between currency and a store of value asset. It maintains the speed and flexibility of fiat currency while remaining independent of central banks and governments and their macro-economic policies such as inflation."

■ **Gold-pegged stablecoins**

For a large number of new cryptocurrencies entering in 2018, most have proven to be inflated, volatile or unreliable. That's why 2018 saw ICO's on the downfall with

stablecoins on the rise. This later became known as the "stablecoin frenzy," mainly due to the benefits of cryptocurrency without the volatility.

Gold-pegged stablecoins emerged from the stablecoin frenzy. One good example of this is Novem who pegged their cryptocurrency to gold. According to a recent statement, the company has approximately 35 kg in LBMA-certified gold (Q1: 2019), stored securely by Loomis International. The amount of gold translates to almost \$1,500,000 in collateral.

The aftermath of the stablecoin frenzy may lead to gold-pegged stablecoins flourishing—especially if the value is delivered to both consumers and businesses across the precious metal industry.

■ **Gold and legislation**

With a worldwide monetary crisis being just around the corner, Ron Paul who served US Congress for several terms from 1976 until 2013, wrote a formal paper, called "The Dollar Dilemma: Where to From Here?"

Paul said, "There are several major efforts

being made to replace the fiat dollar with gold or cryptocurrencies, while other countries are making plans to challenge the dollar as the world's reserve currency." What this really means is that gold or cryptocurrencies could, in the very near future replace fiat.

However, this begs the question, what happens next? Crypto investors need "regulatory clarity." According to a recent article by Coin Telegraph, legislation clarity may indeed be underway. "Two United States congressmen introduced a bill in the House of Representatives on Dec. 20 that would exclude digital assets from being defined as securities."

■ **Final remarks**

In the near future, it will be interesting to see what happens with gold, bitcoins and stablecoins. A lot of this hinges on the government's aptitude to provide investors with regulatory clarity, stablecoin adoption, and will gold continue to be the reserve currency? Right now, it's too early to say, but one thing remains clear—the financial markets are in for a change.

(Source: Forbes)

China's 2018 economic growth sunk to a 3-decade low

China's 2018 economic growth fell to a three-decade low, adding to pressure on Beijing to settle a tariff war with Washington.

The world's second-largest economy expanded by 6.6% over a year earlier, down from 2017's 6.9%, official data showed Monday. Growth in the three months ending in December dipped to 6.4%—the lowest quarterly level since the 2008 global crisis—from the previous quarter's 6.5%.

Communist leaders are trying to steer China to slower, more self-sustaining growth based on consumer spending instead of trade and investment. But the deceleration has been sharper than expected, prompting Beijing to step up government spending and order banks to lend more to shore up growth and avoid politically dangerous job losses.

"Growth will remain under pressure," said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics in a report. "Key risks are the ongoing trade

tension with the U.S. and that credit growth does not recover."

Exports held up through most of 2018 despite President Donald Trump's tariff hikes on Chinese imports in a fight over Beijing's technology ambitions. But they contracted in December as the penalties began to depress U.S. demand.

Economic growth in 2018 was the lowest since 1990's 3.9% in the aftermath of the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests centered on Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Growth in investment, retail spending and factory activity all declined, the National Bureau of Statistics reported.

The impact of U.S. tariffs was limited, but China faces pressure from growing global support for import controls, volatile financial markets and declining investment spending, said the bureau commissioner, Ning Jizhe.

(Source: The Time)

Dollar firm after Chinese growth hits 28-year low

The dollar held near a two-week high on Monday, shrugging off concerns about weakening global growth and data showing China's economy slowed sharply in 2018.

The greenback has enjoyed its first weekly gain since mid-December, buoyed by hopes for a thaw in U.S.-China trade tensions and stronger-than-expected U.S. industrial production numbers.

Going into 2019, weakness in the dollar was a consensus view among currency market traders. The bet was that the U.S. central bank would stop raising interest rates and the economy would slow after a fiscal boost last year.

The dollar index, which measures its strength against a group of six major currencies, on Monday was steady at 96.308 after climbing to 96.260 percent on Friday, its strongest since Jan. 4.

"The U.S. dollar is currently benefiting

from its role as safe currency haven," said Esther Maria Reichelt, an FX strategist at Commerzbank in Frankfurt.

"The Federal Reserve could cushion a weaker economy with monetary policy measures... protecting the U.S. quite well from weakening global growth and making the dollar the currency of choice," she added.

U.S.-China trade friction has put pressure on China's economy, with the latest data showing the world's second-biggest economy slowing further in the last quarter of 2018. Markets appeared to take the outcome, largely in line with expectations, in their stride.

The euro nudged up 0.2 percent to \$1.1376 and was headed for its first daily gain in over a week but remained in close reach of a two-week low of \$1.1353 brushed on Friday.

The pound was 0.1 percent lower at \$1.2860.

(Source: CNBC)

Eurozone household debt falls to lowest level since 2006

A measure of Eurozone personal debt is at its lowest since before the financial crisis, making the region's consumers less vulnerable to the effects of a rise in interest rates or an economic downturn.

The debt held by Eurozone households fell in the third quarter of 2018 to 57.6 percent, the lowest level since 2006, according to a global debt monitor database produced by the Institute of International Finance.

The figure for the Eurozone is lower than for the U.S., where household debt is 75 percent of GDP, and significantly below the 86 percent in the UK. The figures include both secured and unsecured lending such as mortgages, car finance or student loans.

Economists increasingly see household spending as an underpinning for economic growth at a time when a series of tariff disputes between China and the US threaten any expansion in global trade, and when the Eurozone economy shows signs of slowing.

The Eurozone unemployment rate dropped to 7.9 percent in November 2018, the lowest rate since 2008. Job vacancy rates are at their highest since 2009 and Eurozone households have been able to save more of their income.

"Eurozone households' balance sheets remain healthy in most countries with overall levels of debt having declined in recent years," said Ángel Talavera at Oxford Economics.



However, households with a high level of debt could struggle to maintain spending levels if debt repayment increases when interest rates normalize after nearly a decade of record low rates.

The European Central Bank—which has not raised rates since March 2016—remains well behind other leading central banks in normalizing its monetary policy. Markets largely expect Eurozone policy rates to remain unchanged this year.

Filippo Gori, economist at the OECD, said Eurozone household debt remained high by historical standards, with pockets

of higher debt vulnerability in some countries.

However, "with a deteriorating growth environment, households are also exposed to a stalling job market recovery that may negatively affect their income and ability to repay debt", said Gori.

At 103 percent of GDP, Dutch families are the most indebted in the region despite a reduction by 16 percentage points from a peak in 2010. The high ratio largely reflecting high mortgage debt accumulated in previous credit booms.

However Christophe André, economist at the OECD, said Dutch families "do not seem the most at risk of financial distress" because of their relatively high level of assets.

Economists argue that a rapid rise in debt is a better measure of affordability risk. For example in the run-up to the financial crisis, household debt nearly doubled in Spain to a peak of 85 percent in 2010, largely driven by a property bubble. Spanish household debt has since fallen to 59.6 percent of GDP in the third quarter of 2018.

At 40 percent of GDP, Italians have the lowest ratio of debt-to-GDP among larger Eurozone economies. Nearly 60 percent of Italians own their homes outright—about double the rate in Germany, France and the UK.

(Source: Financial Times)

Oil falls as slowing China economy dents markets

Oil prices fell on Monday, in line with weaker stock markets after evidence that economic growth in China, the world's second largest crude consumer, eased in 2018.

Brent crude oil futures were last down 35 cents on the day at \$62.35 a barrel by 0946 GMT, while U.S. crude futures were down 23 cents at \$53.57 a barrel.

The broader financial markets were weaker after data showed China's 2018 economic growth slowing to the weakest in 28 years, at 6.6 percent versus 6.8 percent in 2017.

Although the slowdown was in line with expectations and not as sharp as some analysts had expected, the cooling of the world's No.2 economy casts a shadow over global growth.

"It remains quite likely that the trade spat with the U.S. has played a part in this latest slowdown, but investors should also factor in that it simply isn't possible for the Chinese economy to grow at the pace that it has over the last 10 years, in the next 10 years, as the law of diminishing returns kicks in, and the economy becomes more mature," CMC Markets chief market analyst Michael Hewson said.

While there is concern that a slowing



global economy could impact oil demand growth and, therefore the price outlook, the production cuts implemented by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC) would likely support crude oil prices, analysts believe.

"You can't justify oil prices at these levels. We're looking basically at an average of

almost \$70 a barrel for Brent in 2019," ING commodities strategist Warren Patterson said.

"I am getting increasingly concerned about how tight the market will be going into 2020."

A separate report from China's National Bureau of Statistics on Monday showed crude oil refinery throughput climbed to a record 12.1 million barrels per day (bpd), up 6.8 percent from the previous year.

In the United States, energy companies cut the number of rigs drilling for oil by 21 in the week to Jan. 18, taking the total count down to 852, the lowest since May 2018, energy services firm Baker Hughes said in a weekly report on Friday.

It was biggest decline since February 2016, as drillers reacted to the 40-percent plunge in U.S. crude prices late last year. However, U.S. crude oil production still rose by more than 2 million bpd in 2018, to a record 11.9 million bpd.

With the rig count stalling, last year's growth rate is unlikely to be repeated in 2019, although most analysts expect annual production to average well over 12 million bpd.

(Source: Reuters)

CNOOC resells floating LNG cargo to Japan amid lacklustre winter demand



China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) has resold a liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo floating offshore South Korea, according to data from Refinitiv Eikon and three industry sources, highlighting the drop in winter gas demand in China.

The move is a departure from the 2017/18 winter, when China was desperate to procure LNG to meet demand for the super-chilled fuel amid a spike in natural gas consumption following a government-mandated switch from coal to gas for residential heating and industrial processes.

In 2017, CNOOC spent \$10 million to lease two LNG tankers, including one called the Neo Energy, as an emergency stash of the fuel for unloading at the company's receiving terminals at Tianjin in northern China and Ningbo on the east coast.

Now, CNOOC has sold a cargo on the Neo Energy, which was loaded onto the ship on Nov. 15 from the Bontang liquefaction plant in Indonesia, one of the sources, with direct knowledge of the move, said on Monday.

On Sunday, CNOOC redirected the Neo

Energy to Tokyo from the Okpo anchorage in South Korea, the Eikon data showed. The vessel, currently fully laden, can hold about 150,000 cubic meters of LNG. Details of the buyer were not immediately clear.

Last winter's gas shortages prompted Chinese companies this winter to secure supply ahead of time and pushed LNG imports to a record monthly high in December.

But temperatures have been higher than normal this winter and weather data from Refinitiv Eikon forecasts warmer-than-usual temperatures ahead, leaving suppliers with high inventories.

Chinese buyers do not typically resell LNG cargoes during winter, highlighting the country's reduced appetite for the fuel, said a second source, who is involved in LNG shipping.

Companies were under pressure to remove the surplus LNG cargoes because of the supply and demand imbalance this winter, likely resulting in losses from the sales because of flat domestic gas prices, said the first source.

(Source: Reuters)

Germany won't block Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Merkel ally tells HB



Germany won't be pressured into blocking the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, a top cabinet minister told Handelsblatt.

Construction of the pipeline is "far advanced, with pipes laid over kilometers in the sea," Economy and Energy Minister Peter Altmaier said in an interview set to be published in the Monday newspaper.

Opposition to the project targets "the wrong whipping boy," according to the Christian Democrat and close ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The German government won't intervene to scupper the Russian gas pipeline as "there is no legal basis for it," he said.

The U.S. last year joined a group of Germany's European Union partners such as Poland in criticizing the \$11 billion project, which they say will make the trade bloc more dependent on Russian gas. Merkel's government has long maintained that the Gazprom PJSC-led pipeline is solely a commercial enterprise.

The 1,220 kilometer (758-mile) Nord Stream 2 undersea link to Germany ini-

tiated by Russia in 2015.

Altmaier's comments follow letters sent by the U.S. ambassador, Richard Grenell, earlier this month to Gazprom's European partners warning they could face sanctions by participating in the project. U.S. restrictions would potentially hit companies in Austria, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Royal Dutch Shell Plc, BASF SE's Wintershall unit, Uniper SE, OMV AG and Engie SA are involved in the project.

U.S. pressure on Germany to scale back support for the pipeline prompted Merkel's government in the fall to say that it would seek to help Russia and Ukraine reach a transit accord for gas pumped through Ukraine. The thorny talks between Russian and Ukraine are still dragging on.

Altmaier said in the Handelsblatt interview he's "convinced that a compromise can be reached" and that gas will continue to flow through Ukraine after the pipeline project's likely completion in 2019.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Big Oil's strategy for a global energy transition

"The world is in a transition between an era dominated by fossil fuels and one focused on a low-carbon economy," David Koryani wrote in a report for the Atlantic Council. "While the speed, timing, and details of the transition are highly uncertain, the direction should be clear: toward a low-carbon future."

Koryani argues that there are several drivers pushing the world in this direction, including falling costs for clean energy technology, consumer preferences, government policy, international agreements and pressure from various stakeholder groups. Even shareholders of oil companies are pressing executives to make the transition to cleaner energy.

Oil companies are responding in different ways with varying levels of urgency. Some companies are making significant investments in renewable energy, electric vehicles and associated infrastructure, and utilities. Others are dragging their feet, clinging to their oil and gas assets while fighting public policies that promote energy transition.

One key strategy from the oil majors is to make big bets on natural gas. The prospect of plateauing demand for oil in transportation has oil executives eyeing natural gas, which they view as a safer long-term investment due to the resilience of demand for gas in the electricity sector as coal phases out.

Most oil companies are also investing heavily in chemicals and petrochemicals. Environmental groups would correctly note that this is hardly a strategy for a clean energy transition, but oil executives (and analysts including the IEA) see demand for plastics,



fertilizers and other petrochemical products as a larger source of demand growth going forward than the transportation sector. Shell is building a massive ethane cracker in Western Pennsylvania to build plastics from shale gas, for instance. ExxonMobil and others are doing the same on the Gulf Coast.

Another strategy for the oil majors is to invest in short-cycle shale rather than conventional, offshore or other long-term projects such as oil sands. Shale drilling can return capital within a matter of weeks or months; an offshore project has a multi-decade time horizon. Due to the enormous uncertainty over peak demand, shale is seen as comparatively low risk. For example, Chevron just announced that it would spend \$9 to \$10

billion on short-cycle investments through 2022. "Most of our assets are competitive when tested against aggressive scenarios," Chevron said in a presentation, referring to the possibility of an early onset of peak demand.

Finally, the oil majors – in fits and starts and to varying degrees – are beginning to invest in renewables. The European oil majors in particular have their hands in solar, offshore wind and electric vehicles.

Generally speaking, however, the forays by international oil companies (IOCs) into cleaner forms of energy remains marginal. "By and large, all IOCs are continuing to bank on sustained oil and gas demand and are proceeding cautiously when it comes to

more ambitious diversification away from their core business," Koryani wrote in the Atlantic Council report. He noted that even Royal Dutch Shell, which has made some of the more notable ventures into clean energy and is arguably doing more than its peers, still spends less than 10 percent of its capex budget on renewables.

Doubling-down on oil and gas drilling is problematic given the scale of the climate crisis. A report from Oil Change International argues that the U.S. oil and gas industry "is gearing up to unleash the largest burst of new carbon emissions in the world between now and 2050." Unsurprisingly, a huge chunk of those emissions (39 percent) will come from the Permian, with 19 percent coming from the Appalachian basin (Marcellus and Utica shales).

Over the next few decades, the report says, the U.S. oil and gas industry will add the equivalent greenhouse gas emissions of nearly 1,000 coal-fired power plants. In short, the plans for drilling in U.S. shale alone will likely ensure the world blows past even the more modest climate goals contained in the Paris agreement. Oil Change International's report, aptly titled "Drilling Towards Disaster," calls for a ban on new leases and permits, ending subsidies for fossil fuels, and a plan for a phase out of existing projects.

Needless to say, the gap between what is needed and what the oil industry is doing is overwhelming. It is no wonder then that both sides see this as an existential fight.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Russia plans to accelerate pace of oil cuts: Novak

Russian energy minister Alexander Novak said Moscow is seeking to accelerate the pace of its oil production cuts under the Opec+ agreement, but reiterated it faces operational challenges, Kallanish Energy reports.

Early last week, his Saudi counterpart, Khalid Al-Falih, had complained Russia's production cuts started slower than he'd like, and was pushing for faster reductions.

"Of course we will try to make the cuts faster," Novak told reporters in Serbia. "We have our limitations of a technological nature, yet we will aim to reach the levels we agreed on."

"We have special conditions and cannot ensure sharp declines in principle," he added, referring to winter freezing conditions in Siberia – the country's key oil province.

Under the Opec+ cooperation deal, Russia has pledged to cut its production by 228,000-300,000 barrels per day (Bpd), but since Day 1, has advised the cuts would be made "gradually." Novak said last December "full compliance" would be achieved over a few months given Russia's climate-related and technical challenges.

The output cut deal became effective Jan. 1, and is set to last six months. It's not clear yet how much Russia has taken out of market in the first weeks of January.

(Source: kallanishenergy.com)

The future is now for LNG as derivatives trading takes off

With natural gas demand growing faster than for any other fossil fuel, LNG futures may be finally taking off.

Derivatives represented about 2 percent of global LNG production at the beginning of 2017 as an array of contracts around the world struggled to gain traction. But by the end of last year, volumes had grown to almost 23 percent, led by a burgeoning Intercontinental Exchange Inc. contract based on S&P Global Platts' Japan-Korea Marker spot price assessments.

While volumes are a long way off established global energy benchmarks such as Brent crude -- where trade dwarfs worldwide oil production many times over -- the accelerating growth in LNG derivatives illustrates how the market is maturing. An explosion in supply, from the U.S. to Australia, is bringing more market participants and a shift away from traditional pricing.

"There's more short-term physical trading indexed to JKM and new counterparties active in the market," said Tobias Davis, head of LNG-Asia at brokerage Tullett Prebon. "This creates more liquidity and in turn, builds more confidence in trading the swap and using it as a viable hedging tool."

■ Bright futures

There are now at least six derivative contracts for LNG, ranging from U.S. Gulf Coast futures on ICE to Dubai-Kuwait-India on Singapore Exchange Ltd. The most established by far is ICE's Japan-Korea Marker, launched in 2012. More than 17,000 contracts traded in December, a 10-fold increase from January 2017. The next most active is CME Group Inc.'s futures contract, also based on S&P Global Platts' JKM assessment. Its monthly volume peaked in November last year at 3,335 contracts.

The need for a liquid LNG benchmark has been the subject of much debate. Traditionally, when oil was used more commonly in power generation and production, it was almost exclusively valued relative to crude oil and brought and sold under long-term contracts. One advantage of that system is that oil has a liquid and established futures market that gives market participants visibility and the confidence to hedge.

■ Long way to go

But oil and gas don't move in lockstep and buyers have become increasingly reluctant to be tied to crude markets. The expansion in global supply, most notably with the development of shale reserves that transformed the U.S. into a major natural gas exporter, has opened up other options and stimulated a shift to more spot trading.

About 27 percent of LNG was sold under spot- or short-term deals in 2017, up from 12 percent in 2003, according to the International Group of LNG Importers.

That just increased the need for a reliable price benchmark and liquid futures market for hedging. Regional gas benchmarks such as Louisiana's Henry Hub, the U.K.'s National Balancing Point or Dutch Title Transfer Facility reflect local fundamentals and therefore may not be ideal proxies for the global LNG trade, where the vast majority of sales are in Asia. So that's where LNG futures come in.

JKM "is much more trusted, much more accurate, and the paper market is helping make it be more responsive to price movements," Gordon D Waters, the global head of LNG at ENGIE, said by phone on Friday. JKM contracts could reach the level of NBP or TTF "most likely within the next 5 years." NBP and TTF volumes both averaged about 37,000 contracts a day in 2018.

There's still a long way to go. ICE JKM is still much smaller than other global oil and gas benchmarks. Exchange open interest, or the amount of outstanding bets at the end of every day, accounted for about \$2 billion at the end of 2018, compared with \$36 billion for U.S. natural gas and more than \$100 billion for Brent oil, according to Bloomberg estimates.

For a futures market to be considered truly liquid, volumes should be about about 10 times the size of the actual physical trade, according to Total SA, one of the world's biggest producers and a major participant in the JKM market. With volumes multiplying by about three times a year, JKM should reach that level in about five years, Philip Olivier, Total's general manager of global LNG, said in October.

Brent and U.S. gas traders also have much more flexibility, as they're able to buy and sell futures by the second, with prices updating to reflect the fast-moving market. Most JKM LNG trades are still brokered offline and then cleared by exchanges. Contract values are based on a monthly average of Platts assessments, so the price updates once a day when the new assessment is added.

Still, LNG has already surpassed one energy derivative. ICE's JKM contract now has more value in open interest than the exchange's Newcastle coal contract. The two fuels, of course, also vie in the real world for space in power plants in some regions.

"If you have a look at how the coal market developed in the mid-2000s, it took over a decade to transition to a liquid exchange order book," said Gordon Bennett, managing director for utility markets at ICE. "It definitely feels like JKM is evolving quicker."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Pence's shocking use of Martin Luther King's words

By Julian Zelizer

On the weekend of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Vice President Mike Pence shockingly invoked a line from the civil rights leader's famous "I Have a Dream" speech to build support for President Donald Trump's proposed deal on the border wall. Asking legislators to agree to Trump's proposal of spending \$5.7 billion on a border wall along with a temporary extension of the DACA program (that Trump dismantled), Pence said, quoting King, on CBS' "Face the Nation," "Now is the time to make real the promises for democracy." He compared King's belief in using the legislative process to solve social problems to what the President is trying to do.

The "I Have a Dream" speech continues to resonate to this day as one of the most important symbols of a civil rights movement that was committed to ending social injustice and dismantling policies that enabled the inhumane treatment of people living in the United States and all around the globe.

The comments made by Pence -- who works at the top of an administration that promotes policies that directly contradict King's message -- fly directly in the face of Martin Luther King's legacy.

It does so because this is an administration that right now is holding the government hostage -- leaving civil servants without paychecks and citizens without full benefits -- in exchange for a monument made of brick and mortar or steel that most experts agree won't do much to enhance border security. Not to mention that, under this administration, thousands of parents have been separated from their children at the border.

In a stark contrast to what King stood for, the Trump administration has repeatedly sent encouraging signals to the forces of white nationalism, starting with the President saying that there were "very fine people" among the neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville, the keepers of the flame for the white Americans who did everything in their power to stop civil rights back in the 1960s.

And as a way to promote the passage of new voting restrictions -- which would fall hardest on marginalized groups of voters -- the administration has promoted false claims of election fraud.

President Trump has even praised autocrats all over the world who oppose the fundamental rights that King defended.

All of this has happened while the administration pushes for budgets that undercut social safety programs to help the poor.

As we've seen, nothing about this administration resembles King's ideals.

Martin Luther King Jr. spent every day of his life trying to tear down the walls that separated us. Most historians would agree that if King were alive today, his positions about this administration would be clear. He would be rallying citizens to take to the streets in red and blue states, to insist that elected officials reopen the federal government and to demand a resolution to the status of the millions of undocumented immigrants who currently live in limbo within the United States.

The civil rights leader would be demanding that legislators take a stand against the reactionary policies of the current President. King would probably revisit another part of his famous speech and talk about the "fierce urgency of now" that citizens must have in fighting for social rights. He would be calling for government officials to listen to the pleas of those seeking asylum and to find ways to treat those caught at the border in humane and decent fashion.

When the country lets "freedom ring," King said as he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial, "all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

There is no justification for Vice President Pence to use King's memory to support the administration's policies. Doing so is a perversion of the work of one of the greatest social activists of modern times.

(Source: CNN)

Macedonian solution is a positive step for Europe

A deal to settle a 27-year-old dispute between Greece and Macedonia that comes to the Greek parliament for ratification this week provides a rare achievement to celebrate in the Western Balkans. Macedonia has been stuck in an economic and geopolitical no man's land since it was carved out of a collapsing Yugoslavia in 1991. Many Greeks suspected a new nation calling itself Macedonia harbored territorial ambitions over parts of the northern Greek region of the same name. Spurred by frequent public protests, Greek politicians have long thwarted Skopje's ambitions to join NATO and the EU for refusing to drop the name, leaving Macedonia's 2m people with little prospect of economic improvement and no guarantee of its security. Macedonia's nationalist leader for a decade from 2006, Nikola Gruevski, tried to put pressure on Athens by manufacturing a spurious ancient Macedonian heritage for his nation, renaming airports and stations and erecting statues of Alexander the Great and Phillip II of Macedon. This crude exercise in nation-building further infuriated Greeks while helping distract Macedonians' attention from official corruption and mismanagement.

The ousting of Gruevski and the election of Zoran Zaev, his centre-left rival, opened the way to a compromise and to his credit, Alexis Tsipras, Greece's leftwing prime minister, took it despite widespread Greek opposition. In June last year, the two men signed an accord on the shores of Lake Prespa, renaming the country the Republic of North Macedonia, recognizing its language and culture, clarifying its lack of ancient Macedonian heritage and removing any irredentist references in school history books. The name dispute would be treated as an eccentric anachronism were it not hanging over a part of Europe that is still a powder keg of ethnic tensions and geopolitical rivalries.

The U.S. and the EU, meanwhile, have stepped up their efforts to anchor the region more firmly in the west. The EU has opened up the prospect of membership for six Balkan states by 2025. U.S. and European officials filed through Skopje last autumn to support the Prespa accord ahead of an advisory referendum. The vote showed overwhelming support for the deal, though on low turnout. Neither he nor Zaev appears to have established a broad majority among the public or political elites for this deal, which will need strengthening in the years to come. But it is the right choice for Greece, the Balkans and Europe.

(Source: FT)

A league of their own, as few Arab leaders attend summit

By Vivian Yee

The eyes of the world were nowhere near Beirut, where the kings and presidents of the Arab world had been ceremoniously summoned to a summit of the Arab League over the weekend and had, in all but two cases, ceremoniously declined.

Government jets disgorged only underlings and minor ministers onto the red carpet that had been rolled out for them at the airport.

Libya was boycotting, and just about everyone was in a fight over whether to invite Syria at all. Nonetheless, the city puffed out its chest, put its downtown on lockdown and hoisted the flags of the 22 member states under a mercifully rainless sky.

The fourth economic and social summit of the Arab League -- or most of it, anyway -- was hereby called to order.

"We wished for this summit to be an occasion to bring together all the Arabs, leaving no vacant seats," the host, President Michel Aoun of Lebanon, lamented in a speech that kicked off Sunday's gathering. "Yet the hurdles were unfortunately stronger."

As if on cue, the TV cameras panned to an empty dais on which a small Libyan flag was wilting, and an eloquent gap between the Egyptian delegation and the Lebanese one. Members of a Lebanese political party had threatened to physically block the Libyans from leaving the airport if they showed up.

Syria's empty seat was just across the vast hall, a bone of contention in the form of a large wooden desk -- and a reminder that, with a few member states reopening embassies in Damascus in recent months, Syria's government appeared to be progressing toward rejoining the league.

That, of course, might first require unearthing some kind of Arab League consensus.

Formed at the suggestion of the British during World War II, the league was supposed to strengthen ties among Arab countries from Morocco to Oman, with the Palestinian cause their most important shared mission. It united its members in shaking off colonialism and confronting Israel, helped broker an end to Lebanon's 15-year civil war and developed a significant Israel-Palestine peace plan.

But by now, enfeebled by regional rivalries and disagreements, the league has acquired an all-too-mockable reputation for dysfunction. Its aged leaders have been known to fall asleep during meetings. In one recent year, one leader mused that the only thing the members had in common was the Arabic language.

In 2016, the league hit what was perhaps a modern low point when Morocco announced that it would not be bothering to host the annual leaders' summit. It dismissed it as "just another occasion" to "pronounce speeches that give a false impression of unity." When Mauritania stepped up to host instead, only seven leaders attended.

"It's constitutionally incapable of addressing the real problems that are facing the Middle East," said James Gelvin, a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of California, Los Angeles. "That's everything from bad governance and political violence to climate change, population growth, bad



Enfeebled by regional rivalries and disagreements, the Arab league has acquired an all-too-mockable reputation for dysfunction.

health care and bad educational systems."

Matters have not improved much since 2016.

"Half these countries are fighting each other in wars or undermining each other," said Rami G. Khouri, a Beirut-based political columnist who has covered several Arab League summits.

It is only a slight exaggeration. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia and its partners in the United Arab Emirates are mired in a war against the Houthis, a conflict that has killed tens of thousands and thrust millions to the edge of famine. (Representatives of Yemen's Saudi-backed government attended the summit, but the league took no action to address the humanitarian crisis.)

There are hostilities between the Saudis and Emiratis and the Qataris, whom the Saudis and Emiratis have tried to ostracize politically and isolate economically. There is bad blood between Lebanon and Libya. No one has entirely forgotten that Egypt made peace with Israel in 1979, a move seen as such a historic betrayal of the bloc that Egypt was voted out for a decade.

And when it comes to Syria and the several countries that have funded rebel groups taking on President Bashar al-Assad's government, water is only just beginning to trickle under the bridge.

Soon after the Syrian war broke out, the Arab League suspended Syria's membership, and it later welcomed representatives from the Syrian opposition.

The league's membership has had to wrestle with questions about how to rebuild Syria's shattered infrastructure and economy -- an undertaking that could cost hundreds of billions of dollars -- and what to do about the more than five million refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq.

Those questions were always going to be extra-fraught at a summit meeting in Lebanon, where the three major political and religious

camp -- Christian, Shiite Muslim and Sunni Muslim -- have been so deadlocked, in part over Lebanese-Syrian relations, that they have failed to form a government for eight months and counting.

Assad's government enjoys the support of Shiite-dominated factions in Lebanon and beyond, and in the weeks before the summit, Lebanon's Parliament speaker, Nabih Berri, a Shiite, called for the whole event to be postponed until Syria was invited. What was the point of discussing Syrian reconstruction and refugees, Berri asked, if Syria was absent?

He earned nothing but irritated shushings from Lebanon's Christian president and Sunni prime minister, who were anxious to present the host country in a good light.

There was not much either the president or prime minister could do, however, about the supporters of Berri's party, Amal, who threatened to block the Libyans at the airport if they tried to fly in, and then burned a Libyan flag for good measure.

They were aggrieved about a four-decade-old incident in which a revered Lebanese Shiite leader, Musa al-Sadr, disappeared on a trip to see Libya's leader, Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi. Qaddafi was killed in the 2011 Libyan uprising, but Lebanese Shiites say Libya's current government could do more to investigate Sadr's disappearance.

Perhaps understandably, Libya soon announced that it would decline to attend. Then, one by one, the Arab presidents and kings sent their regrets, until only the presidents of Mauritania and Somalia remained on the guest list. Then the Somali leader canceled. (A leaders' summit is held each year, but the economic and social development conference that Beirut was hosting takes place only periodically.)

When the league's assistant secretary-general, Hussam Zaki, landed in Beirut to oversee preparations for the summit, he had a gravity-defying message: "The summit is

on schedule," he said. "The internal political problems in Lebanon have nothing to do with the Arab League."

Maybe not, but many Lebanese, from the president on down, had hoped that the league would help fix Lebanon's problems.

The Lebanese wanted Lebanon's Syrian refugees to go home. They wanted investment in Lebanon's gasping economy. They definitely did not want the military to shut down half the airport highway as delegations arrived on Saturday, leaving the road so congested that some people were reduced to getting out of their cars and dragging their suitcases the last half-mile to the terminal.

"This summit cost Lebanon millions of dollars -- what are we going to get from it?" Mohamed Al Mawla, an athletic trainer from Beirut, said on Saturday. "It's going to be ink on paper. Nothing will happen."

In the end, the Arab leaders left without addressing the major issues at hand, promising merely to establish a regional fund to invest in technology and to support the youth of the Middle East.

But if the meeting did not provide much in the way of solutions, it was rich in drama. As the oratory flowed on Sunday, a rumor spread that the emir of Qatar, a major regional figure, had not only flown in on his private plane that morning but also announced that he was going to cover the entire \$10 million cost of the summit and throw Lebanon an extra \$1 billion -- news tailor made to perk up every gloomy skeptic.

Soon came the cold water and the official denials: There had been no such princely largess, and there was no emir in sight, the emir having left after a brief stop in Beirut on Sunday morning. Lebanon would pay. The flags came down, the delegates went home; the circumstance was over and the pomp, until the next summit, was put away.

(Source: The NYT)

What's next for Lebanon's yellow vests?

By Victoria Yan

The wave of yellow sweeping across France in the past two months crashed in Beirut on Dec. 23, coalescing thousands of indignant Lebanese citizens protesting decades of state incompetence. But analysts do not predict a change will come.

"So far the demonstrations have been relatively limited," Karim Bitar, director of research at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, told al-Monitor. "Considering the degree of public anger at corruption, mismanagement and years of bad governance, one could have expected much wider participation. Especially if you compare to what is happening in France."

Organized by several civil society groups on social media several days before, the demonstration saw significant attendance, which precipitated heavy military response. Journalist and protesters were beaten and intimidated by anti-riot forces on the ground as the security apparatus attempted to contain crowds dispersing throughout Beirut. Well over 20 armored cars, some carrying loaded machine guns, sped through the city in a display of excessive force.

"It's like we're living under martial law," one protester said. After a viral video circulated of Lebanese photojournalist Hasan Shaaban assaulted by a soldier, many sought a response from the state that has, until now, kept mum.

A few days after, however, the army released a statement calling the freedom of expression "sacred."

"The [army] command calls on citizens who want to express their opinion to do so peacefully and not affect the lives of others or their movement on the roads," it read. "The army will not be lenient with anyone who disrupts security or infiltrators among protests who try to shift these protests from their course."

Despite high tensions, the yellow vest demonstrations have since stalled largely due to the holidays. While a protest is scheduled for Jan. 12, some are wary that too much time has passed for the momentum to continue.

Another obstacle that could prevent demonstrations from growing further is the lack of an end goal. While protesters on



Another obstacle that could prevent demonstrations from growing further is the lack of an end goal. While protesters on Dec. 23 shared indignation toward state failure, a cohesive set of demands was largely absent.

Dec. 23 shared indignation toward state failure, a cohesive set of demands was largely absent.

For one, the Sabaa Party, Lebanon's youngest political party surfacing in 2016 as an anti-establishment alternative, called for the immediate formation of the government. Al-Monitor, which was present at the protests, saw party members passing out signs that read, "We want a government now," chanting for an end to political stagnation.

With sectarian considerations plaguing negotiations in appointing a Cabinet, the country has continued without a government for nearly eight months.

The demand, however, was not shared by all demonstrators. "I'm not here for any one reason," Mahmoud told Al-Monitor. Like many others present, Mahmoud was reluctant to give his last name for fear of retribution from the state. "There is no hope in our country."

There are no jobs, there is no money, everyone is leaving because there is no future here. A new government will not change that," he added.

Rami, another demonstrator who came with his wife and young child, told Al-Monitor he would like to see a country that his daughter could grow up in with an adequate education and proper health care. When asked whether he believed a government would address such issues, he laughed.

In a recent report published by U.S. consulting firm McKinsey, Lebanon, the world's third-most indebted country, showed to be deeply suffering across all sectors. The report was commissioned by the state to provide it with an "economic road map" out of its current situation.

"People know perfectly that a new government will not bring about genuine change," Bitar said. "The Lebanese are angry, but they are not naive. It is understood that a new government -- if or when it is formed -- will be a close replica of the current government of oligarchs."

According to Bitar, this general sentiment will also lead to the ultimate die-out of future demonstrations.

Sami Nader, director of the Levant Institute for Strategic Affairs, agreed that an end goal for protests in Lebanon is far from sight. "In France you had people going into the streets after a tax rise. There was a clear message they were conveying. In Lebanon we have long passed the half-year mark without a government, but we are not seeing people coming out because of that," Nader told Al-Monitor.

Ultimately, both analysts were unsure about the future of Lebanon's yellow vests. While the demonstration was certainly inspired by the momentum seen in France, they lack the organization to see their pleas addressed.

Bitar concluded that the protesters are aware that unlike in the West, their actions may not bear fruit, organized or not.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Extreme right of Europe and Netanyahu’s new mission to Rajavi Cult

➡ Ervand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York and a historian of Middle Eastern and particularly Iranian history, says “the money definitely comes from Saudis. There is no one else who could be subsidising them with this level of finance.”

■ MKO’s relationship with the Israeli regime

According to the Guardian, between 2007 and 2012, a number of Iranian nuclear scientists were attacked. In 2012, NBC news, citing two unnamed US officials, reported that the attacks were planned by Israel’s foreign intelligence agency and executed by MKO agents inside Iran.

According to the western media, it seems that the financial support in the recent years has largely come from Saudi Arabia and Israel (especially Saudi Arabia).

We have witnessed that Saudis have had a strong presence the meetings held by the hypocrites and their high-ranking figures have delivered several speeches supporting such groups and movements.

The Haaretz Newspaper reports Danny Yatom, the former head of the Mossad, that Israel can implement some of its anti-Iran plans through the MKO (Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization). Israel should consider all possibilities, including military conflict with Iran, but it should not exclude the capacity of intermediaries such as the MKO who have collaborated with Tel Aviv in assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists. Israel is training and providing this group.

The former head of the Mossad added that the organization is apparently linked to Saudi Arabia and can be used in two ways by the Jewish nation and Riyadh.

They worked as a source of information regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Israel can indirectly use the organization on social networks to influence the Iranian people.

Former Mossad head Meir Dagan, in an interview with CBS, revealed that Israel is helping the MKO and armed terrorist groups whose mission is to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran.



■ Saudi Arabia behind rapprochement between Israel and MEK

Saudi Arabia has for a long time been the main sponsor of MEK as it has been shown by the attendance of the influential figures of Saudi royal family in the meetings of the terrorist group in the European countries.

In recent years, the progress of Saudi Arabia’s relations with the Zionist regime and their common hostility towards Iran has become a factor for the Zionists to approach the MEK.

In the meantime, the Zionists deliver missions to the group in exchange for their financial and political support. The Rajavi group keeps an eye on Iran and spies on the country on behalf of the Israelis. Another mission that has been delivered to group is infiltrating into the far right parties in Europe to secure their support.

Of course, the Zionists themselves have had their own separate relations with European far right parties and are trying to advance their goals through the channel of the MEK. In this vein, the decline of anti-Semitismism feeling among the far-right parties was also a change that resulted from Israel’s approach to these parties. With regard to Israel’s rap-

prochement to the European far right parties, “Orient XXI” (Socialist Revolution in Arabia) website wrote “it all began on 19 December 2010, when a sizeable delegation arrived in Tel Aviv, consisting of some 30 leaders of the European Alliance for Freedom. As its name fails to indicate, this was an organization comprised of a series of parties belonging to the radical right.

Orient XXI added “it was the first time since the creation of Israel that the country had played host to such a sinister gathering, which included Geert Wilders of the Netherlands, Philip Dewinter from Belgium and Jorg Haider’s successor, Heinz-Christian Strache, from Austria.”

■ What were these neo-Fascists, who often denied the Holocaust and even worrying the loss of the Third Reich, doing in Israel?

They [neo-Fascists] participated in a Conference organized by the right wing of Likud Party which was dedicated to fight against terrorism.

Despite the unofficial specification of this move, the then Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman had long negotiated with Wilders, known for his criticism of Islam, and

he also compensated his blessing with the official visit of the settlements constructed on the West Bank of Jordan River.

According to the Air France Press (AFP), a man who had the dream of banning the Holy Quran in the Netherlands, “spoke against returning the occupied lands through making peace with Palestinians and raised the proposal of the voluntary settlement of Palestinians in Jordan” and then defended the settlements on West coast of Jordan River.

Everything is crystal clear that Israeli right- and right-extremism parties are ready in their “crusade” against the Palestinians to establish unity and amity even in the most unusual ones.

■ What is the reason for Israel to get closer to European extremist right-wing?

The obvious features of the emerging extremist parties in Europe are their opposition to traditional practices in European countries. For example, these parties weaken the convergence in Europe and undermined the position of the European Union in the international system.

Since the traditional European parties have a special look at democratic and human rights issues, they have always been critical of the Zionist regime’s actions against the Palestinians, and the European Union’s criticisms and condemnations of this regime has intensified in recent years. The Zionist regime is struggling to bring a deep divide between emerging and traditional parties through getting closer to the extremist right-wing parties in Europe, perhaps to reduce Brussels’s pressure on Tel Aviv.

Reducing Europe’s pressure on the Zionist regime means releasing Israel from a major dilemma. In other words, divisions among European countries and their challenge with emerging parties can be a factor in advancement of the goals of the Zionist regime at a macro level. Therefore, given the financial support of the MKO for the European extremist right-wing and the link between the Cult of Rajavi with Saudi and Israeli channels, it (Cult) has become a factor used by Zionism to create a rift in Europe.

Iran dealing major blow to U.S. influence in India, Iraq: Italian analyst

➡ Iran is aware of the importance of Iraq in the Middle East region, mainly in the medium term, as a way of pacifying the area through anti-terrorism operations. Equally important for Tehran is the development of a lasting relationship with Baghdad as a way of placing pressure on the U.S., which has a strong presence in the country. Ejecting the U.S. from Iraq should be an objective of both Baghdad and Tehran, since U.S. troops are an ongoing source of chaos and destabilization.

The visit to the Iraqi Kurds consolidates links with Tehran with a view to fighting extremism in the region, often fueled by such regional enemies of Iran as Saudi Arabia, Israel and the U.S. Zarif’s response to U.S. economic pressure is to increase cooperation with countries that have in recent years shown a particular openness to the U.S. Recent cooperation and developments with Iran by both India and Iraq confirm that Tehran is filling the gap left by Washington’s failing policies in the region.

■ The Iranian top diplomat’s trips were concurrent with the regional tour of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that took him to eight countries in one week. Jetting from capital to capital, meeting with kings, princes, and presidents, Pompeo’s goal was to get Arab countries to work together to roll back Iranian influence in the region. What is your take on that? What does the concurrence mean?

A: The tour undertaken by Pompeo to countries in the Middle East and North Africa comes after Trump’s announcement of the “withdrawal” of U.S. troops from Syria. Trump’s declaration is aimed at a domestic audience, to show how he is endeavoring to keep his electoral promises, one of which was his promise to withdraw U.S. troops from areas like the Middle East. Clearly this promise does not coincide with the strategic plans of the U.S. deep state, which seeks to foment chaos and destruction as a way of undermining geopolitical rivals in the region (Iran). Pompeo’s tour to historic allies

has confirmed that Washington is under heavy Israeli and Saudi pressure, which views the prospect of U.S. withdrawal as an irreparable strategic error.

Tel Aviv and Riyadh are fully aware that they are unable to support their obsessive battle against Tehran without the military assistance of the U.S. Washington’s withdrawal from Syria entails Israel and Saudi Arabia waving a white flag to Iran in Syria and the abandonment of efforts to overthrow Assad. Pompeo’s tour sought to reassure allies that Washington will not abandon the region and therefore the overall goal to counter Iran. The idea to create an Arab NATO to counter Iranian influence in the region seems dead, but it could very well be revived as a way of compensating U.S. allies. Much will depend on the split between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are both important players in the Middle East. Pompeo has sought to end the dispute, which, as he himself said, “benefits common adversaries (Iran)”.

Why USAID will never fund Palestinian development projects

TEHRAN (FNA) — It’s a huge mistake to assume that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will ever fund all its projects in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip as it doesn’t want to help exercise of Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty.

The US administration has already made the decision to cut funding to the Palestinians, and Dave Harden, former USAID Mission Director and Managing Director of the Georgetown Strategy Group, has already confirmed that. Harden says Washington plans to shut down USAID and that the US administration “demonstrates again a lack of nuance, sophistication, and appreciation for the complexity of the situation.”

Halting USAID projects in the West Bank and Gaza is another example of the end of the two-state solution. And President Donald Trump’s administration has already notified Congress of its decision to cut more than \$200 million in bilateral aid to the Palestinians, following a review of the funding for projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This should surprise no one, as President Trump says he will never endorse the idea of Palestinian “self-determination.” He won’t make genuine efforts to kick-start peace talks either.

He has already abandoned US support for the two-state solution, as giving the Palestinians self-determination would necessarily imply that they can establish an independent state on Palestinian soil. On the other hand, even if he does the impossible and endorses the idea, he will surely switch his stand the moment he feels like it.

Indeed, Trump has a history of self-contradictions and flip-flops. Since his election, Trump has switched his stands on everything from his signature Palestinian aid to the ongoing war on Syria. He has a way to go to before he matches the sheer volume of self-disagreement that he racked up prior to his election – and the Palestinian issue is not an exception:

Initially, Trump took headline positions on Israel, refusing to condemn the expansion of illegal settlements in Palestinian lands, and then he moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem Al-Quds. Relocation of the embassy was controversial because both Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem Al-Quds as their capital.

Trump now claims he wants to make peace in the long conflict the “ultimate deal.” US administrations over the years have been stymied in similar goals. Peace talks have been at an impasse for several years. Both Trump and Netanyahu are eager to show an improved relationship following eight frosty years with the Obama presidency. But experts have also warned that Trump should be careful not to risk provoking Arab states, whom he needs as counterweight to Iran in Iraq and Syria.

The facts tell another story. The US is not an honest broker and has never sought to bring about peace in the Middle East, let alone in Palestine. The US supports Israel’s expansionist policies, including its

illegal occupation and other violations of International Humanitarian Law. It supports Israel’s criminal policies financially, militarily, and diplomatically. The US also supports Saudi Arabia’s policies in the ongoing war on Yemen.

The Trump administration might state publicly that it is opposed to Israel’s settlement policy and ostensibly “pressure” Tel Aviv to freeze colonization activities; yet it will never cut back financial or military aid to Israel, even if it defies International Law and continues settlement construction. That message is perfectly well understood by Tel Aviv, which continues its attacks on Gaza.

We can still remember vividly how both the US House of Representatives and the Senate passed resolutions openly declaring support for Israel’s war on Gaza, despite a constant stream of reports evidencing Israeli war crimes. On the same token the US reaffirms its “strong support for Israel in its battle with Hamas” - a war crime complicity under International Law.

When Israel waged a war to punish the defenseless civilian population of Gaza last year, its pilots flew US-made F-16 fighter-bombers and Apache helicopter gunships, dropping US-made bombs, including the use of banned munitions in violation of International Law.

US diplomatic support for Israeli crimes includes its use of the veto power in the UN Security Council. When Israel was waging a devastating war against the civilian population and infrastructure of Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the US vetoed a cease-fire resolution. As Israel was waging war on Palestinian protesters last year, the US similarly delayed the passage of a resolution calling for an end to the violence.

Through its virtually unconditional support for Israel, the Trump administration had effectively blocked any steps to implement the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The so-called peace process has for many decades consisted of US and Israeli rejection of Palestinian self-determination and blocking of any viable Palestinian state. This year and the next, Trump will make sure this will continue to be the case under his presidency.

Hence, those that have long been thinking of a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue are apparently needed to get sober to realize that this is not, and has never been, a viable option. The international community should eventually come to realize that Israeli violence, brutality, aggression, crimes and occupation never end through diplomacy and civilized dialogue. Israel and its backers only believe in the barbaric rule of the jungle, so the international community should at least for once look at this problem through a pragmatic view. And it seems that the US policies in support of Israel, specially under Donald Trump, are ironically forcing the genuine advocates of the Palestinians’ rights into an age of sobriety.

U.S. law prof. on Hashemi’s arrest: Custody without cause violates 4th amendment

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American professor at the University of Miami School of Law said the imprisonment of Marzieh Hashemi, a U.S.-born Iranian news anchor arrested five days ago during a visit to the U.S., without a “probable cause” violates the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

“The Fourth Amendment forbids ‘unreasonable’ seizures,” Ricardo J. Bascuas told Tasnim.

He added, “So by definition, there is never good cause to believe a witness probably committed a crime. So by definition, there is never probable cause to believe a witness committed a crime and it is established that incarceration without probable cause violates the Fourth Amendment. Thus, the amendment plainly forbids arresting a witness”.

Professor Ricardo J. Bascuas teaches in the areas of evidence, criminal procedure, and international criminal law. He created and directs the School of Law’s Federal Appellate Clinic, which, in partnership with the Federal Public Defender’s Office for the Southern District of Florida, represents indigent defendants before the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Professor Bascuas is the co-author of the casebook Investigative Criminal Procedure: A Contemporary Approach. In 2014, the Faculty Senate awarded him the University’s Outstanding Teaching Award.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ In one of your recent interviews on Marzieh Hashemi’s arrest and imprisonment, you said the constitutionality of the material witness law has “never been meaningfully tested” in the US and that “the government only relies on it when they need a reason to arrest somebody but they don’t have one”. Please explain this.

A: A “material witness” is someone with information about a pending proceeding. In the 19th century, when courts were not open year-round, a court could summon a witness and ask the witness to promise to appear at a later court session, which might be months away. The witness was made to appear so that there would be a clear record in court that the witness was told of the future court date. If the witness recognized his obligation to appear – gave what the law called his “recognizance” – the witness would be released. Hence the phrased, “released on his own recognizance.” A witness could legally be detained only if the witness refused to promise to appear because that is a contempt of court. The common law imposes a duty on everyone to testify in court when summoned – unless the law creates an exception or “privilege,” as for example the Fifth Amendment creates a privilege against self-incrimination.

Because material witness arrests became less necessary over time, the law governing them was forgotten and distorted and now the government thinks it can arrest anyone it wants to label a witness without having to give any reasons. The government’s understanding of the law has never been meaningfully tested in court. The reason for that is that United States courts, like all common-law courts, decide only the legal questions that lawyers present. For many reasons, most lawyers for material witnesses have little reason to argue that it is always illegal to jail a person as a material witness because there is usually an easier way to get their client out of jail. Also, some lawyers may just assume that, if judges and prosecutors believe they are allowed to jail witnesses, they must be correct.

So, the argument that this is illegal is very seldom made. The argument is this: The Fourth Amendment forbids “unreasonable” seizures. An unreasonable seizure is one that is irrational or arbitrary – i.e., based on hunches or gut feelings rather than facts establishing that the person to be arrested probably committed a crime. By definition, there is never good cause to believe a witness probably committed a crime. So, by definition, there is never probable cause to believe a witness committed a crime and it is established that incarceration without probable cause violates the Fourth Amendment. Thus, the amendment plainly forbids arresting a witness.

■ Can US security forces put a potential material witness behind the bars for any reason and without any charges?

A: They can until a court tells them they can’t and that has not happened yet for reasons explained above.

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Tender/Document/Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following ten (10) day thereof.
Distribution Place	A) Hall No. 316, 3th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS), National Iranian Drilling Company, After Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. B) Jomhouri street , yeghma alley nio: 8th building floor no : 04 room no 428 -tehran -iran .
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Address	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

Tender Guarantee

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IRCS offering rehabilitation packages for the elderly

HEALTH **TEHRAN**—The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is offering modern rehabilitation packages to the elderly aged over 60 at Nour-e Afshar sub-specialty and charity hospital, the hospital chief has announced.

Soon enough the country will be facing an aging population and unfortunately the elderly are not very much physically healthy and older people grapple with various health problems, Majid Nouri regretted.

The aforesaid rehabilitation packages are offered to the elderly in an attempt to improve their health, IRNA news agency quoted Nouri as saying on Monday.

Early detection of memory disorders such as Alzheimer's and other cognitive disorders, prevention, treatment and management of stroke and lowering the risk of a second stroke, diagnosis of Parkinson and other physical disabilities, prevention and early diagnosis of depression and offering medical and non-drug treatments, offering rehabilitation services to stroke patients, patients with Parkinson, and patients who have undergone joint replacement surgeries as well as exercise therapy for musculoskeletal disorders are some of the services older persons can receive at the



hospital, he explained.

Moreover older people will receive the medical service under the supervision of specialists and can also enjoy nutritional counseling for a healthier diet at the hospital, Nouri highlighted.

He went on to say that in general many

older people complain about heart conditions, respiratory diseases as well as osteoporosis and digestive disorders and gastrointestinal diseases.

Additionally brain disorders along with diseases affecting mental health such as anxiety, depression, and cognitive disorders

are other problems older people are suffering from which may remain undiagnosed as the symptoms vary from one person to another, he added.

Based on the latest 2016 census carried out by the Statistical Center of Iran, Iranians' average life expectancy has risen to 74 years (72.5 years for males and 75.5 years for females).

Census reports of 2016 also indicate that the number of persons, aged 60 years or older, has increased by 1.5-fold over the past decade (2006-2016) in Iran. In 2006, some 5.1 million people were 60 or older, but the number rose to 6.1 million in 2011 and to 7.4 million in 2016. Currently, the country's total population stands at about 80 million, of which some 9.3 percent is 60 or older.

According to the United Nations, almost 700 million people are now over the age of 60. By 2050, 2 billion people, over 20 per cent of the world's population, will be 60 or older. The increase in the number of older people will be the greatest and the most rapid in the developing world, with Asia as the region with the largest number of older persons, and Africa facing the largest proportionate growth.

UK asthma sufferers experience three times more attacks than previously suggested

The number of potentially life-threatening asthma attacks suffered in the UK each year is more than three-times higher than previously thought, according to new data.

The Asthma UK charity surveyed more than 10,000 people with asthma and found each had an attack on average twice a year.

Extrapolated across 5.4 million people in the UK currently being treated for asthma, experts calculated that this averaged one attack every three seconds.

Previous studies have suggested that the rate was closer to one every 10 seconds, the charity said.

"It is shocking to think that every three seconds in the UK someone could be having an asthma attack, a terrifying experience than can cause distress and in some cases prove fatal," said Dr Andy Whittamore, clinical lead at Asthma UK.

Three people a day, on average die from asthma attacks and with temperatures expected to drop the charity is warning patients to carry their inhaler as cold air and coughs can be a trigger.



"Having an asthma attack can feel like being a fish out of water and it's terrifying," said Kelly May, 31, a hairdresser from London, who has had hundreds of asthma attacks since she was a year old.

Ms May said that too often people "think asthma isn't

serious" but she is always aware each one can land her in A&E – or prove fatal.

"In winter, I must be especially careful as the slightest cold can land me in hospital fighting for my life," she added.

NHS data shows there were more than 77,000 hospital admissions for the condition last year.

In the wake of its new figures Asthma UK is warning people with the condition to think about whether their symptoms are under control, and if not to see their GP to prevent attacks.

If they are using their reliever inhaler (usually a blue color) three or more times a week, or waking up at night because of their asthma, they should contact their GP.

They should also seek help if their symptoms, such as wheezing or a cough, are getting worse or are interfering with their usual activities.

Those with a preventer inhaler (usually colored brown) should take it daily to help build up protection against asthma attacks.

(Source: The Independent)

100 diabetes care centers set up in Iran

HEALTH **TEHRAN**—In the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2018), some 100 diabetes care centers have been established in 60 universities of medical sciences nationwide, Mehdi Shadnough, head of the Health Ministry's management center for transplantation and special diseases has said.



Some 200,000 patients suffering from diabetes are receiving treatment at the centers, Fars news agency quoted Shadnough as saying on Sunday.

Afshin Ostovar, the Health Ministry's director for non-communicable diseases, said on Sunday that a national diabetes survey entitled "DiaCare" will come on stream in Iran, with the purpose of combatting and preventing the adverse effects of the non-communicable disease.

He added, that is an extensive survey collecting 13,000 samples from the patients suffering diabetes type 2 and is one of the largest scale programs nationwide.

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

Correction

In the news published on January 21 titled "DiaCare national diabetes survey to get underway in Iran" the paragraph mentioning the collaboration between national institute for health research and Sanofi on 10 nationwide surveys is changed as below:

The national institute for health research (affiliated to the Ministry of Health) will conduct 10 nationwide surveys in the next year (starting on March 21) in various fields of health, and "DiaCare" will be carried out collaboratively with Sanofi (a French multinational pharmaceutical company headquartered in Paris), he highlighted.

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

FOR: EMBASSY/COMPANY

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

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

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

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

Other areas:
Farmaniyeh
Aghdasiyeh
Shahrak Gharb
Shariati-Pasdaran
Valiasre
Tajrish
Jordan
Vanak
Arjantin
Zafar...
nice cases ready to move in.

“From Sultaniyya to Florence”: Tehran conference to address medieval architecture

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A range of architectural designs and craftsmanship traditions of the 14th and 15th centuries will be discussed at a Tehran conference titled “From Sultaniyya to Florence”.



Several Iranian and Italian experts are scheduled to deliver lectures in the event, which will be held at Shahid Beheshti University on February 23, CHTN reported.

Sultaniyya, which is also spelled as Soltaniyeh, was briefly the capital of Persia’s Ilkhanid dynasty (a branch of the Mongol dynasty) in the 14th century.

The city has long been a tourist destination. It is home to a UNESCO-registered mausoleum of the same name, where Ol-jaytu who was the eighth Ilkhanid dynasty ruler from 1304 to 1316 is laid to rest.

According to UNESCO, the mausoleum’s interior decoration is so outstanding that scholars like A.U. Pope have described the building as “anticipating the Taj Mahal”.

Ashtian’s handmade soap added to national heritage list

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The centuries-old art of soap making in Ashtian, a city in west-central Iran, has been registered on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list.



“No chemicals are used in the production of Ashtian’s traditional soaps and they are entirely made from animal fat in a completely natural and organic process,” ISNA quoted a local official as saying on Monday.

The soap is famous as a souvenir of Ashtian and the craft goes down in history from some half a millennium, the report added.

The city lies in a fertile agricultural district, dominantly watered by qanats and surface streams.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Palaces and Parks of Potsdam and Berlin

The Palaces and Parks of Potsdam and Berlin (Sanssouci) represent a self-contained ensemble of architecture and landscape gardening in the 18th and 19th centuries.

This ensemble, having an outstanding artistic rank, has its origin in the work of the most significant architects and landscape gardeners of their time in Northern Germany - G.W. von Knobelsdorff (1699-1753), C. von Gontard (1731-1791), C.G. Langhans (1732-1808), K.F. Schinkel (1781-1841), P.J. Lenné (1789-1866) and their co-operators.



Together with highly imaginative sculptors, painters, craftsmen, building workers, and gardeners, they created Sanssouci, the New Garden, the Park of Babelsberg, and other grounds in the surrounding area of Potsdam as an overall work of art of high quality, European rank, and international standing.

The World Heritage property enfolds the Palaces and Parks of Potsdam and Berlin including buildings, parks, and designed spaces, which are intuitively, territorially and historically aligned with Sacrow Castle and Park and the Sauveur Church.

The cultural landscape with its parks and buildings was designed and constructed between 1730 and 1916 in a beautiful region of rivers, lakes, and hills. The underlying concept of Potsdam was carried out according to Peter Joseph Lenné’s plans, which he designed after the mid-1800s, to transform the Havel landscape into the cultural landscape it is today. These designs still determine the layout of Potsdam’s cultural landscape. The ensemble of parks of Potsdam is a cultural property of exceptional quality. It forms an artistic whole, whose eclectic nature reinforces its sense of uniqueness.

(Source: UNESCO)

Ancient hill rescued form destruction

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran’s cultural heritage body has recently defined new boundaries for Negar-Khatun hill in order to protect the ancient site from deliberate destruction.

A demarcation project has recently been completed on the hill to eliminate threats of land-grabbing, illegal construction or repurposing its lands to agricultural fields, CHTN quoted archaeologist Iman Ronasi as saying on Sunday.

“Over the past years, [some] indigenous farmers brought serious and irreversible damage to the hill by leveling [segments of] it to add to their lands,” Ronasi explained.

“The other damage to this hill was illegal construction within its boundaries or even on its slops, he added.

The mound roughly stretched 110 meters in the south-north direction, the archaeologist added.

Some 600 households are living in the village, which also includes some 70



industrial units.

Authorized and supervised by the Cultural

Heritage and Tourism Research Center, a team of archaeologists established the boundaries

Massive cistern getting back to its former glory

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Restoration of Asadabad cistern, believed to be the largest of its kind in Iran, has been 85 percent completed, making it ready to be toured by visitors, governor of Asadabad has said.

“Restoration of the country’s largest Ab Anbar (cistern), which is located in Asadabad, [Hamedan province], is 85 percent complete and goes through the final stage. It will be inaugurated and put into operation in the next [Iranian calendar] year,” ISNA quoted Karim Hamidvand as saying on Sunday.

The monument, named “Ab Anbar-e Sheikh Ali Khan-e Safavi”, dates from the Safavid era (1501–1736) and is lo-

cated in the city’s main bazaar, the report said, adding that the cistern is 18 steps down from the ground, in a depth of six meters.

The main tank of the cistern measures 20 by 15 meters. It used to supply water to the city and some nearby agricultural lands.

Such underground reservoirs or ab-anbars are parts of the iconic qanat systems, which rely on snow fed streams flowing down from surrounding mountains.

Qanats, according to the UNESCO, provide exceptional testimony to cultural traditions and civilizations in desert areas with an arid climate.

Pilgrims mourn martyrdom of Prophet’s daughter



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A host of Shia pilgrims commemorated the martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatimah Zahra (SA), the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in a reunion held in Qom on Sunday.

The occasion, which falls on the 13th day of the lunar Islamic month of Jamadi-al-Awwal, is marked in other countries, including Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan.

Farmers collect daffodils in Fars province



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Every January, gardeners in Mohr county start collecting daffodils during harvest season to be sold in local markets.

The semi-tropical region, located in southern Fars province, is richly adorned with voluminous daffodil farms that are a source of charm for wintertime travelers as well.

Some other southern cities also hold festivals dedicated to daffodils.

The rise of Halal Tourism

By Debra Kamin

For one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global travel industry, there is no pork on the hotel dinner menus. There are flights with no alcohol on the drink carts, resorts with separate swimming pools for men and women, and daily itineraries with built-in break times for the five daily calls to prayer.

Since 2016, the number of Muslim travelers has grown nearly 30 percent, and a recent joint study by Mastercard and Crescent Rating, a research group that tracks halal-friendly travel, projects that over the next decade that sector’s contribution to the global economy will jump to \$300 billion from \$180 billion. With a population that is disproportionately young, educated and upwardly mobile, they are one of the fastest-growing demographics on the global tourism scene.

But this wasn’t always the case.

In 2015, Soumaya Hamdi went roadtripping through Asia with her husband and her then 4-month-old baby. The trio visited Singapore and Malaysia, and then caught a flight to South Korea and on to Japan. The trip was thrilling, but Ms. Hamdi and her husband, who are both observant Muslims, found the daily search for halal-certified food a difficult one.

Ms. Hamdi, who is based in London, began blogging about the best Muslim-friendly restaurants she found, as well as prayer facilities and sites that were particularly welcoming for a family with a young baby. Those musings turned into Halal Travel Guide, an online platform offering tips, recommendations and curated itineraries for Muslim travelers. Her timing was right.

“In Europe the Muslim community is now in its third or fourth generation. They are educated and have good paying jobs,” said Ufuk Secgin, chief marketing officer for Halal Booking, a Muslim-focused vacation search engine. “For the first generation, their idea of a holiday was visiting the family in the home country. This has changed.”

Ufuk Secgin, chief marketing officer for Halal Booking, said that for “first generation” Muslim travelers, a typical trip was visiting their home country. “This has changed,” he said.

At ITB Asia this October, a leading travel show held in Singapore, organizers partnered with two halal travel authorities, Crescent Rating and Halal Trip, to offer



Two Muslim travelers on a recent trip to Madrid.

Muslims now make up one of the fastest-growing segments of the global travel industry. In response, hotels and tour operators are increasingly trying to meet their dietary and religious needs.

specialized panel discussions and showcases targeting the estimated 156 million Muslims who will book travel between now and 2020.

At the heart of much of the discussion was matters of the belly. For Muslim travelers, “the number one factor is good quality halal food,” Ms. Hamdi said in an email exchange. “I’m not talking about curry or biryani — I’m talking about authentic local food that is halal. After that, it’s usually prayer facilities.”

Tourists’ global demand for halal food has grown so much, in fact, that Have Halal Will Travel, a Singapore-based online community for Muslim travelers, has also partnered with ITB Asia with a three-hour conference and special booth space focusing on foodie-centric outreach to the Muslim tourism sector.

Like Halal Travel Guide, Have Halal Will Travel was founded in 2015. Today, their content reaches 9.1 million

users each month, according to their founder, Mikhael Goh. Mr. Goh dreamed up the site with three friends while studying abroad in Seoul; he found himself frustrated on a daily basis with a lack of information about where to find quality halal food.

“We were thinking, why is it in 2015, when there is Yelp and TripAdvisor and so many popular apps and services to tell you where to eat and where to travel, why on earth is there so little information for Muslims?” Mr. Goh said in a phone interview. “Not just about food — yes, halal food is the basis of a lot of things, but also about safety and prayer. There was a general lack of information out there and the information that did exist was so fragmented.”

Only a handful of years later, that gap in the market is now teeming with niche sites, many of them written specifically for young Muslim women. At Passport and Plates, the Los Angeles-based blogger Sally Elbassir chronicles her global foodie adventures where pork and alcohol are always off the menu; at Arabian Wanderess, Esra Alhamal writes about traveling as a female, Muslim millennial on a budget; and at the popular Muslim Travel Girl, run by the Bulgaria-born, Britain-based Elena Nikolova, readers can learn about Muslim-friendly honeymoon resorts with private pools and get tips for a D.I.Y. Umrah (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca).

Many of the bloggers interviewed for this article echoed the same sentiment: Their goal is not just to make it easier for Muslim travelers to find food, prayer spaces and alcohol-free activities that appeal to them. It’s also to support those travelers to branch out of their comfort zones and feel empowered exploring the world.

“We specialize in pushing people to non-Muslim majority countries,” said Mr. Goh. “The most popular destinations we work on are Japan and Korea. Our audience is young — 25 to 30 years old — and very influenced by K-pop and Instagram, so we write a lot about how welcoming those places are.”

Ms. Hamdi of Halal Travel Guide agreed. “We encourage Muslims to seek culturally immersive travel experiences outside of the traditional Muslim-friendly destinations such as Dubai and Morocco,” she said. “Muslims are looking for added value to their trips — from private beaches where women can bathe without men to disturb them, and more than this, trips that offer the Muslim traveler the chance to experience something completely different.” (Source: The New York Times)

Scientists finally solve mystery of how long a day is on Saturn

Set your timers for 10 hours, 33 minutes and 38 seconds — scientists have finally figured out how long a day lasts on Saturn, cracking a lingering mystery about the ringed gas giant.

That's according to newly published research that uses data gathered by NASA's Cassini mission before the spacecraft's destruction in September 2017.

The new calculation shaves several minutes off previous estimates for a Saturn day, which scientists have been making for decades based on data from the Cassini mission and its predecessor, Voyager.

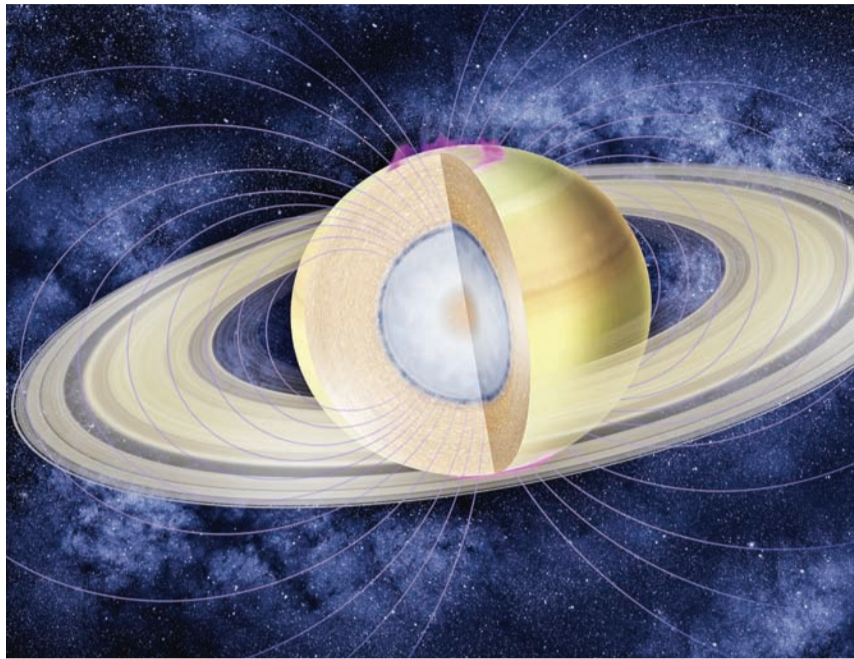
The "researchers used waves in the rings to peer into Saturn's interior, and out popped this long-sought, fundamental characteristic of the planet. And it's a really solid result."

Cassini Project Scientist Linda Spilker said in a statement.

It may seem like it should be easy to measure the length of a day on a planet — just wait and watch the world spin. But Saturn's precise day length has stumped scientists for decades. Because the planet is a gas giant, researchers can't watch steady landmarks through the clouds, as they could with a rocky planet.

■ The planet's magnetic field

Scientists can also typically use the tilt of a planet's magnetic field to measure its day length. But that didn't work for Saturn, because the field aligns nearly perfectly with the planet's rotation axis, stymying their calculations. One scientist who has studied the planet's magnetic field said that the day-length uncertainty is "a bit



embarrassing," speaking in an interview with space.com about research published

in October.

These challenges left scientists with

Saturn's precise day length has stumped scientists for decades. Because the planet is a gas giant, researchers can't watch steady landmarks through the clouds, as they could with a rocky planet.

Unraveling of 58-year-old corn gene mystery may have plant-breeding implications

In discovering a mutant gene that "turns on" another gene responsible for the red pigments sometimes seen in corn, researchers solved an almost six-decades-old mystery with a finding that may have implications for plant breeding in the future.

The culmination of more than 20 years of work, the effort started when, in 1997, Surinder Chopra, professor of maize genetics at Penn State, received seeds from a mutant line of corn. At the time, Chopra was a postdoctoral scholar at Iowa State University, and he brought the research with him when he joined the Penn State faculty in 2000.

The mystery involved a spontaneous gene mutation that causes red pigments to show up in various corn plant tissues, such as kernels, cobs, tassels, silk and even stalks, for a few generations and then disappear in subsequent progeny.

■ The corn genetics

It might seem like a minor concern to the uninitiated, but because corn genetics have long been studied as a model system, the question has significant implications for plant biology.

"In corn, genes involved in pigment biosynthesis have been used in genetic studies for more than a century — pigmentation in corn is a relatively simple trait, which makes it ideal for use as a marker for genetic research," Chopra said.

The "mutant corn plants were identified in 1960 by Dr. Charles Burnham (University of Minnesota), and that seed was given to one of his students, Derek Styles. We received the seed from Styles in 1997, and we were entrusted to continue the research."

Chopra led efforts to introgress the genes from the mutant corn, dubbed Ufo1 — unstable factor for orange1 — into various



inbred corn lines to be studied.

Since he came to Penn State, Chopra's research group in the College of Agricultural Sciences has grown and backcrossed lines of corn plants at both the Penn State Agronomy Farm and in greenhouses on campus.

In the last three years, the researchers, who recently published their findings in The Plant Cell, have grown more than 4,000 of the backcrossed plants to map where the cause of Ufo1 is located in the genome.

■ The red pigments

But the Ufo1 mutant gene does not actually cause the red pigments to appear in corn — that is caused by a gene called the pericarp color1, or p1.

Researchers found that the Ufo1 gene is actually controlled by a transposon — "jumping gene" — that sits close to the Ufo1 gene. Transposons are sequences of DNA that move from one location in the genome to another, and can influence the expression of nearby essential genes.

When this transposon is switched on, the Ufo1 gene is also turned on, which triggers the p1 gene to signal the plant to produce the red pigments. But when the transposon is off, the Ufo1 gene goes silent and so does the p1-controlled pigment pathway. That is the main reason the Ufo1 gene went unidentified for so long and the mystery persisted, according to Chopra.

(Source: phys.org)

Two tiny beetle fossils offer evolution and biogeography clues

It is well-known that living fossils exhibit stasis over geologically long time scales. Examples are the panda and ginkgo. Now, two tiny beetles trapped in 99-million-year-old amber may join this group.

Beetles are the most species-rich group of animals on our planet. Among four extant suborders of beetles, polyphaga is the largest and most diverse group.

The origin and early evolutionary history of polyphagan beetles have been largely based on evidence from the derived and diverse 'core polyphaga', whereas little is known about the species-poor basal polyphagan lineages, which include Clambidae and four other extant families.

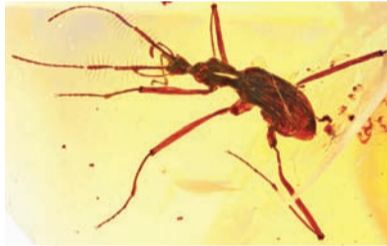
Recently, an international team led by Dr. CAI Chenyang, from the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, reported two new and rare species of the extant family Clambidae from Burmese amber: Acalyptomerus thayerae Cai and Lawrence, 2019, and Sphaerotherax uenoi Cai and Lawrence, 2019. They are important for understanding the early evolution and biogeography of the family and even for polyphagan beetles.

■ The described species

Clambidae is a small group of small-sized (usually 0.7-2.0 mm long) polyphagan beetles distributed worldwide, with approximately 150 described species grouped in five extant genera.

Most clambid adults occur in decaying vegetation, leaf litter and rotten wood and occasionally fly at dusk.

The two new species, represented by five well-preserved fossils, were discovered by Dr. CAI and colleagues from mid-Cretaceous Burmese



amber. Both species are extremely morphologically close to their living counterparts, and can be placed in extant genera.

Acalyptomerus thayerae (about 1.05-1.15 mm long) has a close affinity to A. herbertfranzi, a species currently occurring in Mesoamerica and northern South America.

Sphaerotherax uenoi (about 0.71 mm long) is closely related to extant species of Sphaerotherax, which are usually collected in forests of Nothofagus in Australia, Chile and New Zealand.

The discovery of two Cretaceous species from northern Myanmar indicates that both genera had lengthy evolutionary histories, originating at least by the earliest Cenomanian, and were probably more widespread than at present.

Remarkable morphological similarities between fossil and living species suggest that both genera changed little over long periods of geological time, which is usually considered to be a feature of living fossils.

The long-term persistence of similar mesic microhabitats such as leaf litter may account for the 99-million-year morphological stasis in Acalyptomerus and Sphaerotherax.

(Source: natureworldnews.com)

Scientists discover freaky fish thriving in waters we thought were deadly to life

In the water, it's getting harder to breathe. Suffocating dead zones with little or no oxygen are pervading the world's oceans, rivers, and streams.

This phenomenon — which has exploded in recent decades — poses an extinction-level nightmare for marine populations already beset by a complex interaction of human-made menace.

In a new paper, researchers report the discovery of deep-sea fish who were found thriving in virtually oxygen-less conditions that scientists previously assumed to be deadly.

"I could hardly believe my eyes," biological oceanographer Natalya Gallo from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography explains in a blog detailing the research.

"We observed cusk-eels, grenadiers, and lollipop sharks actively swimming around in areas where the oxygen concentration was less than one percent of typical surface oxygen concentrations."

In 2015, Gallo and fellow researchers conducted eight dives with a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) on an expedition in the Gulf of California led by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI).

■ Oxygen concentrations

Readings from sensors on the ROV indicated the oxygen concentrations in this environment were between one-tenth to one-fortieth as low as those tolerated by other low-oxygen-tolerant fish.

"We were in a suboxic habitat, which should exclude fish, but instead there were hundreds of fish," Gallo explains.

"I immediately knew this was something special that



challenged our existing understanding of the limits of hypoxia (low-oxygen) tolerance."

According to the researchers, fish are generally considered hypoxia intolerant due to their metabolic requirements, but clearly some extremophiles swim within their scaly ranks.

Even amongst such exceptional fish, though, the cusk-eel (Cherublemma emmela) and the lollipop catshark (Cephalurus cephalus) look to be outliers, peaking in number at depths of between 600–900 meters (1,969–2,953 ft).

Alongside these, the researchers also observed the occasional grenadier (Nezumia liolepis) and ogocephalid anglerfish (Dibranchius spinosus), but in fewer numbers,

and seemingly preferring to occupy more oxygenated waters.

■ Hypoxic conditions

"Prior to this study, fish were not expected to tolerate hypoxic conditions this severe," the authors explain in their paper, although they acknowledge they're not able to explain how C. emmela and C. cephalus developed the ability to thrive under these extreme suboxic conditions.

It's hypothetically possible, the researchers suggest, that enlarged gills have enabled both species to ramp up their oxygen uptake.

They may also possess low metabolic requirements thanks to their small, soft bodies, but Gallo and her co-authors point out further in-depth examinations would be needed to verify this.

As the study acknowledges, other sorts of extremophiles have names to denote their special abilities; animals that tolerate high temperatures are called hyperthermophile, while creatures that can handle high levels of salt are known as halophile.

The extreme hypoxia tolerance of C. emmela and C. cephalus is unprecedented, however, so the researchers say we need a new name for them. They propose 'ligooxiphile', which in Greek equates to 'little oxygen lover'.

However these amazing animals got this way, it's a unique trait other marine life might sadly be forced to emulate, and soon — or die trying.

The way things are headed, though, even extremophiles are up against it, the researchers warn.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Desalination plants produce more waste brine than thought, says researcher

As clean freshwater has become scarcer around the world — especially in arid regions such as the Middle East and North Africa — those countries that can afford it have increasingly turned to desalination. That energy-intensive process extracts salt from sea (or other saline) water, transforming it into water that's fit for human consumption. There are now nearly 16,000 desalination plants either active or under construction across the globe.

"(But) they don't just produce desalinated water," explains Manzoor Qadir, a researcher at the United Nations University in Canada. "They also produce brine."

Brine is the concentrated salt water that's left after desalination. But Qadir says, "there is no comprehensive assessment" of how much is being produced. So, Qadir and his colleagues decided to come up with an estimate — which was published in the journal Science of the Total Environment and released Monday.

Qadir's team analyzed available literature as well as a database of roughly 20,000 desalination plants (including some that are no longer active). Since there was no metric specifically for brine production, they used factors such as the type of input water and the desalination technology being used to approximate a plant's "recovery ratio" — or how much brine is produced compared to desalinated water.

The literature had long assumed a one-to-one ratio. But Qadir's study found that the average desalination plant actually produced 1.5 times more brine than desalinated water — fifty percent more than previously thought. That translates to 51.8 billion cubic meters of brine each year, which Qadir says is enough to cover all of Florida, a foot deep.

Sukkur is a famous city of Pakistan, located on the west bank of River Indus. One of the landmarks of the city are Lansdowne and Ayub Bridges for the Road and Rail Traffic. Indus is one of the major rivers of the south Asia. (Source: nationalgeographic.com)

Mangrove patches deserve greater recognition no matter the size: research

Governments must provide stronger protection for crucial small mangrove patches, is the call led by scientists at international conservation charity ZSL (Zoological Society of London), which hosts the IUCN SSC Mangrove Specialist Group, in a letter published on 18 January 2019.

With nearly 35% of mangroves lost from around the world since the 1980s, primarily due to coastal development, the future loss of seemingly small mangrove patches to new construction projects such as airports or aquaculture is extremely worrying for coastal communities and Critically Endangered wildlife like the pygmy three-toed sloth (Bradypus pygmaeus) and green sawfish (Pristis zijsron) that are protected by, and reliant on, these habitats.

Large swathes of mangroves in Southeast Asia, such as in the Philippines, have been cleared to make way for aquaculture, mainly shrimp and fish ponds. Elsewhere, in the Maldives, mangroves are being cleared to make way for a controversial new airport to be built.

Mangroves offer vital ecosystem services to local communities, providing food, coastal protection from extreme weather events, fisheries support and key natural carbon storage facilities. They clean water by trapping sediments and pollutants and help



mitigate the impacts of storm surges and tsunamis on coastal communities, particularly in vulnerable low-lying island nations.

Despite warnings from leading scientists about the dire ramifications of losing mangroves, the conversion and degradation of mangrove forests for infrastructure or agriculture still occur — especially for smaller mangrove patches.

The letter states that the continued loss of small patches of mangroves could result in the disconnect of habitats, meaning natural wildlife corridors used by species to move freely throughout the landscape could be lost.

Dr. David Curnick, post-doctoral researcher at ZSL's Institute of Zoology and member of the IUCN SSC Mangrove Specialist Group said: "Given the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's projections, we simply cannot afford to lose more mangrove forests, irrespective of their size. (Source: eurekaalert.org)

Scientists create monstrous hydras with several functional heads

Researchers at the University of Geneva created creatures that sprouted multiple heads when they engineered hydras not to express the Sp5 gene. The study may pave way for treatment that can target cancer cells. Pictured is a species of hydra.

The tiny freshwater hydra is essentially an immortal creature. It can regenerate an entirely new animal from any fragment of its body with just a few thousands of cells. It also does this without sprouting multiple heads.

In a new study published in the journal Nature Communications on Jan. 19, researchers showed that it only takes one genetic tweak to create monstrous hydras with several functional heads.

The researchers already have an idea that the gene Wnt3 is needed to prompt the growth of the head. The Wnt3 activates the receptor and genetic activator known as beta-catenin/TCF to initiate the process of growing the head. The researchers, however, still have to find the off switch that prevents the hydra from growing multiple heads.

The research team developed a gene-screening strategy to identify this inhibitor based on the results of a study conducted by the researchers in Germany on the planarian flatworm, a close relative of the hydra that also regenerates.

Study researcher Brigitte Galliot, from the University of Geneva, and colleagues eventually identified a gene that codes for a protein called Sp5.

The researchers found that when a hydra needs a new head, it releases Wnt3 that clings to beta-catenin/TCF, which then activates a bunch of genes that include more Wnt3 and Sp5.

In the absence of SP5, however, the Wnt3 continues the cycle, which results in many heads spouting all over a regenerating hydra. (Source: techtimes.com)

Children of Iranian mothers, foreign fathers permitted to get Iranian nationality

WOMEN TEHRAN — Children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers can get Iranian nationality upon their request, said Hassan Noruzi, a spokesman for the legal and judicial affairs committee of the Iranian parliament (Majlis).



The newly approved bill on giving Iranian nationality to a child born to an Iranian mother and foreign father awaits further debate and vote by parliament in a bid to turn into a law, IRNA reported. The bill was studied and passed by the committee, represented by some government, police and judiciary officials and lawmakers, added Noruzi.

“The child(ren) of marriages between Iranian women and foreign men, when under 18 years old, can acquire the Iranian nationality if their mother requests so,” explained the lawmaker.

If there is no request by the mother, the child(ren) can apply for Iranian nationality themselves, when getting over 18 years old, he said.

The applicants should be clear of any criminal record, the MP noted.

The bill’s approval is the first step toward being passed as a law, Noruzi said adding, however, no deadline has yet been set for that.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Potato leek soup

There is nothing better on a chilly, damp day than a steaming bowl of potato leek soup; and conversely, few things are as delicious and refreshing on a hot, sweaty day than a bowl of ice cold vichyssoise.

Ingredients:



4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 1/2 pounds trimmed leeks, cleaned and thinly cut
2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
1 1/4 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled, cut into eighths
3 cups chicken or vegetable broth, or more as needed to adjust thickness
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup creme fraiche
1 pinch cayenne pepper
Chopped fresh chives for garnish

Directions:

Melt butter in soup pot over medium-high heat. Add leeks and salt; cook until leeks begin to wilt. Reduce heat to medium or medium-low and cook until soft and almost pastelike, 30 to 40 minutes.

Place potatoes in the pot; add chicken broth. Adjust heat so mixture simmers slowly. Cook until potatoes are soft, about 30 minutes. Puree mixture with an immersion blender or in batches in a blender. Whisk in heavy cream and creme fraiche. Heat over medium heat. Add more salt, if needed, and cayenne pepper. Do not boil.

Serve with a drizzle of creme fraiche and a sprinkle of chopped chives.

LEARN ENGLISH

Taking the GMAT

Ash: I can’t seem to progress up the **career ladder** no matter how hard I try and I have been here for 2 years already! Mindy: Well, have you thought of getting an **MBA**? I heard it **does wonders** in getting you to the top.

Ash: An MBA... well my degree wasn’t in business, the business schools won’t be interested in me.

Mindy: Nonsense! The business schools measure your ability through a test called **GMAT**.

Ash: GMAT? What does that stand for and what will the test contain?

Mindy: **Graduate Management** Admission Test, it contains three parts; **Analytical** Writing Assessment, the **Quantitative** section, and the **Verbal** section. Not only does the test mark you on the number of questions answered but also on the difficulty.

Ash: Okay this sounds a little tough, how am I supposed to practice for this?

Mindy: Up to you, you could have a **one on one** session with a **tutor** or group sessions, you can also use free or private computer software.

Ash: No matter what I do I’m going to ace this test and go on to become a **corporate fat cat**!

Mindy: Umm... That’s the spirit!

Key vocabulary

career ladder: a metaphor for job promotion

MBA: Master of Business Administration

do/work wonders: to be very effective in solving a problem

GMAT: Graduate Management Admissions Test

management: the action of controlling an area of a business
graduate: someone who has completed a university degree, especially a first degree

analytical: pertaining to or proceeding by analysis

quantitative: type of information based in quantities

verbal: consisting of or in the form of words

one on one: between only two people

tutor: someone who gives private lessons to one student or a small group, and is paid directly by them

corporate: related to business

fat cat: wealthy and privileged person

Supplementary vocabulary

greed: excessive desire, as for wealth or power

wizard: a person of amazing skill or accomplishment

market: the field of trade or business

thesis: a dissertation on a particular subject in which one has done original research

professor: a teacher of the highest academic rank in a college or university

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Iranian female entrepreneur returns from U.S. to empower rural women

1 → Maria, 49, got her high school diploma in applied sciences to fulfill her parents’ wish on becoming a doctor. However, she changed her mind and began to learn art works.

Maria, originally from the Iranian tribe of Bakhtiari, started with the art of painting with watercolor, miniature and leather painting.

Maria was aware that the small village of Garmeh is an attractive destination for tourists who visited there from more than 50 world countries.

In her first visit to Garmeh, Maria found that the only handicraft was basketry. Later, she understood that the art of weaving textiles were forgotten in that area and only 4 middle-aged women, knew the art of weaving towels.

Visiting the great number of tourists in the area and their interest to buy handicrafts, the idea sparks in Maria’s mind and she began to take steps for helping people to earn more money out of the handicrafts.

Currently, about 50 people, mostly women, directly or indirectly, are earning their life under Maria’s entrepreneurship.

All the women being trained and employed by Maria are the vulnerable rural women or breadwinner women being supported by State Welfare Organization of Iran and Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, she explained.

The effect she made on desert area region of Khur and Biabanak is a fundamental effect, not merely in the surface, she believes.

The area is a tourist attracting area, however, in the last years no handicrafts were presented to the tourists visiting that field while today the most attractive



handicrafts exhibitions are held by the people of the area, she stated.

“When I started to work on the handicrafts of the area not only the rural



Women around the world march against austerity and violence

Propelled by a mass public rendition of Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves and accompanied by a thudding police helicopter overhead, hundreds of protesters have rallied in central London in solidarity with an estimated 89 Women’s Marches worldwide.

In Athens, Berlin, Washington DC and Los Angeles, to name just a few, tens of thousands of demonstrators turned out to protest against violence against women and the impact of policies of austerity. They also had some choice words for Donald Trump and Theresa May. “Today is about improving the living and working conditions of women,” said Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, a lawyer, activist and the organizer of the London protest. “On the ground and in the data, it is proven that austerity is disproportionately affecting women, especially vulnerable women.”

Themed as the Bread and Roses March, in homage to the 1912 strike that revolutionized working women’s rights in the United States, the London chapter closed down the length of Regent Street, cheered through Piccadilly Circus and marched on to Trafalgar Square to hear a coalition of speakers from the Fawcett Society, Solace Women’s Aid and the Women’s Equality Party.

Students Isobel, 18 and Nicole, 17, had travelled from Kingston for their first protest. Nicole was there “for science and to prove a career in engineering can be for everyone”.

“Nicole’s teacher wouldn’t give her the textbook for her physics class for over a month because he assumed she was going to drop out,” said Isobel. “I complained about him but I’m the one who got in trouble,” said Nicole. “He would separate groups in class into boys against girls.”

The first Women’s March, held the day after Donald Trump’s inauguration in 2017, was the largest single-day protest in U.S. history, drawing millions of people to the streets in the U.S. and around the world to reject Trump in a colorful riot of placards, fury and pink “Pussyhats”.

But the marches held in the U.S. yesterday appeared to struggle to reach the heights of previous iterations, attracting tens of thousands rather than millions of people after controversial statements by organizers were blamed for pushing down numbers.

While rallies took place in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and, chiefly, Washington DC, they



The London chapter of the Women’s March pass through Piccadilly Circus, London

Tens of thousands take to city streets to protest against violence and the impact of austerity on their lives.

appeared diminished after accusations of antisemitism. In 2017 Tamika Mallory, one of the co-chairs of the Women’s March leadership, was criticized after she posted a photo on Instagram of herself and Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader who has made anti-semitic statements, calling him “the GOAT” — greatest of all time. Mallory has since said that she does not agree with all of Farrakhan’s statements, but refused to condemn him.

The row, though, continues to cast a shadow. Yesterday rifts within the movement caused rival events to be held in New York and Philadelphia, with organizers deciding not to hold a march at all in Chicago. Plans to march in Eureka, California were cancelled after supporters decided that the protest would be “overwhelmingly white”.

Elsewhere, however, the mood was buoyant, if angry. In Athens women held placards declaring “Silent No More” next to a picture of Athena, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom. In Berlin about 2,000 people turned out to protest near the Brandenburg Gate, with slogans including “I’m Not Ovary Acting” and “Fight Like a Girl”.

And in London, women waved signs emblazoned with messages including “Girl Power!”, “Put on your war paint” and, out of support for a BBC Radio 2 DJ,

“Sara Cox: SMASHING IT!”.

Thirteen year-old Izzy Gage from Fairham in Hampshire had asked her mother, Suzie, if they could come “because we’re feminists and just because I’m a girl, I’m not less”. Alison Traub had also come from Cambridge to support her daughter: “It’s hugely important to have our voice heard ... to spur people on and be here and be counted. The upside is that it will inspire people to do something in a practical way.”

The inspiration for this year’s London march was the Polish-born American suffragette and workers’ rights campaigner Rose Schneiderman, who, after the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York in 1911 where 146 mainly female garment-industry workers died, declared: “The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too.” One placard held aloft read: “Sugar and spice and reproductive rights.” Another, quite simply, “Theresa May, we won’t pay”.

Not all words for Britain’s second female prime minister were said in anger, however. Promoting the message #WeAreChange, activist Helen Pankhurst and Labor MP Dawn Butler drew huge cheers, and Butler declared: “We march for every single woman. This might not be popular, but Theresa May, we march for you too.”

(Source: The Guardian)

Second Announcement

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

N.I.O.C
1397.5557

National Iranian Drilling Company

Tender descriptions:

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3188219	TenderNo. PPP/KSH/97/002 Indent 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 Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof.
Distribution Place	A) Hall No.: 316, 3thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS), National Iranian Drilling Company, After Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. B) Jomhuri street, yaghma alley nio: 8th building floor no.: 04 room no 428 –tehran-iran 021 66700249
Submitting Method	Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of Iranian Rials under account number 4001114004020491 (Shaba No. IR520100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran. Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender
DocumentsReceivingMethod	Closing date 14 Days after the last time of Purchasing.
Address	H Hall NO.107,1st floor, Tender committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Ahwaz square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569

Tender Guarantee

Value of guarantee	1,222,000,000 Rial/ 25,460 Euro
Type of guarantee	- ✓ Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. - ✓ Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. 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.
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://sapp.ir/nidc_pr

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

Iraq's PMU warns Israel against possible attacks, pledges strong response

➔ Nonetheless, any act of hostility against PMU could backfire on Tel Aviv as thousands of missiles in southern Lebanon were already aimed at Israeli targets, al-Kazemi warned.

The commander made it clear that PMU was an official military organization funded in part by the Iraqi government and therefore "had the right" to defend the country.

Pompeo, who paid a visit to Baghdad and Iraq's Kurdistan region earlier this month, was reported to have made it clear to Iraqi officials that Washington would not react to possible Israeli attacks against PMU fighters.

Citing an unnamed Iraqi official, Russia's RT Arabic service reported on Thursday that the top U.S. diplomat had relayed the message during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

Abdul-Mahdi expressed concern about the statement and warned Pompeo that such actions by Israel would have grave consequences, the report said.

■ **Israel's long record of attacking anti-ISIL forces**

Last June, PMU fighters came under attack in Syria's border town of al-Hari, in



the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, as they were chasing Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists out of the area.

Both the Syrian government and PMU

declared back then that the attack near the Iraqi-Syrian border had been deliberate and could only have been carried out by either Israel or the U.S.

An unnamed U.S. official denied any in-

volvement by American forces, triggering speculation by some media sections that Israel might have been behind the attack.

"We have reasons to believe that it was an Israeli strike," the official told Agence France-Presse (AFP) at the time.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry also denounced the airstrike, saying it "expresses rejection and condemnation of any air operations targeting forces in areas where they are fighting ISIL, whether in Iraq or Syria or any other area where there is a battlefield against this enemy that threatens humanity."

Israel has repeatedly launched airstrikes against Syrian military forces and other groups fighting ISIL terrorists in the country, under the pretext of attacking Iranian military advisers in Syria.

Many observers believe the attacks are aimed at propping up the Takfiri terror groups which are on their last legs in the face of constant Syrian army advances.

PMU and other anti-terror Iraqi fighters are cooperating with the Syrian government to keep the two countries' joint border safe and repel terrorists.

(Source: Press TV)

Don't hijack Brexit, minister warns Britain's Parliament

Parliament cannot be allowed to hijack Brexit, Trade Minister Liam Fox said Sunday, in a warning to lawmakers who want to take more control over Britain's departure from the European Union.

With just weeks to go before Britain is due to leave the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May returns to Parliament Monday to set out how she plans to try to break the Brexit deadlock after her deal was rejected by lawmakers last week.

As she tries to navigate a way through competing visions for the future from a second referendum to staying in the EU, May told ministers Sunday she was looking for ways to make the so-called Northern Irish backstop more acceptable to her Conservative Party and Northern Irish allies.

The Sunday Times reported May was seeking a treaty with Ireland to remove the contentious backstop arrangement, but German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said it was unclear how any bilateral talks could help the EU's deal with London.

Time is running out for parliamentary agreement on Brexit, Britain's biggest shift in foreign and trade policy in more than 40 years, but so far there is little that unites a divided Parliament beyond its rejection of May's deal that envisages close economic ties with the EU, at least in the medium term.

Fox, a Brexit supporter, told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show that May's divorce agreement with the bloc was still the best basis for a deal and warned lawmakers against trying to take more control of Britain's departure. "Parliament has not got the right to hijack the Brexit process because Parliament said to the people of this country, 'We make a contract with you, you will make the decision and we will honor it,'" Fox said.

"What we are now getting are some of those who were always absolutely opposed to the result of the referendum trying to hijack Brexit and in effect steal the result from the people." Britain voted with a 52 percent majority to leave the EU in a 2016 vote that exposed deep divisions across the country that persist almost three years on.

Britain's opposition Labour Party is pressing for a new election and for May to rule out the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. No deal is effectively the default position that would mean trading on World Trade Organization rules.

After seeing her deal rejected by a majority of more than 200 lawmakers last week, May has opened talks with other parties to try to find a way to break the deadlock. But with Labor refusing to take part until May rules out no deal, some lawmakers fear those talks will change little and instead have said they will



launch attempts to force a change of course.

Several are trying to make sure Britain does not "accidentally" leave without a deal on March 29, a scenario many businesses say would be catastrophic for the economy.

With much of the focus now on Labor, its Brexit spokesman Keir Starmer said there were only two options that could find majority support: a future close economic relationship with the EU, or a second referendum, and that it was increasingly likely Article 50 would be extended.

(Source: AP)

4.5 million British children living in poverty: study

More than 14 million people are living in poverty in Britain, according to a major report proposing a new measure of financial hardship which considers the impact of "inescapable" costs such as childcare and disability.

The research by the Social Metrics Commission (SMC) found that 14.2 million people were living in poverty under the new measure, of which 4.5 million were children and 1.4 million were people of pension age, according to The Independent.

Of that total figure, 7.7 million people were found to be living in "persistent poverty", meaning they had spent all or most of the last four years or more in poverty, while 6.9 million were living in families with a disabled person.

The figure in the report marks a rise on findings by the independent Joseph Rowntree

Foundation (JRF) last year which showed 14 million people in Britain were in poverty.

The SMC said its work over the last two and a half years has given rise to a new measure which makes "significant changes to our understanding of who is in poverty".

The new measure accounts for the negative impact on people's weekly income of "inescapable" costs such as childcare and the impact that disability has on people's needs, and includes the positive impacts of being able to access liquid assets such as savings.

It also takes the first steps to including groups of people previously omitted from poverty statistics, like those living on the streets or in overcrowded housing, SMC chair Baroness Stroud said.

The report finds that the majority (68 percent) of people living in workless families are in poverty, compared to 9 percent for

people living in families where all adults work full time.

There are 2.5 million people in the UK who are less than 10 percent above the poverty line, meaning that relatively small changes in their circumstances could mean they fall below it, the commission found.

Margaret Greenwood, Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary, said: "The government's strategy to tackle poverty consists of trying to mask the deep cuts it has made to social security by disputing the numbers of people in poverty."

"The new measure importantly shows the impact of debt, housing and child care costs, and the extra costs that disabled people face. The extent of poverty it reveals among disabled people and their families is a major concern given the severe cuts to support to them in Universal Credit."

Sam Royston, director of policy and research at the Children's Society, said it was "extremely worrying" that nearly a third of children – around 4.5 million – were living in poverty according to the proposed new measure.

The report also revealed "some areas of good news" with far fewer pensioners living in poverty than previously thought following a "significant fall" in pensioner poverty over the last 15 years.

Philippa Stroud, chair of the SMC, said: "For too long it has been possible to have a debate about the measurement of poverty."

A British government spokeswoman said: "Measuring poverty is complex, and this report offers further insight into that complexity and the additional measures that can be taken into consideration."

(Source: Press TV)

Bangladesh denies entry to 31 Rohingya Muslims fleeing India

Bangladesh has denied entry to dozens of Rohingya Muslims seeking to enter the country from neighboring India, leaving them stranded in the no man's land on the border.

The group, consisting of 31 women and children, has been stuck on the "zero line" of Bangladesh's border with India since Friday, said Golam Kabir, the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) commander in the area.

"We stopped them as they were crossing the border," Kabir told Reuters by telephone, adding that two rounds of talks with the Indian Border Security Force about their legal status had been inconclusive.

Since 2017, Myanmar's military forces have intensified a heavy-handed crackdown on Rohingya Muslims – mostly based in the country's Rakhine state -- with "genocidal intent," according to the United Nations, in an operation that drove more than 700,000 of them into Bangladesh.



An Indian border force officer in Tripura state claimed on Sunday that they had provided food and clothing for the Rohingya refugees, 16 of whom were children.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed deep concern

over India's recent deportations of Rohingya refugees, who have been fleeing their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State over the past decades amid a heavy-handed military crackdown on the Muslim minority community there.

The UNHCR has registered identity cards for about 16,500 Rohingya refugees in India.

India, however, does not recognize the UNHCR cards. In related news, 250 Rohingya men in Saudi Arabia face imminent deportation by authorities to Bangladesh.

The move will be the House of Saud regime's second forced deportation of Rohingya refugees from the country this year, Al Jazeera TV reported.

The Rohingya Muslims, who have lived in Myanmar for generations, are denied citizenship and are branded illegal emigrants from Bangladesh, which likewise denies them citizenship.

(Source: agencies)

Berri praises Bassil for pressing Libya on Sadr

Speaker Nabih Berri has lauded caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil's remarks regarding the 1978 disappearance of the Amal Movement's founder in Libya, following tension between the two over Libya's participation in Sunday's economic summit in Beirut.

"His speech reflected that of a statesman, and hopefully he will continue with this spirit," Berri, who currently heads the

Amal Movement, was quoted as saying by local daily Al Joumhouria Monday, referring to Bassil's speech a day ago at the 2019 Arab Economic and Social Development Summit.

Berri and Amal oppose Lebanon having ties with Libya because of Imam Musa Sadr's disappearance during an official visit to the country when it was ruled by Moammar Gaddafi.

Strains between Berri and the Free Patri-

otic Movement, which Bassil heads, emerged just days before the economic summit, after the speaker called for the event to be postponed over Libya's participation. Libya later decided to boycott the event after Amal supporters tore down and burned a Libyan flag near the summit venue and replaced it with the Amal flag.

In the speech at the AESD conference, Bassil pressed Libya's current leadership to

work to uncover the circumstances behind Sadr's disappearance.

"As a Lebanese state, we regretted Libya's absence from participating, and we expressed our dissatisfaction with what happened," he said. "But this doesn't negate the responsibility of Libya's leadership to carry out all its duties to reveal Imam Musa Sadr's fate."

(Source: daily Star)

Armed Venezuelan soldiers detained in Caracas for trying to stage 'uprising' against Maduro

➔ The rebellious servicemen were eventually captured in Cotiza, north of the Venezuelan capital. The group put up "stiff resistance" to the troops but eventually surrendered, the military statement said. It confirmed reports of a shootout but provided no details of any casualties.

Following the incident, all other military units "are operating as normal," the statement said. Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez condemned the actions of the rebels, and said they would be punished "to the fullest extent of the law."

The head of the Constituent National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, also denounced the group as "traitors to the country that stole weapons to provoke violence and anxiety among the people." Meanwhile, the rebels apparently received support from Juan Guaido, the leader of the opposition and president of the Venezuelan parliament.

Guaido, who earlier declared that he was ready to seize power and take the role of interim president following a coup against Maduro, referred to the rebels in a series of tweets. He said the National Assembly "is committed to providing all the necessary guarantees to the members of the [Armed Forces], who actively contribute to the restitution of the constitution."

(Source: RT)

NATO, Russian ambassadors to meet Friday

NATO and Russian ambassadors will meet in Brussels Friday, the Western military alliance said, with discussions likely to focus on the standoff over Ukraine and on nuclear weapons.

This would be the ninth such NATO-Russia Council since the start of 2016.

"Following consultations with Russia, we have agreed to hold a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council at ambassadorial level on Jan. 25, 2019 at NATO headquarters in Brussels," a NATO official said Monday.

NATO has criticized Russia over its seizure of three Ukrainian naval vessels and their crews in November. A court in Moscow ruled last week that 24 Ukrainian sailors seized off the coast of Crimea should be kept in pre-trial detention until April.

Russia has meanwhile warned that a new U.S. missile defense strategy would unleash a dangerous arms race in space and amount to a relaunch of the Cold War-era "Star Wars" program.

The Trump administration has said it plans to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty, on the grounds Moscow is flouting it. Russia though says it is in compliance, and that Washington is in fact in violation.

(Source: Reuters)

New Israeli airport to open near Jordanian border

Israel has officially inaugurated a new international airport on Monday near the Red Sea resort town of Eilat, a few kilometers from the Jordanian border.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the inauguration ceremony at the sleek, glassy terminal, arriving on the ceremonial first flight.

"Ramon airport, this is Arkia 683, we're very excited," Netanyahu said from the cockpit on arrival in an exchange with the tower relayed over loudspeakers.

The new airport is named after Ilan Ramon, Israel's first astronaut who died in the crash of the space shuttle Columbia. Initially, it will handle only domestic flights, operated by Israeli carriers Arkia and Israir.

In the future, the airport plans to host jumbo jets from around the globe, and will also serve as an emergency alternative to Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion airport.

A date has not yet been given for the start of international flights. Jordan's state-run al-Mamlaka television reports that officials in Amman said the location of the Israeli airport violates the kingdom's air sovereignty.

Al-Mamlaka television said Jordanian authorities lodged a complaint with international bodies over the Israeli airport, without giving further details.

There was no official comment from the Jordanian authorities on the report.

Ramon is about 18 kilometers from Eilat and the adjacent Jordanian port of Aqaba.

The Israel Airports Authority (IAA) has said that the plans for the Ramon project were updated in light of lessons learned during the 2014 Gaza war.

After a rocket fired by Hamas in Gaza hit close to the perimeter of Ben Gurion airport in 2014, international carriers suspended flights, in some cases for 24 hours.

Israeli media have said that a 26-metre-high, 4.5km-long "smart" anti-missile fence has been installed to help protect Ramon, which is adjacent to the border with Jordan.

(Source: agencies)

Spanish taxi drivers resume protests against app services

Hundreds of taxis are holding up traffic in Madrid and Barcelona as drivers continue their protests to demand tighter regulations companies using ride-hailing apps.

Drivers in the Spanish capital began an open-ended strike at dawn on Monday. Their leaders said after meeting with city officials that talks to end the dispute were unsuccessful and the protest would continue.

In Barcelona, taxis have demonstrated outside the Catalan regional parliament building and gathered at a downtown traffic circle, snarling traffic.

Spanish taxi drivers complain that rival ride-hailing app drivers compete unfairly since they don't have the same regulations and costs.

Police are on standby after previous taxi demonstrations led to violence against vehicles using the internet-driven ride-hailing platforms like Uber.

(Source: New York Times)

Djokovic through in Australian Open after beating Medvedev

World number one Novak Djokovic reached the Australian Open quarter-finals for the first time since 2016 with a hard-fought win over Daniil Medvedev. The 31-year-old Serb earned a 6-4 6-7 (5-7) 6-2 6-3 victory over the 15th seed in Melbourne.

Djokovic was not at his fluent best, but outlasted Medvedev to win in three hours and 15 minutes.

Russia's Medvedev, 22, grew frustrated as he paid the price for only taking two of nine break points.

Medvedev's resistance continued until the end, saving two match points before Djokovic took the third with a wonderful cross-court winner. Six-time champion Djokovic will play Kei Nishikori in the last eight after the Japanese eighth seed beat Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta in controversial circumstances in a five-hour match decided by a super tie-break.

Another triumph for the top seed at Melbourne Park will see him move ahead of Australian great Roy Emerson and Roger Federer, who was knocked out by Greek youngster Stefanos Tsitsipas on Sunday, in terms of all-time victories.

Djokovic's progress to the last 16 had been relatively serene, apart from a third-set blip which came against the run of play in his previous win over Canadian teenager Denis Shapovalov.

But the powerful Medvedev, one of the rising stars and in good form having reached the final at the Brisbane International coming into the tournament, was expected to provide a sterner test.

It was a test of durability as the pair pushed each other in some long, physical rallies - including two which lasted more than 40 shots. In stuffy conditions on Rod Laver Arena, both players struggled physically at times with Medvedev appearing to tire first in the third set.

Although there was a suspicion Medvedev was putting up little fight to preserve energy for a push in the fourth, it proved to be the key to Djokovic's victory as he maintained the momentum that had swung his way.

"It was definitely a physical battle," Djokovic said. "It is difficult to go through him and I had to find another way to go through him."

(Source: BBC)

Chelsea target Higuain still in Italy



AC Milan's on-loan striker Gonzalo Higuain remains in Italy as the club attempts to secure a replacement for the Argentine before sanctioning his move to Chelsea.

The 31-year-old, on loan from Juventus, has not travelled with his team-mates to Monday's Serie A game at Genoa.

Talks are continuing over a deal that would take him to Stamford Bridge. Milan are hopeful of signing Genoa striker Krzysztof Piatek, enabling Higuain's move to Chelsea.

Genoa's general director Giorgio Perinetti has told Italian radio a meeting over Poland international Piatek, 23, will take place after today's game and a conclusion is expected one way or another within 48 hours.

If agreement is reached on the proposed moves, financial negotiations and medicals are likely to be completed swiftly, allowing both signings to go through.

Higuain's spell at Milan began well, with the Argentina international scoring six goals in five games for the 18-time Italian league champions. However, he has only found the net once in his past 12 appearances.

(Source: BBC)

Red-carded Acerbi's 149-match run ends as Napoli beat Lazio

Napoli scored twice before halftime and hit the woodwork three times in Sunday's 2-1 Serie A win over Lazio, who had defender Francesco Acerbi sent off to end his remarkable run of 149 consecutive matches.

The win, their 15th in 20 league games this season, left second-placed Napoli six points behind leaders Juventus who host bottom club Chievo on Monday while Lazio dropped out of the Champions League places.

Acerbi had been ever-present since October 2015 in all competitions, firstly for Sassuolo and then for Lazio following his move at the start of this season.

After playing 148 matches in a row - staying on the pitch for the full 90 minutes in each - the 30-year-old's run ended when he was given a second yellow card for a foul on Jose Callejon in the 70th minute.

As a result he will be suspended for the next game at home to Juventus. Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi argued, however, that Acerbi should not have been dismissed.

"I'm sorry because we were back to 2-1 and there were 25 minutes left. Acerbi clearly took the ball, then maybe even the opponent. They are the sort of episodes which have gone against us recently."

Arkadiusz Milik volleyed against the post and then saw a header pushed onto the woodwork by Thomas Strakosha before Jose Callejon fired the hosts ahead with his first goal of the season in the 34th minute. Milik doubled Napoli's tally three minutes later by curling an exquisite free kick into the top corner.

Fabian Ruiz smacked a left-foot shot against the top of the upright early in the second half but Ciro Immobile reduced the arrears in the 65th minute with a shot through the legs of defender Raul Albiol.

(Source: Goal)

'It made me feel better' says racquet-smasher Zverev

German prospect Alexander Zverev only managed to beat his racket on Monday as the highly-regarded fourth seed was dumped out of the Australian Open by big-serving Canadian Milos Raonic in a surprisingly one-sided 6-1 6-1 7-6(5) fourth round triumph.

Zverev has emerged as one of the brightest stars in men's tennis after victories over Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic en route to an ATP Finals triumph in November, but the 21-year-old German remains unable to find his best form at Grand Slams.

Following 20-year-old Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas' win over Federer on Sunday, the towering, shaggy-haired Zverev needed to prove he also has the temperament to match his talent and help lead the next generation against the established order.

"This is one of many tournaments. You can't really compete every single week saying you made semis there or quarters there, beat that," Zverev, who has yet to progress beyond the quarter-finals at a Grand Slam, told reporters.

"No, actually I want to be the best, but, yeah, not this week. Right now I'm not happy, but I'm not depressed either. It's fine. It's a tennis match. I have learned to take tennis matches as tennis matches and not the end of the world."

Zverev started well against 16th seed



Raonic with a break in the first game, but he was then broken six times in the first two sets before the Canadian converted his fourth match point in a tight third set to seal the contest in less than two hours.

Injury-prone Raonic, who climbed to a career-high ranking of third in 2016 when he reached the Wimbledon final, believes he was rediscovering his best form.

"I had a really good off-season. I put in some of the best hours in a long period of

time, maybe if ever," the 28-year-old said. "I'm not the kind of guy that needs a lot of matches."

■ FEELING BETTER

"For me, it's about being sharp, moving well, and being efficient with my serve and this kind of thing."

"If I can get those kind of things, my serve always buys me time in matches and in tournaments to sort of figure things out. It can keep me alive for a while."

For the most part, Zverev was unable to figure anything out, and after serving his fifth double-fault to cough up a break in the second set, he hammered his racket repeatedly into the ground to pick up a code violation warning from the umpire.

While the German did not go to the extent of smashing four rackets into pieces as Marcos Baghdatis did during his three-set loss at Melbourne Park to Stan Wawrinka in 2012, it did feel like a deja vu moment for Zverev.

Last year, he took out his frustration in a similar manner during his Australian Open third round loss to South Korean Chung Hyeon.

"It made me feel better," Zverev said, recalling the incident in Monday's match when he smashed his racket nine times while also startling a ball boy. "I was very angry, so I let my anger out."

Zverev put up a better fight in the third set behind an improved serve and fewer unforced errors, as the German saved the second match point he faced by winning a 29-shot rally but it ultimately proved too little, too late.

Raonic advances to face either Croatian 11th seed Borna Coric or Frenchman Lucas Pouille, who is seeded 28th, for a place in the semi-finals.

(Source: Reuters)

De Bruyne describes mental challenge of injury-hit season

Kevin De Bruyne has described how coming back from successive knee injuries was "mentally hard" but says he is happy with the way he is playing.

The Belgium playmaker was pivotal to Manchester City's title success last season but has been restricted to just eight league appearances during this campaign due to ligament injuries, first in his right knee then in his left knee.

De Bruyne returned to action last month but City manager Pep Guardiola has taken a cautious approach with him.

"I'm getting better obviously," said De Bruyne.

"You need the run of games where you play a lot because I'm not used to playing every three days."

"But I'm getting there. I'm happy with the way I'm performing. It's not the same like it was last year, but that's what you can expect."

"I've been out since the World Cup and to come back twice is mentally hard, but I'm happy to be here to play football again."

The 27-year-old made his first league start since December 26 in Sunday's 3-0 win at managerless Huddersfield, which lifted the defending champions back to within four points of leaders Liverpool.

"There's two teams and even Tottenham, who have so many points at this stage of the season," said De Bruyne, whose side finished 19 points clear last season and had clinched

the title with five games to spare.

"It's quite remarkable because in a lot of seasons you would already be 10 or 12 points ahead, but this season it's tight and I like it. I like it to be competitive. In the end that's what it's all about."

Guardiola's side notched their fourth straight league win courtesy of Danilo's deflected first-half effort and quickfire goals early in the second period from Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sane.

Danilo's opener at the John Smith's Stadium was City's 100th goal in all competitions this season. They have scored 22 in their past four matches without conceding.

(Source: AFP)

Serena edges top seed Halep to reach last eight



Serena Williams staved off a spectacular fightback from world number one Simona Halep to reach the quarter-finals of the Australian Open on Monday and remain on course for her first Grand Slam triumph since becoming a mother.

Williams' thrilling 6-1 4-6 6-4 win was a major step towards the 37-year-old American great equalling Australian Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam wins as she set up a last-eight meeting with Czech seventh seed Karolina Pliskova.

The seven-time Australian Open champion was eight weeks pregnant when she won the last of her 23 Grand Slam titles at Melbourne Park and only returned to tennis last year after the birth of her daughter Alexis Olympia in September, 2017.

She made two more Grand Slam finals last year only to lose the finals at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open but this triumph over the world's leading player felt like another hugely significant step on the road to regaining her old dominance.

Williams showed she has lost none of her brutal power and athleticism against

French Open champion Halep, who has finished the last two years on top of the women's rankings.

The Romanian broke Williams' serve in the first game but that was the only one she managed for the rest of the opening set as the American bulldozed her way through the set in 20 minutes, serving it out with an ace. Coming into the match with eight wins in her nine encounters against Halep, it looked as if Williams would breeze through the match after the opening set mauling she handed out.

But the 27-year-old fought back by forcing to move Williams more and drew level at one set apiece after breaking her a second time.

"That's why she's number one. She literally lifted her game to a new level. I didn't. I kind of stayed at the same level, and I should have looked at my game, as well," Williams told reporters.

"But it's a part of this journey on my way back. It's 10 months, so I can't be too upset at myself."

(Source: Reuters)

Klopp seeks solutions for Liverpool defensive crisis



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has taken his "warriors" to Dubai for a warm-weather training camp where he will search for a solution to his defensive dilemma.

The Premier League leaders, four points ahead of Manchester City, are not in action this coming weekend because they were knocked out of the FA Cup in the last round.

But James Milner's sending-off in Saturday's 4-3 win over Crystal Palace leaves Klopp with a headache at right-back for next week's visit of Leicester.

Joe Gomez, sidelined with a broken bone in his foot, will step up his recovery in Dubai and could have an outside chance of making the game but Trent Alexander-Arnold is still a couple of weeks away from fitness.

Fabinho would have been an option in a position he has played for Brazil but he came off injured late on against Palace and even if fit he may be needed in midfield, with Georginio Wijnaldum out with a hamstring problem.

Klopp gave 18-year-old Rafael Camacho his Premier League debut for the final few

minutes at the weekend and he may be a one-off answer against Leicester.

The Liverpool boss, who has no intention of seeking a solution from the transfer market, told liverpoolfc.com: "Now we need the time to recover obviously, because we had a few injuries."

"Hopefully we can bring a few back. 'Millie' (Milner) will be out for sure, unfortunately, but we will see, as long as we have enough players we will find a solution."

"These boys are real fighters," added the German. "It's a bunch of proper warriors -- I love that. They all stick their leg in or whatever."

"It would have been a massive challenge if we had to play Wednesday and then Saturday. I have no idea how we would have done that, to be honest."

"Now we have two days' recovery for the boys with the most minutes then we start preparing them for the Leicester game, which is another tough task. It will not be a real break, we have to use it for training."

(Source: AFP)

Neymar struggled to adapt to life in Paris after world-record PSG move

Neymar was accused of simulation during the World Cup in Russia, but said he had been on the receiving end of some bad challenges.

"I suffered a lot of fouls during the World Cup," he said. "If you watched these moments, most of the time it was a foul. At no time was it simulation -- I suffered nothing but fouls."

He praised coach Thomas Tuchel, saying: "There is friendship with the coach, but a mutual respect at the same time. I respect him as a coach but, when you have to speak with each other, you speak."

"Since we first spoke, I have developed great affection for him. When you feel this sort of affection towards your coach, you give your life for them on the pitch."

Neymar stressed that PSG wanted to win the Champions League as soon as possible, saying "every player has dreams about that."



"We know that it is very difficult, very complicated, but we have the team to do it," he added.

"It is not easy to say what PSG is missing to go further in the Champions League. You have to grow at the right moment of the competition and that moment is now -- the knockout rounds."

Meanwhile, PSG captain Thiago Silva told TF1 his compatriot was back to his best after a difficult period with injuries. "Neymar is a technical leader," he said. "He can make the difference for us at any minute, like Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani."

"This campaign, he has come back stronger and he is already at a very high level -- I hope that he can continue like this until the end of term."

(Source: ESPN)



Carlos Queiroz warns Iran players not to waste chances against China

After seeing his side qualify for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 quarter-finals, Iran head coach Carlos Queiroz has been quick to praise the team spirit he believes played a major part in the success.

Iran beat Oman 2-0 on Sunday to claim their place in the last eight, an impressive display which followed goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand's superb penalty save in the opening moments of the game.

While grateful for his towering custodian's contribution, Queiroz believes the unwavering unity which exists within the Iranian squad was, however, just as decisive a factor.

"It was a very good and competitive game, although I think it is the first time in my life that I have seen a team concede a penalty so early on. It was a great save from Beiranvand that kept us in the game," declared the Portuguese tactician.

"When a player performs well [such as Alireza did], it gives you more confidence. The early save undoubtedly helped us maintain our clean sheet, but all the players played their part in the victory.

"Player in the team know their role and they know their responsibilities, they are always there at the right moment to support their teammates. Everyone plays for the team."

Iran are now set to face China PR in the last eight, with Queiroz, who is expecting another tough test, calling on his charges to develop a far more ruthless streak in the final third.

"We know how much the China team has progressed, especially under [head coach] Marcello Lippi. It will be another difficult game, as will all the matches going forward.

"We cannot waste chances like we did against Oman, we must play with a killer instinct and we need to put the ball in the net," he said.

"In knockout football it is important to kill the game early, it gives you a tremendous advantage. The most important thing for the next game is to be calmer, to be smarter."

Meanwhile, opposite number Pim Verbeek, although still optimistic about the future of his side, was quick to



admit that Oman were, on the day, beaten by a better team.

"We knew that Iran were the number one side in Asia and that they were stronger than us, so we did everything that was possible to get a result," he said.

"We gave at least one unlucky goal away and I am not talking about the penalty which we missed early on.

"In the second half, we tried everything to score a goal

and come back from 2-0 down, but Iran kept us under control. We are disappointed of course that we lost, but Iran were the better team.

"We had a fantastic tournament and we should not be ashamed that we lost to a team such as Iran. The team has a future as, even though we are a small country, we have talent."

(Source: the-afc)

Masoud Shojaei writes his name in history books



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Veteran midfielder Masoud Shojaei wrote his name into the Iran football record books as the first Iranian player who has represented the country in seven major tournaments.

With two minutes left to play in the match against Oman, Shojaei came off the bench to replace Sardar Azmoun.

Shojaei, 35, had not played for Team Melli in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup group stage, where the Persians defeated Yemen 5-0 and Vietnam 2-0 and played out a goalless draw against Iraq.

He was a member of Iran national football team in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup and has represented Team Melli in three more editions so far.

Shojaei was also a member of Iran national football team in the 2006 FIFA World Cup and has featured Team Melli in 2014 and 2018 World Cups.

He had previously registered a record as the only Iranian player who has played in three FIFA World Cups.

"We want to progress to the next stages, that's why we are here. Our goal in making the Iranian people happy," Shojaei said.

It's time to support Carlos Queiroz: Ashkan Dejagah



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team skipper Ashkan Dejagah believes that it's the time to support Team Melli coach Carlos Queiroz.

The Portuguese coach has come under pressure after accusing Iran's Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Massoud Soltanifar of ordering the country's football federation not to extend his contract at the end of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

"I've been a member of Iran national football team in the last eight years. In the 2018 World Cup, I could not help Team Melli because of injury but Queiroz backed

me up and it is time for me to stand with him until the end," Dejagah said.

Iran advanced to the 2019 AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals after defeating Oman 2-0 Sunday night at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

Alireza Jahanbakhsh was on target in the 32nd minute and Dejagah cemented the Team Melli's win nine minutes later when he converted his penalty kick.

"I am happy for helping Team Melli win the match. From now on, we have to focus on the match against China and afterward we can think of the team we will face in the semi-finals," the unsung captain stated.

Lippi says China need 'more focus' ahead of Iran clash

Marcello Lippi said China need to learn how to focus for an entire game ahead of their crunch Asian Cup quarter-final with Iran, the biggest -- and possibly last -- game of his tenure.

The Italian World Cup-winning coach hailed his players after they overcame Thailand 2-1 to reach the last eight, saying they had proved they were among the best in Asia.

But Lippi, 70, said China still had a habit of drifting in and out of games after another Jekyll-and-Hyde performance in which they trailed 1-0 midway through the second half.

"Chinese players have to improve psychologically," said Lippi, who is expected to leave China after the Asian Cup following two-and-a-half years at the helm.

"Sometimes they need to be much more focused and concentrated and pay more attention during the game. It's a psychological thing.

"It's very important to have the same intensity, the same determination from the beginning of the game."

China were under the cosh against Thailand on Sunday until Lippi switched his formation at half-time, turning the tables as they swamped the Thais



for much of the second period.

But Iran, Asia's top-ranked team, will provide a much stiffer test and the expectation is that after Thursday's game in Abu Dhabi, China will be packing their bags.

Lippi already appeared to be defending his record when he volunteered statistics that in his 10 competitive matches, China have won six and lost only two, to Iran and South Korea.

"That means I have to be very proud of my players," he said, adding: "I'm very satisfied because this team is getting great results and we're in the quarter-finals, which means we're one of the top eight Asian teams."

Reaching the quarters matches China's performance of 2015, when the Asian Cup had only 16 teams rather than 24. China have never won the trophy in 11 previous attempts.

However, Lippi also sounded the alarm for future Chinese teams after fielding an aging line-up including four starters in their thirties, and only one younger than 26.

Captain Zheng Zhi, widely expected to quit the national set-up after the Asian Cup, remains a vital cog at 38, while goal-scorers Xiao Zhi and Gao Lin are 33 and 32 respectively.

"I can say this is a problem for the future of the Chinese team," said Lippi. "Because if the best players are always (in their thirties) it means that right behind them there aren't any young players coming up."

(Source: AFP)

Japan's Tomiyasu sends Saudis spinning out of Asian Cup

Takehiro Tomiyasu's lone strike sent Saudi Arabia crashing out of the Asian Cup as Japan beat the three-time champions 1-0 to reach the quarter-finals on Monday.

Tomiyasu's first-half header was enough to seal it for Japan as the last-16 game between two teams with seven titles between them failed to live up to its billing.

Japan, record four-time winners of the Asian Cup, march on to a quarter-final with Southeast Asian champions Vietnam despite not yet hitting top form at the tournament.

Saudi Arabia were in the ascendancy early on but it was Japan who snatched the advantage with a straightforward goal from a set piece on 20 minutes.

From a corner, Belgium-based defender Tomiyasu climbed above his marker and nodded firmly into the bottom corner for his first of the tournament.

The Saudis twice came close with headers as they strived for a way back, and Hatan Bahbri curled one just off-target as he went for the top corner.

Yoshinori Muto's shot was blocked on

the hour-mark but most of the chances were falling to Saudi Arabia, who will rue some wasteful finishing.

Bahbri's shot from outside the box crept narrowly wide and Ali Al-Bulaihi powered a strong header over when the ball was knocked back into the area after a free-kick.

But despite a late flurry it remained another goalless outing for the Saudis, who haven't hit the net since scoring six goals in their first two group games.

(Source: AFP)



Hadi Rezaei named Iran's chef de mission at 2020 Paralympic Games

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sitting volleyball coach Hadi Rezaei has been named as Iran's chef de mission for the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Japan.

Rezaei also was Iran's chef de mission for the 2018 Asian Para Games, where the Iranian delegation moved one place up to finish in third place.

Iran won 51 gold, 42 silver and 43 bronze medals in the Games held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Rezaei is one of the Iranian most decorated para athletes and coaches.

He won three consecutive Paralympic Games gold medals in 1988 (Seoul), 1992 (Barcelona) and 1996 (Atlanta) as a player.

As a coach, Rezaei also led Iran sitting volleyball team to three Paralympics gold medals in Sydney 2000, Beijing 2008 and Rio 2016 and two silvers in Athens 2004 and London 2012.



Olympic champions donate medals to sports museum

IRNA — Several Iranian Olympic champions have donated their medals to the Olympic Museum.

The medal offerings were on the sidelines of the Olympic Games and Paralympics Headquarters' Summit, that was held with the participation of the Sports and Youth Minister and the chairman of the National Olympic Committee and Paralympics and other members, and Arash Mirasmaeili, holder of world gold medal, Behdad Salimi, holder of the world and Olympic gold medal, Mojtaba Abedini, silver medal holder of the Asian Games and Ehsan Haddadi, the silver holder of the London Olympics.

They donated their valuable medals and memorabilia to the Sports, Olympic and Paralympics Museums.

Launching this museum was pursued in different governments more than a decade ago and the first part of the National Museum of Sports and Paralympics will be open concurrent with the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

In this museum, the collection of achievements and capacities of champion athletes is portrayed as an important step in recording and keeping memorabilia of athletes who flourish in different periods of the Iranian flag as valuable memorial for Iran's current and future generation.

Iran champion of Table Tennis tournament of Peace, Friendship Olympiad

IRNA — First diplomatic Peace and Friendship Olympiad recognized its winners in chess and Table Tennis.

The head of Iran's Foreign Ministry's Public Sports Association and Executive Secretary of the Olympiad Reza Abdi said the Table Tennis tournament began on Saturday with the competition of over 30 sports teams from diplomatic missions residing in Iran which eventually the Iranian team won the championship and the diplomatic teams of Indonesia and Russia ranked second and third respectively.

According to Abdi, in the chess game that was held with 24 chess competitors from different political missions in the chess hall of the Iranian Football Federation, Afghanistan ranked first and third, and Hungary ranked second.

In these competitions, chess players from Iran, Russia, Indonesia, England, India, Tajikistan, Nigeria and international organizations, including UNICEF and the World Health Organization, were present.

Head of the Iranian Chess Federation Mehrdad Pahlevanzadeh said the level of the tournament is lower than the Asian chess competition, but because of the participants and their political reputation, it is considered very important.

World Para Powerlifting and Eleiko announce new agreement

World Para Powerlifting announced on Monday (21 January) a new five-year partnership agreement with Eleiko to provide equipment for all World and regional championships until 2024.

This is an extension of the previous deal signed in 2014 with the global powerlifting equipment manufacturer and will see Eleiko increase its support to the Local Organizing Committees of World Para Powerlifting championships.

Eleiko will also continuous to develop sport specific equipment for Para powerlifting and extend the partnership to educational programmes supported by World Para Powerlifting.

The new contract was officially signed in a meeting at the International Paralympic Committee headquarters in Bonn, Germany, with the presence of Andrew Parsons and Erik Blomberg, CEO of the Eleiko Group.

The 2019 season will kick-off in February with the Fazza World Cup in Dubai. The year's most important competition will be the World Championships in July in Astana, Kazakhstan.

"Eleiko has been an important partner for many years and the new agreement with World Para Powerlifting will have a significant impact on the development of the sport around the world," said Andrew Parsons, IPC President.

"Eleiko's mission is to make people stronger so they better perform in sports and in life. We see our partnership with World Para Powerlifting as an integral part of it. We are fully committed to promote the sport and the benefits of fitness activities for all," said Erik Blomberg, CEO of the Eleiko Group.

"World Para Powerlifting and Eleiko have a very strong partnership. We are very happy to announce the new agreement and look forward to working together in the next five-year cycle," said Jorge Moreno, Head of World Para Powerlifting.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The people of the world are like travelers in
a caravan, who are carried on in their sleep.
Imam Ali (AS)

11th Fajr Festival
of Visual Arts to open
in Tehran Saturday

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The 11th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts will open during a special ceremony in Tehran on January 27, the organizers announced on Monday.

However, the festival's exhibitions for various categories will officially open at Tehran's Saba Art and Cultural Institute on January 30.

A wide array of programs, including exhibitions, workshops and panel discussions, will also be held at the Imam Ali (AS) Religious Arts Museum, Niavaran Cultural Center, Qasr Garden Museum and several other art centers across Tehran.

The first opening will be accompanied with the unveiling of 10 posters created for the 11th edition of the festival.

The Niavaran Cultural Center will host an exhibition of artworks by Iranian artists titled "No. 40" to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

The festival also plans to spotlight movies about visual arts in a section titled "Visual Cinema". A lineup of acclaimed films on this topic will be screened during the program, which will open at the Iranian Artists Forum on January 29.

Moreover, the forum will be hosting several sessions to be attended by art critics and researchers.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi is expected to attend the opening ceremony of festival's exhibitions at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute.

Over 600 works by about 490 artists will be put on view during the festival and winners will be honored during the closing ceremony of the event at Vahdat Hall on March 6.

The Qasr Garden Museum will showcase works selected from 25 galleries in Tehran and about 30 galleries in different cities.

The festival also plans to organize "40 Exhibits, 40 Cities", a program during which the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts will showcase a selection of its artworks in 40 Iranian cities.

NEWS IN BRIEF

"The Tattooist
of Auschwitz"
comes to Iranian
bookstores

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – New Zealander writer Heather Morris' "The Tattooist of Auschwitz" has recently been published in Persian by Chatrang Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Fereshteh Shayan, the book is based on the true story of Lale and Gita Sokolov, two Slovakian Jews, who survived Auschwitz and eventually made their home in Australia.

In that terrible place, Lale was given the job of tattooing the prisoners marked for survival, literally scratching numbers into his fellow victims' arms in indelible ink to create what would become one of the most potent symbols of the Holocaust.

Lale used the infinitesimal freedom of movement that this position awarded him to exchange jewels and money taken from murdered Jews for food to keep others alive.

"The Corn
Maiden" appears
in Persian

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Prominent American writer Joyce Carol Oates' novella has been recently published in Persian by Cheshmeh Publications in Tehran.

Nahid Tabatabai is the translator of the book, which has been selected from "The Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares", a collection of seven short stories and novellas by Oates published by Mysterious Press in the U.S. in 2011.

"The Corn Maiden" is about Marissa, a beautiful and sweet eleven-year-old girl with hair the color of corn silk.

One day Marissa is taken from her school by an older girl, who believes in the Indian legend of the Corn Maiden, in which a girl is sacrificed to ensure a good crop.

"The Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares" received the Bram Stoker Award for Best Fiction Collection in 2011.

Fajr festival sparks criticism with
import of Crystal Simorghs from Dubai

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – The organizers of the 37th Fajr Film Festival, Iran's most film event, have come under fierce criticism from several Persian media over the import of its Crystal Simorgh awards from Dubai.

The criticism was sparked after the executive manager of the festival, Ezzatollah Alizadeh, announced on Sunday that the crystal trophies are being made by a workshop based in Dubai.

He said that the festival has purchased 30 of the crystal awards and added that each trophy costs Iran 900 Emirati dirhams (\$243).

An article published by Tasnim News Agency on Sunday pointed to the economic problems facing Iran and said, "Why should such a great amount of money be spent outside of Iran?"

"This happens in a year that has been termed the year for support for Iranian products and during which the Islamic Revolution intends to celebrate its 40th anniversary," the article added.

In a statement published afterwards, the director of the Fajr Film Festival, Ebrahim Darughezadeh, said that making the crystal statues requires some costly special equipment available abroad and it is not economical for a manufacturer to import the apparatus to make a limited number of the trophies.

The director of the Glassware and Mirror Manufacturers Union, Mohammad-Ali Qanbari, confirmed Darughezadeh's remarks in a press release published by the Fajr organizers.

"Making the crystal trophies is a special job, which cannot be done by the equipment we have in Iran," he noted.

He also said that it is not cost effective to import the very expensive equipment needed for producing only 30 or even 100



A Crystal Simorgh trophy.

trophies for a festival.

The Crystal Simorgh is a rectangular crystal plate bearing an engraving of a simorgh, a mythical bird in Iranian culture.

Earlier in 2013, the then organizers of the festival changed the design of the Crystal Simorgh award and the crystal plate was transformed into a crystal statue of a simorgh

designed by veteran Iranian artist Ebrahim Haqiqi.

A Czech artisan created 50 copies based on the design in Bohemia, a major center for crystal and glass objects in the Czech Republic. However, the result was not satisfactory.

"When I saw a sample of the Crystal Simorgh, I raised objections and I said

that 'this is not a simorgh, it is a rooster!'," Haqiqi stated at that time.

Haqiqi revised the design and the festival honored winners with the hand-made crystal statues for two years.

Due to the flimsy construction of the crystal statues, the organizers of the festival later restored the award to its former design.

Mohammad Rahmanian to stage
martyr Khoshlafz' biography



This combination photo shows stage director Mohammad Rahmanian (L) and martyr Ali Khoshlafz.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Celebrated Iranian stage director Mohammad Rahmanian plans to focus on the life story of Iranian war veteran Ali Khoshlafz in his next project.

The play will be performed at Tehran's Vahdat Hall during Ramadan, which will be in May and June this year, the Persian service of MNA reported on Monday.

The play is based on Khoshlafz' memoirs "When the Moonlight Was

Missing" written by Hamid Hesam and published by Sureh-Mehr in 2015.

Khoshlafz, whom the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, called "a living martyr", passed away from chemical injuries he suffered during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war in December 2017.

Rahmanian is the writer and director of several acclaimed plays including "Fans", "Interview", "Cho's Manifesto" and "Bridge".

"Green Book" boosts Oscar odds with
big win at Producers Guild Awards

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — In a surprise win on Saturday, Hollywood producers named "Green Book" the best film of 2018, boosting its profile just days before nominations are announced for the annual Academy Awards.

The big win by "Green Book" at the 30th Producers Guild Awards set up the film, which stars Mahershala Ali and Viggo Mortensen as an African-American pianist and his white driver in the early 1960s Deep South, as a major contender for next month's Oscars.

In many past years, PGA best film winners have gone on to win the best picture Oscar, Hollywood's top prize.

The PGA's best film had been predicted to be a contest between "A Star Is Born" and "Roma". Earlier this month "Green Book" won the Golden Globe as best musical or comedy.

The Producers Guild of America (PGA), among the leading industry organizations representing makers of movies and TV shows, also named its best animated film which went to "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse", favorite documentary, won by "Won't You Be My Neighbor?", and honored FX's "The Americans" as the top television drama in its final season.

FX scored again when Ryan Murphy's "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story" won the award for limited series.

Among other honors for television productions, Amazon Video's "The Marvelous



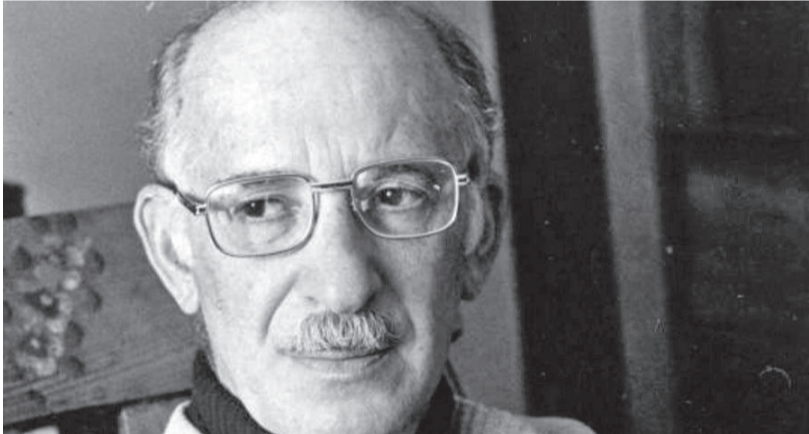
Actors Viggo Mortensen, Linda Cardellini, and Mahershala Ali, pick up director Peter Farrelly as they arrive for the premiere of Green Book at the Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, September 11, 2018. (Reuters/Mark Blinch)

Mrs. Maisel" won the comedy series award and HBO's "Fahrenheit 451" prevailed as best television movie.

CNN's "Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown", starring the late celebrity chef who killed himself last year, won for non-fiction television, while "RuPaul's Drag Race" on VH1 took home the prize for reality competition series.

PBS' "Sesame Street", which debuted nearly 50 years ago, won for children's program. The live entertainment/talk award went to "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver", while "Being Serena" took best sports program.

Tehran bookstore to review Bernard
Malamud's short stories



Bernard Malamud in an undated photo.

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A number of short stories written by American novelist and short story writer Bernard Malamud (1914–1986) will be reviewed in a session to be held at Tehran's Derakht-e Bakhshandeh Bookstore on Friday.

Several of Malamud's short stories have been translated into Persian by Amir-Mehdi Haqiqat in a single book released by Ofogh Publications in 2014 under the title of "The Shoes of the Servant and Some Other Stories".

Author and critic Mehdi Yazzdani-Khorram will join translator Haqiqat in

the session.

"The Fixer", the writer's best-known novel, which won the National Book Award in 1966 and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as "The Tenants" are among other novels by Malamud published in Persian.

Malamud brought to his fiction the need to ask serious questions in the guise of compelling, page-turning stories. In stories set in America, Europe and Russia, Malamud's characters speak in a rich, provocative language that captures the ear and shows a master eavesdropper at work.

Netflix has no plans to cut "Bird Box"
scene despite outcry

NEW YORK (AP) — Netflix's post-apocalyptic survival film "Bird Box" is drawing criticism for using footage of a real fiery train disaster but the streaming giant has no plans to remove it.

The footage concerns a 2013 tragedy in the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic when an unattended train carrying crude oil rolled down an incline, came off the tracks and exploded into a massive ball of fire, killing 47 people.

Netflix licensed the footage of the disaster from the stock image vendor Pond 5 and used it in "Bird Box" in an early TV news montage to set up its horrific premise. The Sandra Bullock-led thriller is about monstrous entities that compel any human who sees them to quickly try to kill themselves. To survive, they don blindfolds.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Pond 5 said the footage "was taken out of context" and the company wanted to "sincerely apologize." Pond 5 footage of the crash was also used in Netflix's "Travelers."

But a Netflix spokesman told the AP on Thursday that it wasn't planning to cut the footage from "Bird Box," saying, "We will keep the clip in the movie." But he acknowledged that Netflix will be looking at ways to do things differently moving forward.

The mayor of Lac-Mégantic, Julie Morin, has decried the use of the footage in an interview with The Canadian Press,



This image released by Netflix shows Sandra Bullock in a scene from the film, "Bird Box." (Saeed Adyani/Netflix via AP)

calling it "a lack of respect." Criticism has also been leveled by Canadians on Twitter, who argue that the footage may trigger feelings of PTSD and additional victimization.

But the Lac-Mégantic mayor and a Netflix representative talked Thursday and Morin said the conversation was productive.

"They've committed to reflecting with their partners on the use of these images so that the situation does not repeat itself. We also felt they were sensitive to our citizens' recovery. I'm satisfied with this exchange," Morin said in a statement.

It's not the first time "Bird Box" has caused an outcry. YouTube is cracking down on a wave of users committing so-called "Bird Box Challenges" — like driving a car while blindfolded.