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## NIOC inks deals worth \$1b with domestic companies

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Subsidiaries of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) signed nine deals worth \$1 billion with domestic contractor companies for maintaining and increasing the production capacity of the country's aging oil and gas fields, Shana reported. The agreements were signed during a ceremony attended by Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh and senior oil officials on Tuesday. At the signing ceremony Zanganeh said,

"We wanted to create projects only for Iranian contractors." The awarded projects are part of a wider plan covering 33 projects for enhancing the production capacity at Iranian oil and gas fields. As reported, a total of \$6 billion is estimated to be invested for these 33 projects during a three-year period. With an average investment worth of \$220 million for each project, the mentioned projects are expected to add 300,000 barrels per day to the country's oil output.

## 30 new biologic drugs to be produced

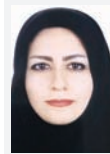
**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Biotech Development Center (BioDC) aims to support the production of 30 new biologic drugs in the country, said the center's director, Mostafa Qane'i. "Iranian experts are capable of producing biologic drugs and helping them toward this goal is among our top priorities," said Qane'i, ISNA reported on Wednesday. A biologic drug is a product that is

produced from living organisms or contain components of living organisms. Biologic drugs include a wide variety of products derived from human, animal, or microorganisms by using biotechnology. According to Qane'i, there are currently 146 biologic drugs in global market and 20 of them are available in the country, out of which 4 ones are monoclonal antibodies and the remaining 16 ones are Recombinant drugs.

## Syria warns of attack on Tel Aviv airport

Syria has warned that it could use its right to respond in self-defense to recent Israeli air raids against a civilian airport near Damascus by striking Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport if the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) fails to shoulder its responsibilities and act against the

regime's aggression. Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar al-Ja'afari said on Tuesday that "the unlimited support" provided by some permanent members of the Security Council, namely France, Britain and the U.S., has encouraged Israel to continue its air raids on Syria. **→13**



## ARTICLE

**Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh**  
Tehran Times Journalist

## Will phoenix rise from the ashes?

Iran has experienced an unprecedented devaluation of its currency, rial, during the current Iranian calendar year 1397, which is going to end on March 20, 2019.

The occurred depreciation has had an inflationary and in result a recessionary effect on the country's economy. It has also negatively impressed the nation's life.

Iranians' loaves of bread are much smaller than before and the decrease in their purchasing power has become more remarkable than ever.

The conditions were exacerbated, when the last round of U.S. sanctions was imposed on Iran on November 5 hitting its crude oil exports, banks, shipping industry and airlines.

But what Iran has experienced by the time is said to be mainly and merely the psychological result of rial devaluation and the imposed sanctions, in the short-run. During the first six months of 1397 (ending September 21, 2018), the administration could earn its intended amount of foreign currency revenues from selling oil with oil prices ranging from \$55 to \$75 per barrel, enjoying pre-sanctions atmosphere.

The inflationary effect of rial depreciation besides the restrictive impact of the U.S.-led sanctions would appear incrementally and are probable to lead into a deep stagnation. The current year is believed to be less difficult for Iran than the one coming. Yet, the time is not ripe to see their full impact on Iran's economy in the long-run.

As some express concern, the government may face a budget deficit in 1398, since its main sources of revenues, oil and tax revenues, may be threatened. On one hand, a big part of the government's revenues as planned are those from selling oil and on the other, with the high possibility of economic recession and fall in production level, its tax revenues are probable to drop.

In addition, considering the current conditions of the international oil market as well as the U.S.-China trade war, neither the future of Iran's future oil sales and revenues nor those of the international markets are not easy to predict. **→4**

## Diplomats: Pompeo might cancel Warsaw conference

**UNITED NATIONS** — The U.S. said Tuesday that a controversial conference on Middle East stability next month in Poland, jointly hosted by the State Department, won't be focused on Iran and will have a broader agenda the Wall Street Journal reported.

The acting U.S. ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Cohen, told the Security Council the meeting in Poland wasn't a "venue to demonize or attack Iran" or to reopen arguments about the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement.

Rather, he said, it would be a "global brainstorming session" with an agenda on cybersecurity, humanitarian aid in Syria and Yemen and extremism.

Offering reassurances in response to international criticism of the conference, Mr. Cohen said that the meeting also would acknowledge Iran's missile activity and other destabilizing actions. But he added: "The scope of the discussion will be much broader than any one country or set of issues."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in early January that the conference would focus on Iran as a destabilizing influence in the region, but the U.S. failed to rally participation from allied countries. European allies have balked at the conference, concerned that it would serve as a session to criticize Iran and promote the U.S. decision to exit from the nuclear deal, further aggravating European Union attempts to salvage the deal. **→13**

## 'Russia and U.S., including conspiracies and interference'

By Giovanni Sorbello

On the delicate and critical relations between the United States and Russia, we interviewed Professor Claudio Moffa, professor of History of International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Teramo.

■ Shall we think of Russia collusion case as a mere political plot to destroy Trump or Russian interference in the 2016 US elections is a fact?

A: Let's look to the enemy of Trump in the 2016 elections: Hillary Rodham Clinton, a politician involved as Secretary of State in the 2011 anglo-french aggression to Libya, interested in capturing Gheddafi's gold, and ready to set off a war even against Russia. A danger for Moscow and the world peace. So, it was obvious that Russia was interested in avoiding her election. And today it is normal that the same bellicose strong powers

that had supported Hillary Rodham Clinton, accuse Trump, the winner of 2016 election, to have been supported by Putin. Whatever the truth is, these strong powers are the enemy of peace. And the election of Trump was the right choice.

■ Robert Mueller is Republican. So his defiance against Trump might show that the disaster is even beyond the imagination. What's your opinion on this matter? **→7**

## Why Yemen matters to Saudi Arabia and the West

By Farzad Farhadi

**TEHRAN** — Yemen is one of the most populous countries on the Arabian Peninsula. With a population that is 35 percent Shia, Saudi Arabia has also been concerned by what it sees as Iranian meddling in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has worried that the presence of Iran in Yemen could be risky for Sunni order, especially along part of its 1,800-kilometer border with Yemen.

From the viewpoint of the Saudi authorities, such a wide border is seen as the main point of penetration for extremists and terrorists such as al-Qaeda into Saudi Arabia. You only have to look at the list of detainees at Guantanamo Bay to know that Yemen has been a fruitful recruiting ground for al-Qaeda.

A majority of the 800 prisoners listed in recently published detainee assessments were Yemenis. Back in the 1990s, most of Osama bin

Laden's bodyguards were recruited from Yemen. Since 9/11, the Saudis have invested heavily in stamping out the threat at home from al Qaeda, and the last thing they want is contagion seeping in from next door and it made a major investment in Yemen in term of development and advancement. Therefore, military and financial support from the central government of Yemen is not only wise but necessary to its national security and military strategy. **→7**



© Tehran Times / Marviam Kamvab

## Protesters condemn U.S. arbitrary detention of Marzieh Hashemi

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The staff members of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on Wednesday gathered in front of the United Nations' office in Tehran to condemn the U.S. detention of Press TV news presenter Marzieh Hashemi.

According to Press TV, the demonstration was attended by IRIB World Service director Peyman Jebelli, and Habib Abdolhossein, who is the manager of Press TV's English-language website. **→2**



## REPORT

**Fatemeh Salehi**

Mehr News Agency  
journalist

## Sudan close ties with Qatar escalates Riyadh isolation in Arab world

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir left Tuesday for a two-day visit to Qatar amid ongoing anti-government protests at home, the state-run Qatar News Agency reported. President al-Bashir was scheduled to meet with the emirate's ruler, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to discuss "brotherly relations and ways to bolster them" as well as issues of mutual interest.

This is the Sudanese President's first trip abroad since the beginning of widespread unrest and internal crisis in Sudan.

Qatar has offered al-Bashir help as he faces protests initially sparked by the country's economic woes.

In a December 22 telephone call to al-Bashir, Qatar's ruler stated his country's readiness to "provide all that is needed" to help Sudan get through its crisis, according to a report by the official Sudanese news agency.

In fact, Sudan is more than willing to go to Qatar than Saudi Arabia to resolve internal crisis, because Khartoum considers Doha's promise honest and out of goodwill. According to media reports, Qatar has provided \$1 billion to Sudan.

Saudi Arabia is enraged by Al-Bashir's trip to Doha. The House of Saud has not only helped Sudan to resolve domestic crisis at home but put Khartoum under pressure to pursue its political objectives.

According to Turkish daily newspaper Yeni Safak, some Sudanese officials have disclosed that Sudan was offered bribes by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to cut ties with Iran, Turkey and Qatar.

As Sudan kept relations with the three states, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi plotted against Khartoum and staged protests under the pretext of economic problems.

The tension between Sudan and Saudi Arabia is quite obvious so much so that the Sudanese government summoned Al Arabiya correspondent Saad el-Din Hassan for the second time over coverage of unrest in Sudan. **→7**



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani hopes money laundering laws will foil U.S. plots

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani is hopeful that four bills to counter corruption and money-laundering will pass to leave hanging in midair the United States' plots to restrict Iran's international banking relations.

Speaking at a cabinet session on Wednesday, Rouhani said the United States' sanctions against Iran have failed to achieve their desired results, the presidential website reported.

"Although they create hardships for our people, they will never attain their goals," he said.

The president added, "Every country knows that these sanctions are unjust, illegal, and against the Iranian nation, are never against a state individual, organization, or entity, and only mount pressure on the Iranian people."



Judiciary deputy chief visits Mehr headquarters

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Qolamhossein Mohseni Ejei, the deputy head of the Judiciary, paid a visit on Wednesday to the Mehr news agency headquarters in downtown Tehran in run-up to the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

In talks with Mehr and Tehran Times Director General Ali Asgari, Mohseni Ejei said, "Mehr is twins with the revolution."

He said, "During the forty years, some figures disembarked from the revolution's train and stood in front of the system and moved away from the target."

When Mehr news agency was launched, he said, "We sensed the need for a farsighted, all-embracing news agency to be heard loud and clear inside and outside of the country."

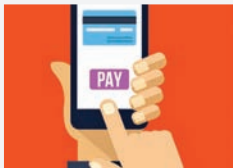


New Turkish ambassador meets FM Zarif

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Turkey's new ambassador to Iran on Wednesday met with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported.

During the meeting, Derya Ors submitted a copy of his credentials to the Iranian foreign minister.

Professor Ors, well versed in Persian language, was head of Turkey's Ataturk Supreme Council for Culture, Language and History. He also acted as translator for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Turkish leader's past meetings with Iranian officials.



Switzerland, Iran forming payment channel to bypass sanctions

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A special financial mechanism aimed at maintaining trade ties between Switzerland and Iran is ready for implementation, according to Sharif Nezam-Mafi, head of the Iran-Switzerland joint chamber of commerce.

He told IRNA news agency that the clearing house will be used to facilitate Iran's oil transactions with its major Asian crude customers — namely India, China and South Korea.

"Currently, there is no money belonging to Iran in Europe. Most of Iran's money is in India, China and South Korea which import Iranian crude," he said.

He said once Iranian oil money flows from Asia to Europe, the Swiss financial channel will start to work immediately, adding the Swiss government has already designated an operating bank, but has not yet formally announced its name.



Iran, IACA agree to shore up educational cooperation

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's General Inspection Office and the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) have agreed to enhance cooperation in educational field.

According to Iran's permanent mission in Vienna, during a meeting between Iran's General Inspection Office director Naser Seraj and Executive Secretary of IACA Martin Kreutner held on the sidelines of the 10th annual conference of international anti-corruption bodies, the two sides agreed on signing an MOU to establish mutual cooperation.

The cooperation consists of students and professor exchange, holding joint training courses and performing joint researches.



Ambassador says Japan keen to expand ties with Tehran

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Japan's new ambassador to Iran, Mitsuo Saito, said on Wednesday that Tokyo welcomes expansion of political, economic and cultural relations with Tehran.

In a meeting with Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the Majlis speaker's special aide in international affairs, the Japanese diplomat praised 90 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations, IRNA reported.

Expressing content with the progress of mutual ties, Saito said Japan attaches great significance to expansion of relations with Iran as a country which enjoys an ancient civilization and plays a leading role in the region and across the world.

Underlining the abundant untapped capacity in Iran-Japan relations, Amir Abdollahian, for his part, highlighted the importance of boosting mutual ties.

# Washington failing to create consensus against Iran, Salehi says



**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said late on Tuesday that there has been no international consensus against since the conclusion of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The U.S. threatens countries based on its logic of [applying] force, however, there is no international consensus for it to resort to," Salehi said in a televised interview.

However, he said, there was an international consensus against Iran before the conclusion of the JCPOA.

"There was international consensus against us based on the UN Security Council's resolutions. We even went to friendly countries, and I do not want to mention their names, and they told us they wanted to help but could not do so because of the Security Council's resolutions. However, they do not say such things now," stated Salehi, who was foreign minister from 2011 to 2013 during the Ahmadinejad presidency.

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

## Russian diplomat calls Warsaw conference 'counterproductive'

*By staff and agency*

Russia's Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzya has said that joint U.S.-Poland conference on the Middle East in Warsaw will be "counterproductive".

"Attempts to create some kind of military alliances in the region, holding different conferences and focusing on having a simplified unilateral approach to the region that is clearly linked just to Iran, is counterproductive," Big News Network quoted him as saying, addressing the Security Council on Tuesday.

The conference will fail to bolster Middle East security because of its "one-country aspect" and failure to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he added.

He also asked why Iran, a regional power, was not invited if the conference was aimed at tackling

regional stability.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on January 11 that Warsaw will host a conference that "includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence" in the region.

The conference is set to be held on Feb. 13-14.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned on January 13 Polish charge d'affaires to Tehran Wojciech Unolt to protest Poland's bid to co-host the anti-Iran conference.

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 to launch a new satellite by January 31

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said on Wednesday that Iran will launch a new satellite before the Ten-Day Dawn celebrations marking the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Ten-day celebrations start from February 1-10.

The satellite will be carried by the Safir satellite-carrier rocket, he told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

The minister added that the satellite is to be sent into a 500km orbit.

Iran attempted on January 15 to launch the Payam satellite into orbit but the rocket's third stage failed to provide enough speed

to reach the orbit.

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

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



## Leader pushes for steady scientific progress

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday pushed for efforts to keep up steady scientific progress and to prevent any deceleration in Iran's scientific advancement.

In an address to a gathering of officials and researchers from the Institute for Cognitive Science Studies (ICSS) held in Tehran, the Leader hailed the good scientific growth in Iran over the past 20 years, Tasnim reported.

"The pace of this scientific movement should not slacken; instead it must be maintained and strengthened for the next twenty to thirty years, until we reach the pinnacle," he emphasized.

Ayatollah Khamenei also warned that any nation lagging behind the rest of the world in the new sciences and technologies will be doomed to underdevelopment, humiliation and exploitation by foreign powers.

Iranian scientists, researchers, and scientific centers should trust Almighty God and make unwavering efforts to maintain the country's scientific growth, particularly in the field of modern sciences, he stressed.

The Leader urged the Iranian scientific community to learn from the West's scientific achievements, underlining that one should not be ashamed of learning from others, but should be ashamed of "remaining an apprentice forever."

## Iran urges world to end Israeli impunity

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Es'haq Al-e-Habib, the Iranian deputy ambassador to the UN, said on Tuesday that the international community should put an end to the Israeli impunity against Palestinians and hold the regime accountable for its crimes.

Al-e-Habib made the remarks during a speech at the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Following is an excerpt of his speech published by IRNA:

Palestine's situation has deteriorated last year. More than 295 Palestinian civilians were brutally killed and over 29,000 were injured by Israel. Many of those killed and about 7,000 of those injured were under 18 years of age.

This proves that Israel is a child-killer regime. This is a clear manifestation of war crimes and crime against humanity.

Equally, in 2018, more Palestinian homes were demolished and more illegal Israeli settlements were built: the blatant violation of international law.

There are yet new plans to demolish more Palestinian homes, to confiscate more Palestinian lands and to build more illegal Israeli settlements. This means the forced displacement of even more Palestinian families.

In 2018, by enacting a law to ensure Jewish supremacy over others, Israel legalized racism.

Very recently, it inaugurated an apartheid highway that features a large concrete wall, one side of which is open to Israeli vehicles only and the other side to Palestinian vehicles only. Not surprising!

Racism is in the very nature of the Israeli regime. First, they constructed a racial segregation wall, then enacted a racial discrimination law, and have now constructed an apartheid highway.

Extremely shameful! This must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

We should also strongly reject and condemn the recognition of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the Israeli capital, as well as the continued occupation of parts of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan by Israel.

They are material breaches of international law and the relevant resolutions of this Council and the UNGA.

Israel has been emboldened by impunity. Instead of facing punishment, it has been rewarded to continuously and brazenly commit all international crimes.

**"During its short life span, Israel has waged over 15 wars; occupied territories of Arab countries; invaded all of its neighbors, without exception; attacked other countries in the region and beyond from the Middle East to Africa; possessed all types of weapons of mass destruction; and the list goes on."**

That's why, during its short life span, Israel has waged over 15 wars; occupied territories of Arab countries; invaded all of its neighbors, without exception; attacked other countries in the region and beyond from the Middle East to Africa; possessed all types of weapons of mass destruction; and the list goes on.

Now, the only option is to put an end to such impunity through holding Israel accountable for their crimes against the Palestinians. This can ensure the application of law and deter its future violation.

## Protesters condemn U.S. arbitrary detention of Marzieh Hashemi

**1 →** The protesters held up placards and chanted slogans to demand the release of Hashemi, who was detained at St. Louis' Lambert International Airport on January 13 and then taken by the FBI to Washington.

In a joint statement read out at the gathering, the IRIB, the Basij media branch and national media center, and the Association of Muslim Journalists demanded an immediate release of Hashemi and said the U.S. government should "apologize to the international media community, of which Hashemi is not only a member, but also a prominent one."

They also slammed the discriminatory conduct of U.S. government, asking, "How is it that a 'witness' or even 'a key witness' is being constrained by handcuffs and shackles? How is it that a 'witness' is deprived of her most basic religious rights?"

"And how is it that a 'witness' is denied every prisoner's basic right to contact their family, and made to stay in prison uncommunicado, even though the judicial apparatus itself has acknowledged her innocence and lack of charges against her?" the statement added.

Later in the day, the Association of Muslim Journalists organized a conference to condemn the "illegal arrest and imprisonment" of Hashemi and demand her immediate release.

Iranian filmmaker and commentator Nader Talebzadeh, Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran, and Mostafa Khoshcheshm, a political analyst and university professor, addressed the conference.

In his opening remarks, Talebzadeh condemned the move as a "straightforward result of American arrogance," saying "her detention is the direct result of a lot of thinking in think tanks."

"Hashemi exemplifies very stern beliefs of what happened in 1979 [Islamic] Revolution in Iran," he remarked.

Talebzadeh said the illegal act is part

of a broader plot to intimidate Iran and those who stand for the Islamic Revolution.

"We pray that she returns with victory and also shamefulness for the American government," he said, arguing such detentions would be costly for the U.S. government.

**Political analyst Mostafa Khoshcheshm says detention of Press TV presenter is "a flagrant violation of human rights, a violation of domestic rights, a violation of freedom of speech and the freedom of the press."**

Khoshcheshm also emphasized that the detention was a "flagrant violation of human rights, a violation of domestic rights, a violation of freedom of speech and the freedom of the press."

He said the U.S. has admitted that Hashemi's detention was done according to a very rarely-practiced law, adding that such fact requires elaboration and explanation by the U.S.

"The fact that they do not see themselves duty-bound to elaborate on the cause of her arrest or to present more elaboration and explanations to the public, to her family at least, shows why the Iranian people call the U.S. an arrogant entity," he argued.

The analyst further noted that Hashemi's case also proves that notions like human rights, democracy, freedom of the press, as well as freedom of expression, they all matter when they are in alliance with the U.S. agenda.

During his speech, Marandi also said he has "almost zero" expectations from the Western media outlets when it comes to such cases.



# Maduro to revise U.S. diplomatic ties after Pence backs protesters

Nicolas Maduro says he has ordered a “re-vision” of Venezuela’s diplomatic relations with the United States, accusing Washington of trying to force a coup after the United States Vice President Mike Pence threw his weight behind attempts to get rid of the South American country’s president.

Maduro said on Tuesday he would announce new measures in the next few hours, in comments that came shortly after Pence declared support for protesters and opposition leaders before widespread anti-government demonstrations planned for Wednesday.

“On behalf of President Donald Trump and all the American people, let me express the unwavering support of the United States as you, the people of Venezuela, raise your voices in a call for freedom,” Pence said in a taped video message in English with a few Spanish words and phrases mixed in.

“Nicolas Maduro is a dictator with no legitimate claim to power. He has never won the presidency in a free and fair election, and has maintained his grip of power by imprisoning anyone who dares to oppose him.”

Venezuela’s opposition on Wednesday plans to hold anti-Maduro demonstrations across the county as part of an annual event that marks the fall of a military government in 1958. Government supporters are also expected to take to the streets.

In response to Pence’s comments, Maduro told a press conference: “Never before has a high-level official said that the opposition



should overthrow the government.”

Maduro was sworn in on January 10 for a controversial second six-year term following an election largely boycotted by the opposition and considered fraudulent by many within the international community.

Last week, the National Assembly, the opposition-controlled legislative body led by opposition figure Juan Guaido, declared Maduro a “usurper” and decided to push for a transitional government to be established.

Guaido has said he would be ready to take over as president and hold fair elections if

Venezuelans and the armed forces backed him. He has also called for opposition protests.

On Monday, Venezuela’s Supreme Court disavowed Guaido as the president of the National Assembly, rendered powerless by the top court after Maduro’s ruling Socialist Party lost control of it in 2016.

In his video message, Pence declared Washington’s support again for Guaido, with whom he spoke to by phone earlier this month, and the National Assembly as the “last vestige of democracy”.

“As you make your voices heard tomorrow,

on behalf of the American people, we say to all the good people of Venezuela: estamos con ustedes,” Pence said, following up with the translation in English. “We are with you, we stand with you, and we will stay with you until democracy is restored and you reclaim your birthright of libertad.”

The developments come against the backdrop of a crippling Venezuelan economy. Annual inflation is now over one million percent, with the price of food and medicines too high for most to obtain. Millions have fled since 2015, according to the United Nations.

On Tuesday, the government said a group of military officers who stole weapons as part of a failed revolt the previous day had delivered the arms to opposition party Popular Will, which the party dismissed as “lies” and an attempt to divert blame.

Some two dozen officers on Monday attacked a National Guard outpost in Cotiza, a Caracas neighborhood one kilometer from the presidential Miraflores palace, leading to opposition demonstrations in nearby parts of the capital.

Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez said the officers involved stole 51 rifles but that authorities had only recovered 40. The officers were arrested after the incident.

David Smolansky, a former exiled mayor of El Hatillo district in the capital, Caracas, claimed that Maduro was being isolated by the Venezuelan armed forces.

(Source: agencies)

## Afghan spy agency says it killed Taliban mastermind of deadly attack

Afghanistan’s main spy agency said on Wednesday it had killed the Taliban commander behind a deadly attack on one of its bases this week, and vowed to hunt down and kill all the rest of those involved.

The National Directorate of Security (NDS) said the Taliban commander, identified only as Noman, was killed in an air strike on Tuesday night.

The agency said Noman was the mastermind of a Monday attack on an NDS base in Maidan Wardak province, west of Kabul, in which the NDS said 36 people were killed and 58 wounded. Other officials said the casualty toll was higher.

“Noman, along with seven others, was targeted after being identified by the NDS forces,” the security agency said in a statement.

“NDS will follow the terrorist group and kill them all.”

The Taliban issued a statement, denying that the commander had been killed.

The insurgent attack in Maidan Wardak was the latest to inflict heavy casualties on government forces and underlined the pressure they face as increasingly confident fighters step up violence, even as diplomatic efforts to end the conflict are underway.

In Monday’s attack, the Taliban detonated a captured military Humvee packed with explosives. Some government officials said the casualty toll was higher than the one given by the NDS.

A senior defense source had told Reuters 126 members of the Afghan security forces were killed. Two senior security officials in the capital, Kabul, said at least 72 men being trained by the NDS were killed with 38 severely wounded.

The Taliban said their attack killed 190 people.

It was not immediately clear if Tuesday’s air strike was supported by the United States forces.

Afghan forces backed by the U.S. air strikes have been targeting Taliban commanders, but questions have been raised over the future of the U.S. involvement by reports that President Donald Trump wants to bring home almost half of the 14,000 U.S. troops.

Officials in Maidan Wardak gave conflicting accounts of the violence that followed Monday’s Taliban attack.

Mohebulla Sharifzai, spokesman for the provincial governor said the NDS had killed six gunmen in an air strike in the provincial capital, but he was not sure if Taliban commander Noman was among them.

A second provincial official said the NDS, with support from foreign forces, conducted two raids.

“An air strike conducted by foreign forces killed three men and a boy, they were not gunmen but hunters,” said Akhtar Mohammad Taheri, head of Maidan Wardak’s provincial council.

Taheri told Reuters in the second raid, NDS forces hunting militants killed five civilians from the same family. An NDS spokesman was not available for comment and did not respond to requests for comment.

The surging violence came as Taliban leaders met the U.S. officials in Qatar for talks to try to agree on a way to end the 17-year war.

Officials from the two sides have met at least four times in recent months but the militants have refused to talk to the U.S.-backed Kabul government.

The Taliban say they are fighting to oust foreign troops, topple the government and restore strict Islamic law.



The United States and its allies say they want to stop Afghanistan from becoming a haven for international militants plotting attacks in the West.

Taliban officials privy to the talks, which entered an unscheduled third day on Wednesday, said the U.S. negotiators, led by special envoy for peace Zalmay Khalilzad, were concerned about deteriorating security and feared that a U.S. withdrawal could lead to “terrorist groups” taking control in Afghanistan.

The two sides exchanged “heated arguments and counter-arguments”, said a senior Taliban official who declined to be identified.

“Our delegation made it clear that they would never let Afghanistan to be used against any other country,” the official said.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russia presents info on missile U.S. says violates pact

The Russian military Wednesday rolled out its new missile and spelled out its specifications, seeking to dispel the U.S. claim that the weapon violates a key nuclear arms pact.

The military insisted that the 9M729 land-based cruise missile conforms to the limits of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

The U.S. has announced its intention to abandon the INF, charging that the new Russian missile violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. Washington said it will suspend its treaty obligations if Russian does not come into compliance by Feb. 2.

Lt. Gen. Mikhail Matveevsky, the chief of the military’s missile and artillery forces, said at a meeting with foreign military attaches that the new missile has a maximum range of 480 kilometers.

He said that the 9M729 missile differs from the previous 9M728 model by having a modified warhead and guidance system that enhances its capability.

The military then displayed the weapon along with its mobile launcher during a pres-



entation at its exhibition center near Moscow.

Matveevsky insisted that the new missile’s booster, cruising engine and fuel tank remain unchanged. He added that the new missile actually has a range 10 kilometers less than the older type due to heavier warhead and control systems. Matveevsky emphasized that the new missile can’t be modified in field conditions.

The Russian general said that the modified mobile launcher for the new type of missile is bigger because it carries four of them rather

than the previous two.

Matveevsky added that the military gave the presentation to underline its “increased transparency and our adherence to the INF Treaty.” Kremlin has staunchly denied the U.S. claim of Russian violations of the pact.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov noted Wednesday that the U.S. hasn’t put forward any data to prove its claim that Russia has tested the missile at a range exceeding the treaty’s limit. He said the U.S.

ignored Moscow’s offer to inspect the missile made during talks in Geneva earlier this month – a refusal he alleged reflected the lack of U.S. interest in meaningful negotiations.

He said the U.S. has made it clear during diplomatic contacts that President Donald Trump’s decision to abandon the pact is final and not subject to talks.

“We were given a clear message that this decision isn’t an invitation to dialogue and is final,” Ryabkov said.

He charged that the U.S. intention to suspend its obligations under the pact is legally void and the INF Treaty should hold.

“The treaty must be preserved,” Ryabkov said, adding that a dialogue between Moscow and Washington must be held “taking into account mutual interests and without any ultimatums.”

U.S. Undersecretary of State Andrea Thompson, who led the American side in the talks, has said that Moscow’s offer is inadequate.

“To see the missile does not confirm the distance that missile can travel, and at the end of the day that’s the violation of the treaty,” she told reporters last week.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Next U.S.-N. Korea summit must give concrete results: Seoul

A planned second summit next month between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un must “deliver concrete results on denuclearization,” South Korea’s top diplomat said Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha told the World Economic Forum in Davos that the two leaders should make “really great big strides” on the road to denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula, in line with international demands.

Trump and Kim met in Singapore last June for an unprecedented summit, producing a promise to work towards

“complete denuclearisation” of the peninsula, but the two sides have since struggled to agree how to implement the pledge.

Critics of U.S. efforts say that summit only boosted Kim’s international stature while doing little to curb Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal that now threatens the United States.

After Trump met Pyongyang’s top nuclear negotiator, Kim Yong Chol, in Washington Friday, the White House announced that the second summit would take place in late February.

The two sides have given no sign of having narrowed their differences over U.S. demands that North Korea abandon

its nuclear weapons program and Pyongyang’s demands for a lifting of economic sanctions and a formal end to the Korean War.

North and South Korea are still technically at war, given the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. The North Korean envoy’s recent visit to Washington has put nuclear talks “back on track,” Kang said in Davos. Details of the second summit would continue to be negotiated despite a partial government shutdown in Washington, he added.

(Source: AFP)

## In a letter, Palestinian Authority asks U.S. to drop all remaining aid

The Palestinian Authority (PA) says it will refuse American aid in its entirety after Washington cut humanitarian funds to Palestinians, adding that accepting such help could carry unwelcome legal consequences for the Ramallah-based administration.

The Authority “sent an official letter to the U.S. administration requesting it stop all aid to the PA, including assistance to the Palestinian security services,” senior negotiator Saeb Erekat said on Tuesday.

The U.S. President Donald Trump has already pledged to cut almost all humanitarian aid to Palestinians. American-funded projects are being phased out gradually.

Erekat further said the decision was made due to concerns over the so-called Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA), approved by President Trump in October 2018, which makes it possible for US citizens to sue foreign entities that receive the U.S. aid.

This may prompt the U.S. families to start exposing the PA to “costly” lawsuits over alleged “past Palestinian attacks,” AFP said.

American authorities have, in the past, blamed Palestinians for “political violence” targeting American interests inside and outside the occupied territories. This is while Washington provides an annual military aid of around \$3 billion to Israel, which engages in routine deadly acts of aggression against Palestinians.

PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah wrote in the letter sent to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo back on December 26, 2018 that “as of January 31st, 2019, it fully disclaims and no longer wishes to accept any form of assistance referenced in ATCA.”

The U.S. aid features roughly \$50 million in annual support for Palestinian security services, including support for security coordination with Tel Aviv. Israel claims that the coordination is “crucial” for maintaining calm in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli acts of aggression are a daily occurrence.

Relations between the PA and the U.S., already strained due to Washington’s unwavering support for Israel, took an unprecedented dip in late 2017, when Washington recognized al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel’s “capital” in the face of the Palestinians’ internationally-recognized claims to the occupied city.

The PA, in response, stopped recognizing any mediation role by Washington in the decades-long conflict with the Israeli regime.

■ Israeli jets strike northern Gaza Strip in new act of aggression

Meantime, Israeli military aircraft have carried out a series of airstrikes against targets in the northern part of the Gaza Strip as Tel Aviv continues with its acts of aggression against the besieged Palestinian coastal sliver.

“The strike was executed following earlier strikes during the day and in response to the shooting incidents against our forces,” the Israeli Air Force said in a statement released late on Tuesday.

The statement added that the Israeli warplanes pounded several targets at a training camp belonging to Hamas resistance movement. There were no reports of injuries.

Earlier in the day, at least one Palestinian was killed while four others were injured as Israeli forces shelled the Gaza Strip after an Israeli soldier was shot along the border between the coastal enclave and occupied territories.

Ashraf al-Qidra, the spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry, identified the fallen Palestinian as 24-year-old Mohammed al-Nabaheen. Hamas later confirmed he was a member of its military wing, Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades.

The attack came shortly after an Israeli soldier was slightly injured near the border fence in the southern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army said the soldier was wounded when a bullet struck his helmet.

(Source: Press TV)

## Pope says fear of migrants can make people crazy

Pope Francis suggested Wednesday that hostility to immigrants was driven by irrational fear, as he headed to Central America, a staging area from where migrants try to enter the United States.

U.S. President Donald Trump has asked Congress to provide him with \$5.7 billion to help fund a U.S.-Mexico border wall to keep migrants out - a demand the Democrats refuse to meet, leading to a partial shutdown of the federal government.

One of the reporters flying with the Pope to Panama told him he had recently seen a barrier designed to deter migrants that juts out into the Pacific Ocean in San Diego, the western edge of the U.S. border with Mexico, and described it as a “folly”.

“Fear makes us crazy,” Francis replied.

Immigration is expected to be one of the main themes of the pope’s six-day trip to Panama. Underscoring his firm focus on the issue, Francis met eight refugees living in Rome before heading to the airport for his flight.

The Jan. 23-28 visit to Panama for the Church’s World Youth Day is the pope’s first foreign trip of 2019.

The 82-year-old pontiff is also scheduled to visit the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania this year, and said a visit to Japan was on the cards.

“I am going to Japan in November. Get ready,” he told reporters on board his plane. Francis said he also wanted to visit Iraq but had been advised it was still too dangerous.

A Vatican official said last year that Pope Francis would consider the possibility of an unprecedented visit to North Korea. He said such a trip would need “serious preparation” and there has been no sign that it might happen any time soon.

(Source: AP)

## Situation in Syria’s Idlib province is rapidly deteriorating: Russia

The situation in Syria’s Idlib province where Russia and Turkey have tried to create a de-escalation zone is rapidly deteriorating, Maria Zakharova, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said Wednesday.

The territory is now almost under full control of Nusra militants, she said. “Continuing provocations pose a threat to civilians, Syrian military personnel and the Russian Hmeimim air base,” Interfax citing Zakharova as saying.

(Source: Daily Star)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	162940.9
IFX	1980.15

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,740 rials
GBP	54,393rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$53.17/b
Brent	\$61.81/b
OPEC Basket	\$61.49/b
Gold	\$1,280.40 /oz
Silver	\$15.34/oz
Platinum	\$796.20/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran hosting 2 intl. expos

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The 18th International Paint, Resin, Coating, Composites and Plating Industries Fair and the 10th Door and Windows Technology International Exhibition are being run at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground from January 23 to 26.

Some 205 domestic and 55 foreign companies from Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, South Korea, China, India, Turkey, Belarus, Russia, and Spain are attending the paint and resin fair, IRNA reported.

The door exhibition is mainly focused on increasing exports of domestic products and finding new export markets besides attracting investments and creating a competitive environment among domestic producers, IRIB reported.

U.S. cancels trade planning meeting with China

The White House rejected a trade planning meeting with Chinese counterparts this week due to outstanding disagreements between the two sides over the enforcement of intellectual property rules.

Officials from the U.S. trade representative's office were set to meet with two Chinese vice ministers this week to try to resolve trade differences before the March 1 deadline, but the meeting was called off, a source familiar with the situation confirmed to CNBC's Kayla Tausche.

Should Beijing and Washington fail to agree on a permanent solution, President Donald Trump has said he will reinforce punitive tariffs on roughly half of all Chinese exports to the U.S.

Asked for comment, the White House told CNBC that "the teams remain in touch in preparation for high level talks with Vice Premier Liu He at the end of this month." The Treasury Department and the U.S. trade representative's office did not respond to requests for comment.



White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow denied that an official meeting had been canceled, telling CNBC on Tuesday that no intermediate meetings had been scheduled other than the visit by Liu next week.

One source suggested that talks may still happen over the phone, but the termination of the in-person visit signals that reaching a complete agreement beyond the basic tenants of the Group of 20 truce will be difficult. China offered to boost its imports from the U.S. for six years, officials familiar with the matter told CNBC last week, though how any such promise would be enforced remains uncertain.

Chinese officials made the offer during negotiations in Beijing earlier in January, Bloomberg News reported. China would increase its annual import of U.S. goods by a combined value of more than \$1 trillion, the officials told Bloomberg, which was the first to report on the import boost offer.

"I would kind of characterize negotiations as generally moving in the right direction. Last week, China offered a fig leaf in lowering tariff rates and agreed to import a trillion dollars of U.S. goods by 2024," said Joseph Lupton, global economist at J.P. Morgan.

Trade negotiations between Washington and Beijing have stretched for months amid a tit-for-tat dispute. Both countries have slapped tariffs on billions of dollars worth of each others' goods. The White House put tariffs of 10 percent on \$200 billion of Chinese products in September and at the time threatened to increase the levy to 25 percent by the start of 2019.

(Source: CNBC)

Forex market under CBI's full control

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — "The desks Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has a full control over domestic foreign exchange market," the central bank Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati announced in a televised interview on Tuesday.

Briefing the nation about his six-month performance, Hemmati announced that rial and domestic economy are experiencing a

stable condition, presently.

Saying that foreign currency inflow into the country is being done without any problem, Hemmati added that CBI has a sufficient supply of foreign banknotes for at least two years.

"We are more focused to implement the policies outlined by resistance economy including reducing our reliance on oil



revenues and increasing dependence on domestic potentials and non-oil exports," he said.

Hemmati added that inflation is now under total control despite the pressure from Donald Trump's decision last year to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal and

re-impose sanctions on Iran.

He, in addition, asked Iranians to adjust their spending habits and take seriously sustained efforts by the U.S. to destabilize the economy, while Iran has to confront very high levels of corruption that are exacerbated by exploitative currency trading practices.

Will phoenix rise from the ashes?

**1 →** According to the latest World Bank (WB) projections, Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) will continue to contract in 2019 to reach -3.6 percent after experiencing an estimated -1.5 percent in 2018 but will reverse the gear towards the positive territory at 1.1 percent in 2020 and 2021 afterwards.

Admitting the same trend, data released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expect the oil-reliant economy to shrink by 1.5 percent in 2018 and 3.6 percent in 2019 due to the reduced oil production, before returning to modest positive growth in 2020–23.

To overcome the expected difficulties in the next year, the government has shifted attention towards strengthening non-oil products exports, compiling mechanism for currency inflow through exports and combatting with goods trafficking at the border regions.

The value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$65.97 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ended on December 21), according to the latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). Iran exported 86.94 million tons of non-oil commodities,



worth \$33.35 billion, during the mentioned period of time, showing 5.40 percent growth in terms of value compared to the same time last year. Iran's top export destinations in the said time span were respectively Iraq by importing \$6.92 billion of Iranian goods equaling 2.77 percent of the total exports, China (\$6.749 billion; 20.23 percent), and the United Arab Emirates (\$5.13 billion; 15.39 percent).

Regarding the country's regional location, being neighbor to 15 countries, Iran seeks to increase its non-oil exports to its neighbors.

As Industry minister Reza Rahmani announced from the total imports of Iran's neighbors, only 2.1 percent is from Iran and the country seek to improve the figure up to 4 percent, which would make its exports to those countries double and would create one million jobs for Iranians. Iran also intends

to target China and India as its main exports destination.

It is in talks with its neighbors Turkey and Pakistan besides Syria and India for making Preferential Trade Agreements (PTA).

In a bid for doubling the country's current \$50-billion non-oil export revenues to \$100 billion, Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) is preparing mega export projects in a three-year program.

Iran is doing its best to dump U.S. dollar in its international financial transactions, as well.

Offering incentives to exporters and supplying working capital and banking loans for the production units are the other policy being applied to expand non-oil exports. The resistance economy committee issued a package to support non-oil exports which was announced by the First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri to all the affiliated state-run organizations on November 18.

Possibilities are hopefully high for Iran to convert the current predicaments to an opportunity to augment its non-oil exports as a trustworthy source of revenues, officials believe.

TSE worth of trades up 62% since last March

By Mahnaz Abdi

**TEHRAN** — The value of trades at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) has risen 62 percent to 6.2 quadrillion rials (about \$147.6 billion) from 3.8 quadrillion rials (about \$90.9 billion) since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), TSE Head Ali Sahraei announced in a press conference on Wednesday.

The official further elaborated on the activities and achievements of TSE during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – December 21, 2018) and said entrance of more companies to the TSE, creating more transparency in the trades and more control over the stock market, and launching new financial instruments in the stock market have been some major measures followed up during the mentioned time span.

TSE head also said that the number of securities traded at TSE during the first ten months of this year has risen 122 percent to 429 billion, the number of trades has increased 108 percent to 26 million, and TEDPIX (the main index of TSE) has experienced a 69-percent growth to stand at 162,805 while it was 96,290 at the start of this year.

He also said 177 new trading codes have been issued which shows 62 percent growth from the last year's same time.

Sahraei put the number of companies conducting trades at the TSE at 324 for the moment and said some six companies have been deleted from the list of TSE and transferred to Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), during the ten-month period.

He said the companies present at TSE has increased their

capital by nine percent to 123 trillion rials (about \$2.9 billion).

**■ More financial instruments on agenda**

Elsewhere in his remarks the TSE head referred to launching futures contract as a new financial instrument in Iran's capital market in last month as one of the major achievements of TSE in the current calendar year and said launching more instruments in the capital market is on the agenda of TSE's activities.

He said futures contract is currently the fourth major derivative contract in the world's stock markets and it is hoped that it will be developed in Iran's capital market as it has many advantages.

During the 26 working days since the establishment of this contract in the country's capital market, some 2,128 deals based on futures contract has occurred at the TSE, the official announced and put the worth of deals at 148 billion rials (about \$3.5 million).

Futures contracts (more colloquially, futures) are financial contracts obligating the buyer to purchase an asset or the seller to sell an asset at a predetermined future date and price.

**■ Capital market infrastructure should be upgraded**

Sahraei further stressed the necessity of upgrading the capital market infrastructure in the country and said: "Our current infrastructure has been created some 11 years ago and the country that created it for us has launched two new generations of it since then in its own capital market."

"We have planning for the required upgrade and in this regard we are conducting negotiations with some foreign and domestic companies," the official announced.

"To develop the capital market we have no other choice except for upgrading and promoting the infrastructure",



he noted.

**■ MOU signed with 12 world's bourses**

The capital market official also announced that TSE has already signed memorandums of understanding with 12 bourses of the world and is currently on the process of signing an MOU with the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

He further mentioned the high number of industries at the TSE as one of the factors that makes this stock market attractive for the foreign investors and said there are presently 40 industries at TSE.

Lunching new financial instruments at the TSE will be another factor to lure the foreigners into this market, he stressed.

Sahraei also announced that according to the data released by the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE), Iran's capital market index (including indices of TSE and IFB) has experienced a 79.7-percent growth by the end of November 2018.

European shares dip as Ingenico and Metrobank add to macro gloom

European shares dipped on Wednesday morning as a new batch of corporate updates prompted fresh concerns, particularly on the tech sector, and added to worries about a global growth slowdown and Sino-U.S. trade negotiations.

At 0941 GMT, the STOXX 600 was down 0.1 percent, with most bourses across Europe losing ground and a number of steep individual falls at the open.

A profit warning by Ingenico (INGC.PA) sent the French payment group down over 12 percent to six-year lows and hit the whole European tech sector .SX8P,

which retreated 0.9 percent.

Still in the sector, ASML Holding NV (ASML.AS), a major supplier to the world's largest computer chipmakers, fueled concerns among investors as it warned that first-quarter sales would be weak, with some customers delaying orders into the second half of 2019.

A profit miss by Metro Bank (MTRO.L) triggered a spectacular 30 percent fall and gave no respite to a sector already weakened during the previous session by Swiss bank UBS's (UBSG.S) fourth-quarter earnings report.

The car making sector .SXAP was sustaining the biggest losses on worries about trade negotiations between the Trump administration and the Chinese government ahead of high-level talks next week.

European retailers .SXXP, however, rose 0.5 percent to a seven-week high after supermarket groups Carrefour (CARR.PA) and Ahold Delhaize (AD.AS) posted trading updates and gained 7 percent and 2.9 percent respectively.

Europe's biggest plastics packaging maker, RPC Group (RPC.L), rose 4.6

percent after Apollo Global Management agreed to buy it for 3.3 billion pounds in cash after months of negotiations.

Doubts about global growth highlighted by the International Monetary Fund cutting its 2019 outlook continue to weigh on stock markets.

"Profits growth will clearly decelerate this year, and market expectations are probably still too high, but we don't see a meaningful downturn developing any time soon", wrote Paul Quinsee, global head of equities at J.P. Morgan Asset Management. (Source: Reuters)

U.S. bank Citi to shrink Russia branch network, but expects to do more business

The Russian arm of U.S. bank Citi (C.N) said on Wednesday it planned to reduce the number of its offices in the country, but expected to do more business this year.

Foreign banks in Russia have been under pressure since Western countries began imposing sanctions on Moscow over its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Many foreign banks were forced to significantly cut their exposure to Russia.

But as some of the banks adjusted to the new circumstances, they started to grow in fields not covered by the sanctions.

Michael Berner, a Citi Russia board member and its consumer business



manager, said on Wednesday the bank would reduce its number of branches from

22 to 15 in Russia by the end of the year to try to further move its client-base online, the Interfax news agency reported.

Citi said in a presentation on Wednesday its Russian assets under management had grown 24 percent last year, with the number of retail client accounts and deposits up 8 percent year on year.

"We think these results are positive and we are planning to keep that same growth rate this year," Berner said.

The Russian banking market is dominated by large, state-owned companies. They make up almost 70 percent of Russian bank assets and five large banks control

60 percent of the assets, according to the World Bank.

Citi Russia, which has been in the country since 1992 and is its 21 largest bank by assets, said the competition from state-owned players would not affect its business.

"Do we feel the strengthening of state banks? No, because we have a clearly-defined strategy and a clearly-defined segment in which we operate," said Maria Ivanova, president of Citi Russia.

Russia's central bank has said the country needs to increase competition in the financial sector. (Source: Reuters)



# Oil edges up on hopes Chinese fiscal stimulus will stem economic slowdown

Oil prices inched up on Wednesday after China said it would raise spending to stem an economic slowdown that has been weighing on financial markets.

International Brent crude oil futures were at \$61.85 per barrel at 0624 GMT, up 35 cents, or 0.6 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$53.26 per barrel, up 25 cents, or 0.5 percent.

The firmer prices followed a 2-percent fall in crude futures and a slump in international financial markets on Tuesday as concerns over global growth spooked investors into looking for safe-haven assets such as government bonds or gold.

A widespread economic slowdown is expected to dent growth in demand for fuel, weighing on energy prices.

Chinese finance ministry officials on Wednesday said the government would step up fiscal spending this year to support its economy, which last year registered its lowest growth rate since 1990.

The Bank of Japan said on Wednesday it would keep its ultra-easy monetary settings which have been running since 2013.

That came after Japan reported that its



December 2018 exports fell by 3.8 percent, the most in more than two years, dragged down as weak global demand and U.S.-Sino trade frictions took their toll on the trade-reliant economy.

Meanwhile, Japan's 2018 crude oil imports fell to 3 million barrels per day (bpd), the lowest since records started in 1979, the

finance ministry said on Wednesday.

Steen Jakobsen, chief economist at Denmark's Saxo Bank, said "the global economy is suffering", but added that China's government would "do all it can for stability".

This includes for the United States and China to find a solution to their bitter trade dispute, Jakobsen said, but to prevent a sharp

economic slowdown, a solution needs to show itself before Feb. 5, the Lunar New Year.

Should a deal be reached by then, "we will see powerful support for the Chinese economy", he said, as well as the launch of strong stimulus programs to keep the economy growing.

Despite this, Jakobsen warned that stimulus programs could not keep the economy going forever, and there was a large risk of another downturn in 2020.

Providing oil prices with support in 2019 have been production cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), aimed at reining in an emerging supply overhang.

Whether OPEC's efforts will be successful will also depend on the development of oil production in the United States, where crude output jumped by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2018 to an unprecedented 11.9 million bpd.

The boom was largely fueled by onshore shale oil drilling. And while the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Tuesday that it expected shale output to rise further, it said that production growth would slow in the coming years.

(Source: Reuters)

## Nigeria posts biggest oil production rise in OPEC



Crude oil production from Nigeria increased the most last month among its peers in the 14-member Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

OPEC, in its latest Monthly Oil Market Report for January, put Nigeria's output at 1.797 million barrels per day for December, up from 1.579 million bpd in the previous month, according to direct communication.

The oil group uses secondary sources to monitor its oil output, but also publishes a table of figures submitted by its member countries.

The report said Nigeria's output rose to 1.750 million bpd in December from 1.739 million bpd in November, according to secondary sources.

Kuwait's output increased by 72,000 barrels to 2.803 million bpd in December, while that of Venezuela rose by 47,000 barrels to 1.511 million bpd.

Angola, Africa's second biggest producer after Nigeria, saw its production rise by 28,000 barrels to 1.445 million bpd in December, while Iraq's output increased by 10,000 barrels to 4.465 million bpd.

Total OPEC preliminary crude oil production averaged 31.58 million barrels in December, a decrease of 751,000 bpd over the previous month.

Crude oil output decreased mostly in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran and the United

Arab Emirates, according to the report.

In a related development, oil prices dropped by three percent on Tuesday on signs of the spread of an economic slowdown in China, stoking concerns about global growth and fuel demand.

The gloomy news from the world's second-largest economy and top oil importer pulled down financial markets across Asia, the CNBC reported.

International Brent crude futures were down \$1.97, or 3.1 percent, at \$60.77 per barrel at 10:08 a.m. ET (1508 GMT), down 88 cents or 1.4 percent. The United States West Texas Intermediate crude futures fell by \$1.78, or 3.3 percent, to \$52.02 per barrel.

China reported the lowest annual economic growth in nearly 30 years on Monday and its state planner warned on Tuesday that falling factory orders pointed to a further drop in activity and more job losses.

While China's oil imports have so far defied the economic slowdown, hitting a record above 10 million bpd in late 2018, many analysts believe that the country has reached peak energy growth, with its thirst set to wane.

The International Monetary Fund on Monday trimmed its 2019 global growth forecast slightly to 3.5 percent from 3.7 percent in last October's outlook.

(Source: punchng.com)

## Saudi Aramco eyes multi-billion-dollar U.S. gas acquisitions: CEO



Saudi Aramco is looking to acquire natural gas assets in the United States and is willing to spend "billions of dollars" there as it aims to become a global gas player, the company's CEO said on Tuesday.

Amin Nasser told Reuters in an interview that his company wants to increase its U.S. investments. It already owns Motiva, the biggest U.S. oil refinery.

"We have agreed to bring an additional \$10 billion in the Motiva refining complex," said the chief executive, attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"We do have appetite for additional investments in the United States. Aramco's international gas team has been given an open platform to look at gas acquisitions along the whole supply chain. They have been given significant financial firepower – in the billions of dollars."

Aramco's gas expansion strategy needs \$150 billion of investment over the next decade as the company plans to increase output and later become a gas exporter, Nasser said in November.

Aramco is pushing ahead with its conventional and unconventional gas exploration and production program to feed its fast-growing industries, freeing up more crude oil to export or turn into chemicals.

Investing in the U.S. gas and petrochemical sector has become "very lucrative" due

to the large availability of ethane resources, Nasser said. "In gas we will be one of the main global players," he added.

Aramco is a major gas player but much of its production is used domestically. The firm plans to boost its gas production to 23 billion standard cubic feet (scf) per day over the next decade, from 14 billion scf now.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude oil exporter, wants to diversify its energy mix and increase the share of its gas capacity to 70 percent in the coming decade from around 50 percent now.

Aramco also aims to become a global leader in chemicals with plans to expand its refining operations and petrochemical output. The company is considering acquiring a strategic stake - up to 70 percent - in Saudi Arabia's SABIC 2010.SE, the world's fourth-largest petrochemicals maker.

Aramco plans to issue bonds in the second quarter of 2019, likely worth about \$10 billion, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said this month. The bond issuance could help finance the SABIC acquisition.

Nasser said banks were being considered for the bond issuance but declined to identify them.

"Since 2018, we have been preparing quarterly results. We will publish our financial results as part of the bond issuance process," he said. (Source: CNBC)

## Capital raising by U.S. oil companies falls sharply

Capital raising by U.S. oil exploration and production companies has fallen sharply following the decline in crude prices that began last October, pointing to cutbacks in capital spending budgets and a continuing slowdown in activity.

Companies in the sector have not held a single bond sale since the start of November, according to Dealogic, while share sales have also slowed. The data suggest that after a record-breaking boom in U.S. oil output in 2018, growth will be weaker this year.

The government's Energy Information Administration has forecast that between December 2018 and December 2019, U.S. crude production will rise by about 500,000 barrels a day. That would represent a sharp slowdown from growth of 1.8m b/d over the previous 12 months.

The U.S. shale industry has relied heavily on debt to finance its growth, with exploration and production companies raising about \$300bn from bond issuance over the past 10 years.

As crude prices started to slide last October, that source of capital was choked off, with just three bond sales by exploration companies that month, and none at all since November, according to Dealogic.

U.S. benchmark crude dropped from a peak of about \$76 a barrel in early October to about \$42 at Christmas, before recovering to about \$53 this week.

Ken Monaghan, co-head of high yield at Amundi Pioneer, the fund management group, said the rise in exploration and production companies' debt yields had put off potential borrowers, with spreads over U.S. Treasury bonds climbing from 3.9 to 7.5 percentage points at their peak before settling back to about 5.9 percentage points this year.

"No one wanted to issue debt unless they had to," Monaghan said. "At the peak, they would have been looking at yields of about 10.25 per cent. That's awfully expensive."



Henry Peabody of Eaton Vance, another fund management group, said that for the time being debt and equity investors were aligned in encouraging oil producers to pursue cash generation rather than borrowing more to pursue growth. "No one wants to get caught out over their skins," he said.

Weak share prices have also been a deterrent to capital raising. Share issuance by exploration and production companies has slowed sharply, with just \$157m raised from equity sales in the past four months as the S&P oil and gas exploration and production sector index has fallen 29 per cent since October. There has not been an initial public offering of an oil and gas company for more than a year, and companies that were looking at possible flotations are expected to wait for markets to recover.

"We have a great IPO backlog, but not much IPO activity," said Osmar Abih, co-head of energy at Credit Suisse. "We are getting ready, but owners are not going to go out at a substantial discount and give away value."

With new capital constrained and cash flows squeezed by the weaker crude price, oil production companies are expected

to rein in their plans for drilling and completing new wells. The number of rigs drilling oil wells in the U.S. has already dropped by about 8 per cent since November to 889, according to S&P Global Platts Analytics.

Paal Kibsgaard, chief executive of oilfield services group Schlumberger, told analysts on a call last week that given a steady recovery in U.S. crude prices to last year's average of about \$65 a barrel, it expected investment in onshore exploration and production in the U.S. this year to be "flat to slightly down compared to 2018".

The companies with the greatest access to capital are the big international oil groups, many of which have been building positions in shale oil and projecting steep production growth. Chevron said last month that about a quarter of its planned \$20bn capital spending this year would go to the Permian Basin of Texas and New Mexico and other shale investments.

Merger and acquisition activity in the U.S. exploration and production industry picked up sharply last year, with BP's \$10.5bn purchase of BHP's shale assets the largest deal, and international oil companies could be buyers again this year, analysts and advisers say. Royal Dutch Shell has been reported to have been looking at buying privately held Endeavor Energy Resources, a leading holder of drilling rights in the Permian Basin.

Tim Perry, also of Credit Suisse, said he expected financial pressures to encourage further deals.

"Investors want bigger companies, so companies are looking for scale. Larger companies can get their development financed more efficiently," he said. "There is a general recognition that the industry needs to consolidate."

(Source: Financial Times)

## Warning signs flash for U.S. shale

The shale tidal wave may finally be starting to ebb. The largest oilfield services company in the world says that shale drilling activity is slowing, creating an uncertain outlook for 2019.

The recent volatility in oil prices has created "less visibility and more uncertainty" on spending by shale companies in 2019, Schlumberger's CEO Paal Kibsgaard said on an earnings call on January 18. Shale drillers are "generally taking a more conservative approach to the start of the year, again delaying the broad based recovery in the E&P spend that we expected only three months ago," he said.

Kibsgaard said that spending from the shale industry could be flat or down this year relative to 2018. That could translate into lower drilling activity, while E&Ps focus on drawing down the enormous backlog of drilled but uncompleted wells (DUCs). Companies working through DUCs could keep production aloft even as drilling slows, but output would likely fall relative to 2018, while decelerating further in 2020.

Schlumberger's chief executive also warned that the shale industry could see other problems going forward that could be even more significant. Shale drilling suffers from a precipitous decline in output soon after a well is completed. After an initial burst in output, wells see a rapid decline in production. This is not news; it has characterized shale drilling for years.

But this dynamic appears to be a growing problem, one that could soon catch up with the industry. "It is also worth noting that with the continued growth in U.S. shale production, an increasing percentage of the new wells drilled are being consumed to offset the steep decline from the existing production base," Kibsgaard told shareholders and analysts on Schlumberger's earnings call. "The third party analysis shows that in 2018, this number was 54 percent of total CapEx and is expected to increase to 75 percent in 2021, clearly demonstrating the unavoidable treadmill effect of shale oil production." Beyond that, well interference is also a mounting problem. Drilling wells too close to one another can cannibalize production, raising costs and leading to less overall output. That becomes a larger problem over time after companies pick over the best acreage. Additionally, the length of laterals and the use of frac sand and other proppants have reached the limits of what they can achieve. "We could be facing a more moderate growth in U.S. shale production in the coming years than what the most optimistic views have been suggesting," Kibsgaard warned.

That echoes the problems of shale gas giant EQT. The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this month that even as EQT was breaking new frontiers in terms of the length of the shale wells the company was drilling, the economics proved highly disappointing. Last April, one shale gas well EQT drilled exceeded 18,000 feet, and EQT thought it could drill horizontal wells approaching 20,000 feet. "The decision to drill some of the longest horizontal wells ever in shale rocks turned into a costly misstep costing hundreds of millions of dollars," the Wall Street Journal reported. EQT's CEO said later in the year that its wells were encountering problems when they exceeded 15,000 feet.

In other words, even as shale oil and gas drillers boast of their ability to achieve ever-increasing gains by drilling longer laterals, using more sand, packing wells into tighter distances – there are signs that these "efficiency gains" are maxing out.

Schlumberger still sees a rebound in drilling over the course of 2019, but in the short run, the fall in oil prices is taking a toll. Baker Hughes reported a massive decline in the active rig count last week, with 21 oil rigs vanishing from American oil fields along with four natural gas rigs. That puts the U.S. oil rig count at its lowest point in eight months. There is typically a lag between major movements in crude prices and a response in the rig count. But a few months on from the collapse of oil prices, we are finally starting to see the effects. Last week's decline of 21 rigs is the largest one-week drop in nearly three years. "Clearly the slump in the WTI price to \$42 per barrel at year's end made shale oil producers more cautious," Commerzbank said in a note on Monday.

Looking at the latest oil production forecasts, there is also an expected slowdown in output on the way. The EIA said in its latest Short-Term Energy Outlook that U.S. oil production growth would slow to 1.1 million barrels per day (mb/d) this year, down from a surge of 1.6 mb/d in 2018. By next year, production growth will slow further to a 0.8 mb/d expansion. (Source: oilprice.com)

## 39 million barrels of oil are stuck in a Turkish shipping jam

Oil tankers exporting Kazakh and Russian crude from ports in the Black Sea are contending with spiraling delays when navigating Turkey's key shipping straits, stalling the delivery of millions of barrels of supplies to refineries on the Mediterranean Sea and beyond.

The lengthening queues to pass through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits are due to a change in rules back in September requiring more vessels to be escorted by tugboats, according to Tribeca Shipping, a local port agent. It estimates that tankers holding about 39 million barrels of oil are backed up. Bad weather has also contributed.

"The refineries in the Mediterranean are very soon going to start feeling the pinch on this if the delays continue or get worse," said James Davis, director of short-term global oil service at Facts Global Energy, adding that there are signs the issues may be getting resolved, which should lessen the impact.

The Turkish straits are a choke point for global oil supplies because crude from Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan must pass through the waterways in order to reach international markets. Those shipments -- particularly from Kazakhstan -- have surged in recent years, exceeding 2 million barrels a day for sustained periods in late 2018.

As well as impeding outflows, tankers are also waiting longer to enter the Black Sea to get to export terminals. Loadings at the Russian port of Novorossiysk and the nearby CPC terminal have run behind schedule this month, according to tracking data and shipping programs compiled by Bloomberg.

Tankers are waiting about 13 days to pass through the shipping straits in order to exit the Black Sea, the longest waiting times since at least 2014 and more than double the norm, according to Tribeca. Vessels moving in the opposite direction are waiting about 15 days.

(Source: Bloomberg)



## Najaf Shiites launch solidarity initiative with Sunni areas

By Ali Mamouri



Clerics and other religious figures from Najaf's Hawza Illmiya, a prominent Shiite seminary, have launched the Dialogue for Social Cohesion in Iraq, a community cooperation initiative reaching out to western and northern Sunni governorates recently liberated from the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS). In the first phase of the initiative, a delegation from Najaf visited Anbar University Jan. 10 for meetings to open channels of communication with Sunni scholars and other religious figures, professors, students, intellectuals and civil society members.

Jawad al-Khoei, who oversees the Dar al-Ilm in Najaf and co-founded the initiative, told AL-Monitor in Anbar, "[The goal is to] promote the concept of equal citizenship among all Iraqis and uphold values of shared living and co-existence."

The delegation to Anbar consisted of figures from various segments of Najaf society, including religious authorities, professors from the University of Kufa and youth leaders from civil society organizations (CSOs).

"The initiative will include other visits, to the governorates of Saladin, north of Baghdad, and Mosul, in northern Iraq," Khoei said. "There are also several local NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] in Najaf working in cooperation with international NGOs, including the Finnish Crisis Management Initiative, which is also involved in this project."

Iraq's main Sunni governorates — Anbar, Saladin and Mosul — suffered social fragmentation, along with the rest of Iraq, after ISIS seized and held their territory for three years. That period had been preceded by another episode of social upheaval with the sectarian conflict ignited between Sunnis and Shiites following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 and subsequent occupation. All this has created deep mistrust between Sunnis in those governorates and Iraqis in Shiite- and Kurdish-majority governorates.

This highlights the necessity of the work by Shiite religious institutions and personalities in Najaf to open communication channels and boost cooperation aimed at establishing social harmony between the Sunni governorates and the rest of Iraq.

During the delegation visit to Anbar, Khoei addressed a crowd of intellectuals and professors at Anbar University. It is hoped that such visits — by harnessing the broad influence of Iraqi religious figures, professors, intellectuals and students — will eventually bring together Iraqis at the grassroots from all walks of life and from across the sectarian spectrum.

"We are all in the same boat, whether in the northern, southern, central or western governorates," Khoei said. "All of them suffer from one problem: corruption, poor services, and unequal distribution of wealth." He stressed that the only solution to these problems is to work toward the establishment of a "state of citizenship." Khoei also pointedly noted that the Najaf initiative is a sociological and cultural project devoid of any political agenda.

The initiative is, in fact, a project of the religious authority in Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. According to Khoei, the initiative is based on the need for "fair government, regardless of religion or sect." "[It] does not judge a ruler by his religion, but by his justice," he said.

In speeches and publicly stated positions, Sistani, Iraq's supreme Shiite cleric, has advocated for relations among Iraqi communities on the basis of the values of citizenship, not religious or ethnic affiliation. He has stressed on more than one occasion that Sunnis and other sects and ethnicities share equal footing with Shiites, being entitled to the same rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

To cite one example of Sistani's thinking, after some Iraqi clerics issued fatwas in December prohibiting Muslims' from participating in Christmas and New Year's festivities, Sistani ruled to the contrary. "It is permissible to extend greetings to non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians and others, during their festivities, such as Christmas, Easter and New Year," he wrote.

Balaghi Academy, a Hawza institution, is taking part in the Najaf initiative, represented by its director, Sayyad Zaid Bahr al-Ulum. The academy's primary focus is on interfaith and inter-cultural engagement. It has hosted several Christians and other figures at the Hawza and has cooperated with non-Islamic institutions, such as the Christian Community? of Sant'Egidio, to further religious dialogue.

The Najaf initiative emerged from the growth of a large community within the Hawza calling for rejecting extremist religious stances and instead advocating religious openness in human relations and a civil-oriented state with citizenship equality. They oppose the establishment of a religious state, for which some political parties have been calling.

Several CSOs have joined the Hawza in pursuing joint civil action. The Wave Team, consisting of young people from CSOs working to promote civic values in Najaf are among the main participants in the activities sponsored by the Hawza clerics. For instance, the team took part in the Najaf Initiative for Dialogue and Solidarity with Sunni Governorates, part of the social cohesion project. The UNESCO Chair for Inter-religious Dialogue Studies in the Islamic World, a department at the University of Kufa, has also participated in Hawza-sponsored activities aimed at promoting national reconciliation among Iraqis.

Initiative members are currently organizing visits to the Saladin and Mosul governorates in mid-2019, followed by Najaf playing host to Sunni personalities and leaders from those governorates.

The Najaf Hawza's civil initiative and other activities suggest that the Shiite religious institution has decided to dedicate its authority to encouraging deep-rooted and broad-based social cohesion, taking on a major role in building national harmony in areas affected by extremism and sectarianism.

(Source: Al Monitor)

# The Arabs are paying the price for peace with Israel

By Mohammad Ayes

In the past few years, Israel, the alien regim in the region, has been sleeping in peace in a way that it has never dreamt of since it was founded more than seven decades ago. Meanwhile, the Arabs are drowning in war and blood day after day. If we expand our awareness and attention to what is happening, we find that the deeper the Arab states sink into war, the more unprecedented peace and happiness that Israel and its military occupation enjoy.

Over the past five years, Israel has launched a series of raids on Syria and carried out carefully planned military operations across the border, including the assassinations of Samir Qantar, Imad Mughniyeh, and others. It has also carried out military operations elsewhere, including the assassination of Engineer Mohamed Zouari in Tunisia and the assassination of Palestinian academic and researcher Fadi Al-Batsh in Malaysia. It may have even carried out more killings in other countries without anyone realizing, especially since Israel does not immediately admit to such operations. It only confessed a few years ago, for example, that it had killed the martyr Wadie Haddad in Iraq in 1978, 30 years after the assassination which people thought was a natural death.

Israeli raids and operations in recent years are an important indicator of the peace and relative relaxation enjoyed by the regime, at a time when the Arabs are preoccupied with



**According to Elias Khoury, the editor of Palestine Studies magazine, there is a link between peace with Israel and the Arab internal war.**

their internal conflicts, which have cost them enormously in human and material terms. The richest Arab countries suffer from deficits in their budgets and suffocating economic crises, while the poorest Arab countries, such as Syria, Yemen and Libya, are standing in line waiting to die. Their citizens who have escaped death by gunfire and bombs

are facing starvation and extreme cold temperatures in refugee camps, or maybe even being drowned in their attempts to escape to the shores of Europe.

According to Elias Khoury, the editor of Palestine Studies magazine, there is a link between peace with Israel and the Arab internal war, pointing out that the Arab world

is paying the price of that peace, which is far greater than the price of conflict and war with the Zionist regime. At least 72,000 Arab martyrs have been killed in the wars with Israel, which is far fewer than those lost in inter-Arab conflicts. In Lebanon, for example, more than 120,000 people died in the civil war alone. Khoury asks whether this deceptive peace is merely a door to hell for the Arab world. Have the past few years proven that the price of peace is higher than the price of war?

The answer may well be yes, especially if we take into consideration the Machiavellian theory that when people face an external danger, they come together and forget their internal disputes. They rally behind each other in order to face the external threat and defeat it.

To say that the Arabs are paying the price of peace with Israel or that Israel is enjoying peace at great cost to the Arabs amounts to one and the same thing. Israel is reaping the benefits of the Arabs being in perpetual conflict. Ultimately, it is the sole beneficiary. The fact that it is being allowed to get away with attacking targets in Syria and assassinating its enemies with apparent impunity is not the only benefit that the Israeli government has obtained from Arab conflicts. It is also sitting back and watching Arab leaders fall over themselves in the race to normalize relations with the Zionist state in our midst.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

## Rise in arms sales feeding war in Yemen

By Mona Zaid

Could a similar comment not be made about the various British arms manufacturers who continue to, with the full support of our government, sell arms to Saudi Arabia, a state that has played and is playing such a disastrously central role in Yemen's civil war?

UK aid to Yemen is eclipsed by the billions brought in through the bungling, deceitful sale of British weapons to Saudi Arabia.

Britain and the U.S. have been the key supporters of the Saudi-led coalition, providing arms, intelligence, logistics, military training and diplomatic cover.

This has provoked criticism: in the U.S., a Democrat congressional resolution invoked the 1973 War Powers Act to end U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen, but was blocked by a Republican procedural rule change to a resolution about ... wolves. More recently, an attempt to push through a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire was stalled by the U.S. and other countries, reportedly after a lobbying campaign by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Since the bombing started, the Saudis have bought from Britain £2.7bn worth of aircraft, helicopters and drones; £1.9bn of grenades, bombs and missiles; and £572,000 worth of tanks, CAAT figures showed.

Last month, UN experts said there was evidence indicated both sides in the Yemen war had committed crimes under international law.

Yet the financial value of aid is a drop in the ocean compared with the value of weapons sold to the Saudi-led coalition licenses worth at least £4.7bn of arms exports to Saudi Arabia and £860m to its coalition partners since the start of the war. Relatively speaking, aid has been little more than a sticking plaster on the death, injury, destruction, displacement, famine and disease inflicted on Yemen by an entirely manmade disaster.

The kingdom is the British government's largest arms customer, with the UK licensing more than £4.6bn worth of arms to the country since the beginning of its bombing campaign in Yemen in March 2015, according to the Cam-



**The Saudi kingdom is the British government's largest arms customer, with the UK licensing more than £4.6bn worth of arms to the country since the beginning of its bombing campaign in Yemen in March 2015, according to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT).**

paign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT).

The UK government claims to have one of the most rigorous arms control regimes in the world, yet evidence of attacks on medical facilities and schoolchildren in Yemen is clear.

Brokering is facilitating (rather than directly supplying) the transfer of weapons from outside Britain to a third country.

Since 2012, in the counter-revolutionary backlash against the Arab spring across the Middle East and north Africa,

the Saudis and the UAE, alongside Jordan and Turkey, have purchased weapons worth £1.2bn (£1.08bn) from eastern and central European countries — notably the former states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and Serbia, Croatia and Bulgaria — for onward re-transfer to allied proxy forces in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

War is the primary cause of death, injury, famine and disease in Yemen; and the coalition is causing twice as many civilian casualties.

The war in Yemen has killed upwards of 57,000 people since March 2015, left 8.4 million people surviving on food aid and created a cholera epidemic.

As calls grow for an embargo on Saudi Arabia and a peace process in Yemen, this litany of British deceit, mistakes, bureaucratic malfeasance, and political maneuvering — all to support a friendly yet wantonly reckless regime — will not be judged kindly by history.

Starvation is also being used as a weapon of war in the country, according to Save the Children, with some 400,000 children under the age of five so severely malnourished they are fighting for their lives. A further 1.8 million children are also starving, according to United Nations children's agency.

But aid experts and United Nations officials say a more insidious form of warfare is also being waged in Yemen, an economic war that is exacting a far greater toll on civilians and now risks tipping the country into a famine of catastrophic proportions.

The devastating war in Yemen has gotten more attention recently as outrage over the killing of a Saudi dissident in Istanbul has turned a spotlight on Saudi actions elsewhere. The harshest criticism of the Saudi-led war has focused on the airstrikes that have killed thousands of civilians at weddings, funerals and on school buses, aided by American-supplied bombs and intelligence.

According to United Nations Human Rights Office, between March 2015 up to 23 August 2018, 6,660 civilians were killed and 10,563 injured, although the real figures are likely to be significantly higher.

(Source: Yemen Press)

## Trump, Macron, and the poverty of liberalism

By Kishore Mahbubani

If liberals want to defeat populists, there is only one route: regain the trust of the voters that form much of their base. The choice for liberals is clear: they can feel good by condemning their opponents, or they can do good by attacking the elite interests that have contributed to their opponents' success.

No Western liberal would disagree that Donald Trump's election was a disaster for American society, while that of Emmanuel Macron was a triumph for French society. In fact, the opposite may well be true, as heretical as that sounds.

The first question to ask is why people are engaged in violent street protests in Paris, but not in Washington, DC. I have personally experienced these Paris protests, and the smell of tear gas on the Champs-Élysées reminded me of the ethnic riots I experienced in Singapore in 1964. And why are the Yellow Vests protesting? For many, at least initially, it is because they didn't believe that Macron cared for or understood their plight.

Macron is trying to implement sensible macroeconomic reform. The proposed increases in taxes on diesel fuel would have reduced France's budget deficits and helped lower its carbon dioxide emissions. His hope was that a stronger fiscal position would increase confidence and investment in the French economy so that the

bottom 50% of society would eventually benefit. But for people to endure short-term pain for long-term gain, they must trust their leader. And Macron, it appears, has lost the trust of much of that bottom 50%.

By contrast, Trump retains the trust and confidence of the bottom half of U.S. society, or at least the white portion of it. At first sight, this seems strange and paradoxical: the billionaire Trump is socially much further from the bottom 50% than the middle-class Macron is. But when Trump attacks the liberal and conservative U.S. establishments, he is seen as venting the anger of the less well-off toward an elite that has ignored their plight. His election may, therefore, have had a cathartic effect on the bottom 50%, which may explain the lack of street protests in Washington or other major American cities.

And these Americans have much to be angry about. Most tellingly, the United States is the only major developed society where the average income of the bottom half has not just stagnated but declined markedly, as Danny Quah of the National University of Singapore has documented. Even more shockingly, the average income of the top 1% was 138 times that of the bottom 50% in 2010, up from 41 times higher in 1980.

There is no single explanation for why inequality in the U.S. has rocketed while the economic interests of the bottom 50% have

been ignored. But we can obtain at least a partial answer by looking at the two principles of justice that Harvard philosopher John Rawls articulated in his famous book A Theory of Justice. The first principle emphasizes that each person should have "an equal right to the most extensive liberty," while the second says that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to "everyone's advantage."

The undeniable fact is that Western liberals have emphasized the first principle over the second in both theory and practice, prioritizing individual liberty and worrying far less about inequality. They believe that as long as elections take place and people can vote freely and equally, this is a sufficient condition for social stability. It follows, therefore, that those who fail economically do so because of personal incompetence, not social conditions.

Yet there was no doubt when China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 that "creative destruction" in developed economies would follow, entailing millions of job losses. These economies' elites — whether in the U.S., France, or elsewhere — had a responsibility to help those who were losing their jobs. But no such help was forthcoming.

Conventional macroeconomic theory remains sound. Trump's policy of running larger budget deficits in good times will bring pain later, while Macron's economic policies

will eventually pay off if the French remain patient. And Macron may yet back reforms that address inequality. But Macron is clearly not trusted by the bottom 50%, while Trump is.

For this reason, liberals may have made a strategic mistake by focusing their anger on Trump himself. Instead, they should ask themselves why much of the bottom 50% trusts him (and may yet re-elect him). And if they were honest, liberals would admit that they have effectively let the bottom half of society down.

If liberals want to defeat Trump, there is only one route: regain the trust of the voters that form much of his base. This will require them to restructure their societies so that economic growth benefits the bottom half more than the top 1%. In theory, this can be done easily. In practice, however, major vested interests will invariably seek to block reform. The choice for liberals is clear: they can feel good by condemning Trump, or they can do good by attacking the elite interests that contributed to his election.

If liberals can do the latter, Trump's election would be seen by future historians as a necessary wake-up call, while Macron's merely created the illusion that all was well. These historians might then conclude that Trump's election was ultimately better for American society than Macron's was for France.

(Source: Project Syndicate)



# Russia and U.S., including conspiracies and interference: Claudio Moffa

**1 →** A: It seems to me that Mueller does not work as an irreducible enemy of Trump. For instance, when the web BuzzFeed accused Donald Trump to have ordered his lawyer Michael Cohen to lie to the Congress about his interest in building a Trump Tower in Moscow, Robert Mueller – after denials of President’s spokesperson Sarah Sanders – criticized the scoop-complaint as “inaccurate”: that’s to say he, the special procurator on Russiagate, gave indirect support to denials of White House. Now, we may say that this single event cannot mean that Mueller is a supporter of Trump, but it anyway shows that he is not a frontal and irreducible enemy of the President, whatever the reason for this attitude.

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

A: I don’t know, it seems to me that there are not clear informations about this crucial item. Media against Russia have interest to accuse Moscow of infiltration in U.S. administration. But I think Trump is enough strong to avoid this eventuality.

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

A: The origin, or the cause of any Russian infiltration in U.S. leadership, is that in the U.S. Administration there have always been representatives of a hard line against Russia: see for instance not only Hillary Clinton vs. Obama, but also Bolton vs Trump himself. I mean that eventual Russian infiltration in U.S. administration and apparatus of power seems to have a defensive intent. Is it absurd to say to say this? I don’t think saw. Whatever the reason (weakness towards western power?) the official foreign policy of Moscow is coherent with the International Law. The intervention of Putin in Syria is a clear example of this: Moscow defends the legitimate president of Syria, Assad, from the internal and

external aggressions. This means to be coherent with the International law, that stands side by side the legitimates governments against rebels, in the specific case Isis terrorists. Face to this situation, Trump has been ambiguous, first he sent American troops to Syria “to defend the Kurds” and then he withdrew them leaving the camp free for Moscow’s support for Assad.

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

A: Who are these experts? And what evidence do they put forward for their thesis? When Trump was elected one of his first concerns was the control of the Fed, and China’s economical growing power. I think these are the most important problems for him.

■ A look into the U.S. policies since 2016 shows how its position as a superpower has been undermined while at the same time, Russia has been strengthening its international position. What’s your opinion on this matter?

A: Being a superpower does not necessarily mean to be an expansionist superpower. When U.S. leaderships take this path, in violation of International Law, it’s obvious that they lose the support of States they treat as enemies. On the contrary, Russia has pursued an official foreign policy that respects international law, whatever the cause, may be for instance its weakness compared to the western world. The allegations about Crimea were weak, because the annexation of Crimea followed a referendum whose result was in favor of Moscow with over 90% of consensus. And the crisis with Ukraine bears bay the provocations of Kiev, a government born with the help of Mossad.

This does not mean that Moscow has not enemies, but they are less motivated to assume an aggressive attitude.

■ Less than one year, some western media revealed that some people in Kushner’s inner circle (such as Sena-



tor Tom Cotton) had relations with Mossad and spied on the U.S. senate intelligence committee. At the same time, some other media talked about the Russia’s infiltration into Mossad and even their infiltration into Israel and the U.S. security intelligence structures. Do you think that there is any relations with the Russia collusion case and other infiltration claims?

A: Let’s take the news about Kushner as good. But has Russia really infiltrated Mossad? I don’t know, Russia has often assumed an aggressive stance towards Israel, that does not accept the support of Moscow for Assad and Iran. But this does not mean that Russia is able to infiltrate Mossad: we should check the sources of these news, in order to understand that they are true or at least credible. On the contrary, it is well credible that Mossad infiltrated CIA, with which it often collaborates.

(Source: Ilfarosulmondo)

## Why Yemen matters to Saudi Arabia and the West

**1 →** In the West’s view, by controlling Yemen through the Houthis, Iran is aiming to increase its strategic and regional influence and is desirous for acceptance of its positions in Syria and Iraq, which is not desirable to the Arab-Western axis. In their view, the Houthis are the Iranian forces in Yemen, and Iran is a geopolitical threat to the axis.

According to Saudi Arabia, the Pahlavi regime collapse caused the geopolitical void in the region and it paved the way to Saudi Arabia to be a regional power, but the Islamic revolution complicated matters for the Saudis. In the Iraq-Iran war, Saudi Arabia tried to help Iraq. After the war, however, Iran became more powerful in the Middle East. The stabilization of Iran’s position in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen led Saudi Arabia to see Iran as a big threat. Confrontation increased.

From Saudi Arabia’s view, the Yemeni Shiites are the last ring of the Shiite crescent, and their victory would mark a complete collapse of its military goals and its regional power, and would also constitute a threat to its territorial integrity.

Perhaps this is why, despite the international criticism and intense media outrage against Saudi Arabia for the humanitarian



catastrophes and war crimes in Yemen, the U.S. continues to support Saudi Arabia as its important ally in the Middle East.

Unlike some Arab countries whose oil is paramount, Yemen’s strategic location at the south of the Arabian Peninsula and on the

vital sea lanes has ramped up the importance of Yemen both to the Saudis and the West.

The Gulf of Aden in southern Yemen is an important port area at the intersection of one of world’s busiest shipping lanes. During colonial British times, the Aden area was

used as a coal station for the British merchant marine.

The daily passage of millions of barrels of oil, the maritime traffic of trade towards the Suez Canal and the Saudi Refinery in Yenbu’, and the flow of oil tankers and other commercial vessels to destinations such as China and Europe, have given special importance to the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Bab al-Mandab. The presence Somali pirates also greatly enhances the importance of stability and security in Yemen in general and the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Bab al-Mandab.

The West is concerned that instability and insecurity on the frontier of one of the world’s oil giants may cost them. According to Saudi statistics, a production rate of 11 million barrels of oil per day plays a very important role in the world’s energy market, as most of Saudi oil goes to developed Western countries, as well as emerging countries such as China and other parts of East Asia.

The importance of control over Yemen for Saudi Arabia and the West is obvious. Instability along Saudi’s border with Yemen seems a threat to the global political and economic order as determined by the West and the Saudis.

## Attendance at U.S.’ anti-Iran summit could destroy Europe’s interests: analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — A senior Irish political analyst said European nations’ participation in an anti-Iran conference due to be held by the U.S. in the Polish capital of Warsaw in mid-February could destroy the 28-member bloc’s “political and economic interests”.

“Such a ‘war summit’ – for that’s what it amounts to – completely destroys European economic and political interests with Iran. It would be like shooting your own vessel below the water line. Germany, for one, has something like \$4 billion of annual trade with Iran,” Finian Cunningham told Tasnim.

He added, “Sooner or later, the Europeans must respond to the hegemonic abuse by the U.S. The U.S. aggression towards Iran is not in Europe’s interests”.

Finian Cunningham (born 1963) has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Originally from Belfast, Ireland, he is a Master’s graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. For over 20 years he worked as an editor and writer in major news media organizations, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent. Now a freelance journalist based in East Africa, his columns appear on RT, Sputnik, and Strategic Culture Foundation.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said recently that Washington will jointly host a global summit focused on Iran and the Middle East in Warsaw from February 13 to 14. Pompeo said the meeting would “focus on Middle East stability and peace, freedom and security here in this region, and that includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence.” What is your take on the move by the U.S. administration?

A: It looks like the Trump administration is trying to concentrate its hostile policy towards Iran and its efforts for regime change in the Islamic Republic. This is in the context of Trump’s decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria. As Pompeo said in a speech in Cairo last week, this purported troop pullout from Syria is a “tactical change” not an absolute reduction of U.S. militarism in the Mid-



dle East. No doubt, the Trump administration is seeking to focus its military efforts more on Iran, by obviating its failed efforts in Syria. Pompeo and Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton have been intensifying the rhetoric of aggression towards Iran lately. It seems that the U.S. is trying to cohere its hostile forces and clients in the region against Iran.

■ A group of activists in the United States and other countries have signed a petition calling on European countries to boycott the anti-Iran summit. The online petition urges EU countries to skip Pompeo’s “belligerent conference” and “instead host an alternative one with all nations of the region, including Iran.” What do you think? Do you believe European nations will resist against Washington’s pressure campaign?

A: The American agenda of hostility towards Iran is one more policy on top of several other policies that have cut across European vital interests. The abandonment of the nuclear accord with Iran; the threat of secondary sanctions against Europeans doing business with Tehran; the threat of sanctions against Europeans over the Nord Stream 2 project with Russia; the unilateral abandonment of the Paris Climate accord; the bullying conduct of the Trump

administration over trade and tariffs with the European Union; Trump’s continual insults against the EU and its political leaders; the moves by Washington to rip up the INF nuclear weapons treaty with Moscow which puts Europe at risk of a future war. And so on. Sooner or later, the Europeans must respond to the hegemonic abuse by the U.S. The U.S. aggression towards Iran is not in Europe’s interests. We cannot predict exactly what the Europeans will do. But sooner or later out of necessity they have to defend their interests against American depredations. The issue with Iran could be one such opportunity for the Europeans to stand up for their interests.

■ Do you think that it would make sense for Europe to participate in the conference as European countries are still a party to the Iran nuclear agreement?

A: Absolutely not. Such a “war summit” – for that’s what it amounts to – completely destroys European economic and political interests with Iran. It would be like shooting your own vessel below the water line. Germany, for one, has something like \$4 billion of annual trade with Iran. Is Germany going to let that sink just to satisfy America’s unwarranted and self-serving aggression towards Iran?

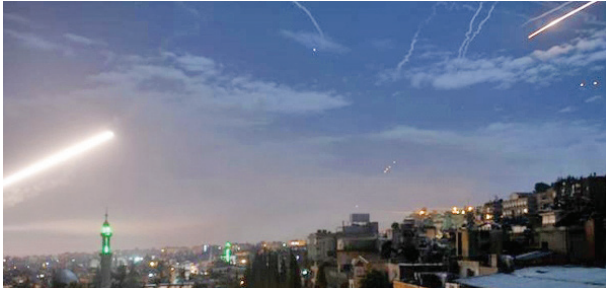
■ The Trump administration’s withdrawal from the long-negotiated nuclear agreement and its increased hostility towards Iran that have added to the instability of the region and are threatening to unleash another devastating war in the Middle East. Do you believe so?

A: We may hope not. But the incendiary and belligerent nature of the U.S. ruling class is always a threat against peace. Trump’s reckless aggression towards Iran is truly criminal in its gratuitous and flagrant incitement against peace and for war.

It is tantamount to throwing matches around in a gas depot. The Trump administration’s obsession with Iran as demonstrated by the psychotic personalities of Pompeo and Bolton could embolden client regimes like Israel and Saudi Arabia to do something provocative against Iran.

We may hope war does not happen. But the danger has probably never been greater than under this current American regime.

## UN required to classify Israeli air strikes on Syria as war crimes



**TEHRAN (FNA)** — On Monday, January 21, Syria’s air defenses shot down more than 30 cruise missiles and guided bombs during Israel’s night attack.

Tragically, the airstrikes still managed to target an airport in Southeastern Damascus, killing and wounding a number of Syrian soldiers. Syrian media, citing a military source, said the country had endured “intense attack through consecutive waves of guided missiles” early Monday, but had destroyed most “hostile targets.”

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

Mind you, in September 2018, a Russian reconnaissance aircraft with 15 servicemen on board was also 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 cross-chairs 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.

This is welcome news but never enough. The international civil society, the United Nations in particular, should also join in and seek international accountability as civilians in Syria are also being killed by Israeli airstrikes. The UN must seek Israeli records on the legal basis for the Syrian raids and the assessment of civilian deaths afterward.

Indeed, the international civil society has a right to know about any claims and justifications Tel Aviv is making to target Syria and what really happens with their illegal operations and missile warfare specifically. The usurper regime’s explanations have little credibility, and the documents the Syrian government and other organizations seek are essential for international accountability.

As is often the case, civilians are still being killed by Israel in Syria. Israeli officials responsible for these bungled raids and missile-drone campaigns have committed, and continue to commit, war crimes and crimes against humanity. They should stand trial because they have broken international laws designed to protect civilians and Syria’s sovereignty. As maintained by Damascus, Israel’s missile and air strikes are unjustified, contravene the laws of armed conflict, and must end.

Some might argue that getting to the bottom of individual strikes is exceptionally difficult in places like Syria. Yet Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both mounted a major effort to investigate tens of the many attacks Israel has carried out against civilian areas in besieged Gaza. All those interviewed by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch strongly deny any of the men, women and children killed had been involved in militancy.

The same is true in Syria. Israel has no right to attack Syrian military positions and/or civilian airports. The world community has serious concerns as these attacks violate the prohibition of the arbitrary deprivation of life and constitute war crimes. The world community calls for those responsible to stand trial, particularly those who are exploiting the fragile situation in Syria to evade accountability for their deliberate violations.

The world community also rejects the “pro-Israel doctrine” that allows the U.S. to support Israeli air strikes on Syria without any justifications. To accept such a policy would be to endorse unlawful Israeli practices that fundamentally undermine regional peace and human rights protections that have been painstakingly developed over more than a century of international law-making.

These arguments determine beyond any doubt that Israel’s air strikes on Syria are condemnable under international law and UN Charter. They are only designed for domestic consumption and to protect its own illicit interests. Israel’s air strikes are illegal because they are not authorized by the United Nations and because Syria never attacks Israel. Israeli strikes are illegally and indiscriminately killing civilians as well, and must be classed as war crimes. Evaluating the legality of these strikes must begin immediately at the UN with an understanding of how the law of armed conflict applies - not how Tel Aviv and its friends in Washington view its applicability in Syria.

## Sudan close ties with Qatar escalates Riyadh isolation in Arab world



**1 →** Recently, the Saudi ambassador to Cairo addressed the issue of Sudanese protestors, saying, “Riyadh cannot care less about the fate of al-Bashir or who would take power in Sudan.” The remark shows the Saudis have already given green light to downfall al-Bashir government.

Sudan is part of the Saud-led coalition against Yemen and has deployed thousands of ground troops to Yemen. The alliance has brought huge military expenditure to Khartoum and played as a factor in the deteriorating Sudanese economic situation.

In a wrap, Saudi Arabia is about to lose a partner and ally, Sudan, which is an important African country in terms of geopolitics and natural resources, making Riyadh more isolated than ever before for its aggressive policies.



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# 161 Iranians have ‘very rare’ blood types

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — 161 people out of all blood donors in Iran have been identified as having ‘very rare’ blood types, said the spokesperson of the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO).

According to Bashir Hajibaigi, another survey within the framework of “national plan of rare blood types” revealed that out of 40,000 blood samples collected from different ethnic groups all over the country, 1700 people have ‘rare blood types’, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

A rare blood type is any blood type that is difficult to find in the population where you may need that ‘rare’ type of blood.

An individual's blood type is considered to be ‘rare’ if only one other person in 1,000 lacks the same antigens or shares the same uncommon antigens. A person's blood type is considered ‘very rare’ if only one person in 10,000 has or lacks similar blood antigens.

“We selected a group of people with



**A rare blood type is any blood type that is difficult to find in the population where you may need that ‘rare’ type of blood.**

rare and very rare blood types based on our requirements and facilities; then we refrigerated samples of their blood, so that we can use them whenever a patient in any healthcare center needed such rare blood types,” Hajibaigi explained.

“By using the refrigerated samples, we managed to send 121 samples of rare or very rare blood types to the patients who needed them since the beginning of last year [March 2017],” he further noted.

According to Hajibaigi, the IBTO has set up blood bank refrigerators in the immunohematology departments and is running the “national plan of rare blood types” to ensure that patients who need rare blood types will have instant access to them.

He added that the blood bank refrigerators will soon be equipped with a data storage system so that a comprehensive network of data about people with rare and very rare blood types are established.

## Nurse-led clinics to rise to 100 by March 2020

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — The number of nurse-led clinics in the country will increase to 100 by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020), said the deputy health minister for nursing.

Maryam Hazrati added that the clinics will assume different specialties. They provide the patients with psychological support and proper education to promote their health, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The nurse-led clinics will offer three kinds of services: prevention of the disease, examination of the risk factors in patients and referring them to the specialist doctors, as well as rehabilitation services.

In October, Hazrati announced



that Health Ministry was planning on holding nurse practitioner courses in an attempt to improve the quality of healthcare services.

The more a nurse is trained and the more they pursue further specialization the higher the quality of healthcare services will be, she suggested.

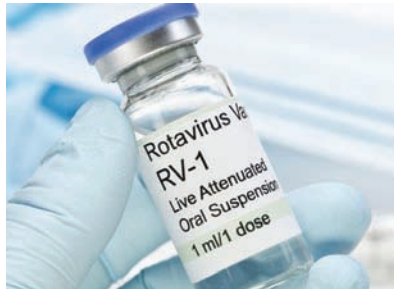
## Two new vaccines in last stage of production

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — Pneumococcal and rotavirus vaccines are in their last stage of production in Pasteur Institute and their usage is likely to start in the new Iranian calendar year (starting March 21), said the head of communicable diseases department of the Ministry of Health.

Pneumococcal vaccination is a method of preventing a specific type of lung infection (pneumonia) and Rotavirus vaccine is a vaccine used to protect against rotavirus infections, which are the leading cause of severe diarrhea among young children.

According to Mohammad Mehdi Gouya, the Iranian parliament (Majlis) has approved that the two vaccines will be added to the national immunization program, if they are produced domestically, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

Gouya added that production of Ro-



tavirus vaccine will make a great contribution to the development of children's health across the country.

In March 2018, Pasteur Institute announced the allocation of \$100 million from the national development fund for domestic production of the two aforementioned vaccines.

## Oolong tea extract may stave off breast cancer

New research finds that oolong tea can damage breast cancer cells and that people who consume large amounts of this tea have a lower risk of developing breast cancer.

Oolong tea may have secret cancer-fighting properties, a new study suggests.

Despite recent advances in screening procedures and treatment, breast cancer remains both the most common form of this disease and the second leading cause of cancer death among women.

According to estimates by the American Cancer Society, more than 250,000 women in the United States developed breast cancer in 2017, and more than 40,000 died as a result.

In this context, researchers are still in need of more effective prevention and treatment strategies. Moreover, given the side effects of chemotherapy, the need for nontoxic alternatives is also dire.

With these aims in mind, scientists have investigated the potential benefits of green tea for breast cancer and found that certain compounds have anti-cancer effects. However, few studies have examined other types of tea and their role in breast cancer prevention.

Now, a study looks at the potential benefits of oolong tea. Chunfa Huang, Ph.D., who is an associate research professor in the department of internal medicine at Saint Louis University in Missouri, led the new research.

### ■ Oolong tea damages breast cancer cells

Huang and team examined the effect of oolong tea extract on six breast cancer cell lines, which included ER-positive, PR-positive, HER2-positive, and triple-negative breast cancer cells.

The researchers treated these cells with different concentrations of green, oolong, black, and dark tea extracts.

Huang and team examined the viability of the cells and measured the DNA damage and cleavage, as well as any other changes in the morphology of the cells.

The extracts of green and oolong tea stopped the growth of all types of breast cancer cell. In contrast, black and dark tea extracts had no effect on the cells. Huang and team conclude:

“Oolong tea, same as green tea, can induce DNA damage and cleavage, play an inhibitory role in breast cancer cell growth, proliferation, and tumorigenesis, and [it has] great potential as a chemopreventive agent against breast cancer.”

### ■ Oolong tea drinkers and breast cancer risk

Additionally, the scientists examined annual cancer registry data from China and the Fujian province and found that people in the latter area were 35 percent less likely to have breast cancer and 38 percent less likely to die from it compared with the national average.

They also noted that people who consumed large amounts of oolong tea on a regular basis were 25 percent less likely to develop breast cancer compared with the average incidence in the Fujian province and 50 percent less likely compared with the national average.

Finally, compared with the national average, high consumers of oolong tea were 68 percent less likely to die prematurely.

(Source: medical news today)

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- 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.



## Ancient relics, fabrics unearthed in Rey

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Some ancient relics and urban structures, deemed to date from Seljuk era (1037–1194), have recently been found during a construction project in the city of Rey, south of Tehran.



“The findings include two clay jars, [parts of] a water supply system, urban sewage disposal, and flowing bricks,” ILNA reported on Wednesday.

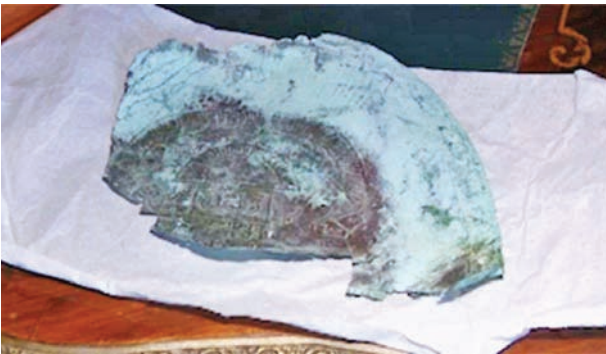
In the 11th and 12th centuries Rey (also known as Shahr-e Rey) was one of the capitals of the Seljuk Empire. It was devastated in the 13th century when the Mongols swept through and, these days, has been swallowed up by the urban sprawl of Tehran.

Rey, however, retains enough history to give it a different sensibility, its key sight is the elaborately decorated Shah Abdol Azim Shrine. Beside the shrine complex is a lively bazaar, while further afield are a couple of minor historical attractions.

## Ancient funeral mask uncovered at Florida coast

Archaeologists have discovered a rare death mask dating back thousands of years on a beach in Florida, a sign that more treasures may be nearby.

A team of researchers with Seafarer Exploration Corporation found the artifact made of precious metal on Melbourne Beach and believe it served as part of a funeral headpiece from a pre-Incan civilization in Peru, Fox 35 reported.



“This is some of the earliest evidence of man’s ability to metal-work and to use iridium,” Dr. Michael Torres, who found the mask, told Fox 35. “That changes things, and may change the way we perceive ancient Peruvian cultures.”

Torres is working with a team to discover artifacts from the 1715 shipwreck of the La Concepcion. Researchers believe the mask was taken by Spanish tomb raiders and washed up after the wreck.

The discovery of the mask hints that more precious items could be nearby.

Torres told Fox 35 that he hopes to give the mask to a museum as a gift.

(Source: Fox News)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Acropolis, Athens

The Acropolis of Athens is the most striking and complete ancient Greek monumental complex still existing in our times.

It is situated on a hill of average height (156m) that rises in the basin of Athens. Its overall dimensions are approximately 170 by 350m.

The hill is rocky and steep on all sides except for the western side, and has an extensive, nearly flat top. Strong fortification walls have surrounded the summit of the Acropolis for more than 3,300 years.



The first fortification wall was built during the 13th century BC, and surrounded the residence of the local Mycenaean ruler. In the 8th century BC, the Acropolis gradually acquired a religious character with the establishment of the cult of Athena, the city’s patron goddess.

The sanctuary reached its peak in the archaic period (mid-6th century to early 5th century BC). In the 5th century BC, the Athenians, empowered from their victory over the Persians, carried out an ambitious building program under the leadership of the great statesman Perikles, comprising a large number of monuments including the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the Propylaia and the temple of Athena Nike.

On this hill were born Democracy, Philosophy, Theatre, Freedom of Expression and Speech, which provide to this day the intellectual and spiritual foundation for the contemporary world and its values. The Acropolis’ monuments, having survived for almost twenty-five centuries through wars, explosions, bombardments, fires, earthquakes, sackings, interventions and alterations, have adapted to different uses and the civilizations, myths and religions that flourished in Greece through time.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Mashhad hosts some 700,000 Pakistani pilgrims per annum: envoy

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Some 700,000 Pakistani pilgrims annually travel to Mashhad to visit the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), Islamabad’s Ambassador to Tehran said on Tuesday.

Riffat Masood made the remarks at the opening ceremony of a cultural center in the Consulate of Pakistan in the northeastern metropolis, IRNA reported.

The envoy underlined that Tehran and Islamabad have put in a great deal of effort to facilitate air and land traveling to Mashhad, adding “Iran and Pakistan, in addition to having common borders, have many cultural heritage such as language, rituals and traditions in common.”

She voiced hope that the new center would help cultural and economic ties between the two neighbors to become deepened.

“Although one of the most important tasks of the consulates is to expand political ties, but developing cultural and economic relations are important as well because



Islamabad’s Ambassador to Tehran Riffat Masood cuts ribbon on a cultural center in Mashhad, northeast Iran.

they help the two nations to get closer to each other.”

“Today is a very auspicious day for me because I attended the ceremony at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad to commemorate Mohammad Ali Jinnah and now I’m witnessing the opening of Pakistan’s cultural center,” she stated.

Pakistani general consul in Mashhad, Irfan Mahmood Bokhari, explained that the cultural center includes a museum, literature room and a space to present Pakistani souvenirs.

Earlier this month, Pakistan Today said: “An unprecedented surge in religious tourism between Pakistan and Iran was witnessed during the months of Muharram and Safar this Islamic year.”

Mashhad, which embraces more than 900 hotels, apartment hotels and guest houses, is the prime destination for Pakistani travelers who come to go on pilgrimage to the shrine of the eighth Shia Imam.

## Borjak’s art of pottery inscribed on national heritage list



**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — A skill of pottery-making without wheel, which is practiced in Borjak, a village in central Markazi province, has been registered on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

“Potteries produced here are [indigenously] famous as ‘Do-gou-leh Borjaki’ and they are only handcrafted by females,” provincial tourism chief Qasem Kazemi said, IRNA reported.

“No potter’s wheel is used for this product and all production steps are done by hands. The raw material is all-native yet very simple hand-made tools are being utilized. No extra coats of glaze are applied... very simple decorations, like di-

agonal lines, are added on the surface,” the official explained.

“Do-gou-leh” or “Abgoosht” is one of traditional dishes typically served in such potteries in the region. Abgoosht is an incredibly rich stew of lamb, legumes, tomatoes and potatoes.

Last July, Persian media reported that a 75-year-old craftswoman was endeavoring to revive the old-school earthenware style in Borjak by setting up workshops.

Pinching, slabbing and coiling are amongst basic techniques that are used for making earthenware without using a potter’s wheel. Goat’s hair are usually being used in crafting the local earthenware to help boost its strength.

## ‘Zaras village’ an emerging destination for nature lovers



**TOURISM TEHRAN** — Once an intact village in the heart of Zagros Mountains, Zaras is becoming a favorite travel destination in the southwestern Khuzestan province.

Temperate climate in winters or scenic nature seem to be the raison d’etre. However, the village was put on the map for nature lovers when became equipped with tourist facilities over the past couple of years, Tasnim reported.

Situated adjacent to a lake, the village is teemed with oak trees and is surrounded by rugged mountains. The lake is a place to sail and catch fish.

There are also tourist attractions near the village, including historic monuments

such as Tagh-e Tavileh and Atabaki citadel, as well as Shivand waterfall, villages and gardens where various fruit trees grow.

Kul-e Farah rock reliefs and Qaleh-ye Kazhdamak are other ancient monuments close to this area, located a few kilometers southwest of the ancient city of Izeh.

Khuzestan province is home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Susa, Tchogha Zanbil and Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System yet it is a region of raw beauty where its visitors could spend weeks exploring.

The province is also a cradle for handicrafts and arts which crafters inherited from their preceding generations.

## The three most threatening travel illnesses revealed

Travelling to far-flung exotic destination is paradise for most travelers, but amid off-the beat locations comes the risk of tropical travel illnesses – with the three worst now revealed.

Tropical travel illnesses are a troubling side effect of sun-soaked long haul holidays in relatively untouched destinations. Many countries such as Bali and India require holidaymakers to have a host of preventative jabs to ensure their health and wellbeing while on vacation.

Although some of the immunizations might come at a cost to UK residents, they could help to save lives and combat against regional illnesses. The top three travel sicknesses that are tipped to impact the most people heading on vacation in 2019 have now been revealed.

Medical insurance providers Get Going have pinpointed the most threatening illnesses that exist in most countries, these being Dengue Fever, Typhoid fever and Yellow fever.

Dengue fever is a tropical disease with four different types of viruses that are transmitted by mosquitoes, with 390,000,000 cases, while Typhoid fever is classed as an acute illness that has a recorded amount of 21,000,000 cases. The latter comes around after ingestion of contaminated



food or water.

Meanwhile Yellow fever is preventable virus caused by mosquito bites, for which immunization is available, with over 127,000 cases affecting travelers.

Kenya and Peru are hotspots for Dengue fever, while Typhoid is also present in Peru and India.

Diarrhoea also affects 30 percent of travelers who jet to far-away climes.

Get Going also stated the “riskiest nations” to travel to in health terms were India, Peru, Indonesia and Kenya.

Thailand also made the list, despite its popularity with holidaymakers crashing beaches and culture.

A spokesperson stated: “The average value of an insurance claim in this part of Southeast Asia is £734, with Travellers Diarrhoea the most common ailment for its visitors.”

Meanwhile, contaminated food was flagged as a major way bugs are transmitted.

The firm also warned against poor sanitation facilities, and advised: “Locations where there is a lack of clean water, open sewers and toilets are hotbeds for bacteria and parasites to thrive.

“Steer clear of tap water and ice in your drinks to avoid disease in the risky nations.”

Insect bites are also prime for disease to enter the body.

The spokesperson added: “The WHO estimates that the mosquito is the deadliest animal alive, resulting in over one million deaths every year.

“Travelers can equip themselves with maps showing danger zones for Malaria and Dengue to stay safe.”

(Source: express.co.uk)

## Three New Year’s resolutions for better travel in 2019

By Justin Sablich

Changing your approach to traveling can go a long way in making you happier and healthier in the New Year. Here are three ways to get the most out of your trips in 2019.

It’s not uncommon for people to set unrealistic expectations when making New Year’s resolutions, which likely contributes to most of them failing. Over 90 percent of them do, according to research by the University of Scranton.

So this year, why not focus on improving just one area: your travels, and making sure you travel well.

“Vacation is essential to our well-being,” said Penny Zenker, a business strategy and life coach. “In order to be creative, think strategically and create balance in our lives we need to disconnect from our day to day activities.”

With this in mind, here are three ways to get the most out of your travels in 2019.

### ■ Take more time off

It’s important to remember that vacation days are typically part of one’s compensation but the onus is on you to take them. (The GfK-Oxford Economics study found

that 52 percent of American workers had unused vacation days by the end of 2017, which equates to 705 million unused days for the year.)

“The employer agreed to the terms of vacation, which is usually its duration, not its timing, at hiring,” said Holly Weeks, a communication consultant and professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. “Timing is generally not part of the agreement and is left to the preference and discretion of the employee, with accommodation of the employer as a courtesy.”

There are things you can do to make it a smoother process for everyone involved.

Plan early so you can give as much advance notice as possible, being mindful of when your company or team’s busy times of the year are. Also, consider a vacation-planning lunch or shared calendar with your colleagues to avoid potential timing conflicts.

When you make the request with your boss, treat it with the same amount of respect as any other important workplace issue.

“I would not apologize for my decision,” Ms. Weeks said. “I would honor it

as important and valuable, the same way I would honor a business decision I made after thoughtful consideration.”

### ■ Ease up on the to-do lists

“I find one of the biggest killers of fun while traveling is forcing yourself to adhere to a strict daily schedule,” said Kayla Matthews, a productivity and technology expert.

Unfortunately, trips don’t plan themselves (unless you hire a travel planner). But you can strike a middle ground of having solid logistics while still leaving room for spontaneity.

“Checklists definitely help for the major components: flights, hotels, car rental, tickets or reservations. As for organizational techniques, I’d say that different people have different comfort levels with plans and schedules,” said Laura Vanderkam, time management expert and author of “Off the Clock: Feel Less Busy While Getting More Done.”

For the trip itself, Ms. Vanderkam suggests planning one anchor activity for each day of the trip, especially if you’re traveling with a group. “People who like plans and schedules will probably be fine if they know

they’ve got one cool thing planned for the day — the rest of the day can go as it will. People who like to be spontaneous can take comfort that there’s only one thing on the schedule,” Ms. Vanderkam said.

### ■ Stress less about packing

Do you insist on never checking a bag? Maybe it’s time to let this one go and cut some stress.

“Yes, getting gate checked is a small hassle, but your luggage is usually taken by hand and put into the front of the hold, which means it’s often the first bag to come out when the plane is unloaded,” Kit Dillon, an editor at Wirecutter, The New York Times company that reviews products, said. “It really doesn’t add that much time to your trip, unless you need to make a connection.”

If you’re ready to take this leap, treat yourself to a new checked luggage bag. For most travelers, Mr. Dillon recommends Travelpro’s Elite 25-Inch Expandable Spinner Suiter. It can comfortably hold two weeks’ worth of clothes, is sleek and durable, and comes with a lifetime warranty.

(Source: The New York Times)



# Astronomers use split images of quasars to produce a new estimate of the Hubble constant

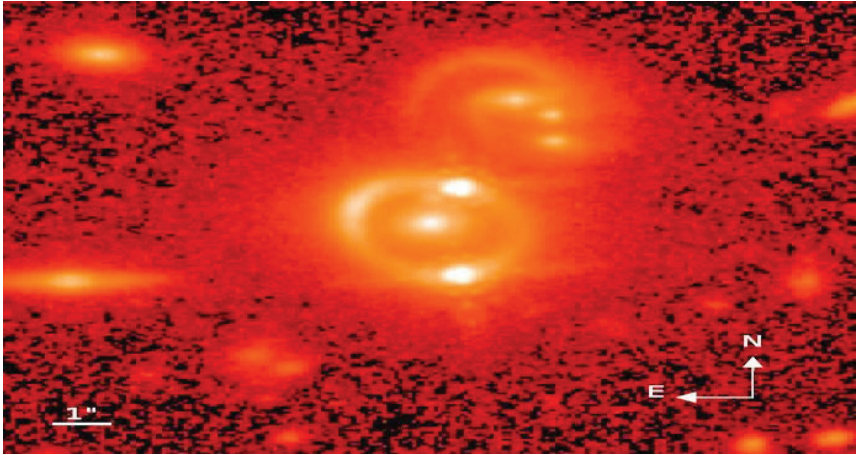
The question of how quickly the universe is expanding has been bugging astronomers for almost a century. Different studies keep coming up with different answers — which has some researchers wondering if they’ve overlooked a key mechanism in the machinery that drives the cosmos.

Now, by pioneering a new way to measure how quickly the cosmos is expanding, a team led by UCLA astronomers has taken a step toward resolving the debate. The group’s research is published today in Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

At the heart of the dispute is the Hubble constant, a number that relates distances to the redshifts of galaxies — the amount that light is stretched as it travels to Earth through the expanding universe. Estimates for the Hubble constant range from about 67 to 73 kilometers per second per megaparsec, meaning that two points in space 1 megaparsec apart (the equivalent of 3.26 million light-years) are racing away from each other at a speed between 67 and 73 kilometers per second.

■ **The physical scale**

The “Hubble constant anchors the physical scale of the universe,” said Simon Birrer, a UCLA postdoctoral scholar and lead author of the study. Without a precise value for the Hubble constant, astronomers can’t accurately determine the sizes of remote galaxies, the age of the universe or the expansion history of the cosmos.



Most methods for deriving the Hubble constant have two ingredients: a distance to some source of light and that light source’s redshift. Looking for a light source that had not been used in other scientists’ calculations, Birrer and colleagues turned to quasars, fountains of radiation that are powered by

gargantuan black holes. And for their research, the scientists chose one specific subset of quasars — those whose light has been bent by the gravity of an intervening galaxy, which produces two side-by-side images of the quasar on the sky.

Light from the two images takes different

routes to Earth. When the quasar’s brightness fluctuates, the two images flicker one after another, rather than at the same time.

■ **Galaxy’s gravitational field**

The delay in time between those two flickers, along with information about the meddling galaxy’s gravitational field, can be used to trace the light’s journey and deduce the distances from Earth to both the quasar and the foreground galaxy. Knowing the redshifts of the quasar and galaxy enabled the scientists to estimate how quickly the universe is expanding.

The UCLA team, as part of the international HOLICOW collaboration, had previously applied the technique to study quadruply imaged quasars, in which four images of a quasar appear around a foreground galaxy. But quadruple images are not nearly as common — double-image quasars are thought to be about five times as abundant as the quadruple ones.

To demonstrate the technique, the UCLA-led team studied a doubly imaged quasar known as SDSS J1206+4332; they relied on data from the Hubble Space Telescope, the Gemini and W.M. Keck observatories, and from the Cosmological Monitoring of Gravitational Lenses, or COSMOGRAIL, network — a program managed by Switzerland’s Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne that is aimed at determining the Hubble constant.

(Source: phys.org)

## Scientists chose one specific subset of quasars — those whose light has been bent by the gravity of an intervening galaxy, which produces two side-by-side images of the quasar on the sky.

# A Mysterious disease is killing beech trees, research team finds



A new disease, named for the tell-tale symptoms that appear on foliage, is killing American beech trees. Beech leaf disease was first spotted in northeast Ohio in 2012 and has since moved into 10 Ohio counties, eight Pennsylvania counties, one county in New York, and five counties in Ontario, Canada. Its rapid spread has led scientists to raise the alarm as they try to figure out the cause.

Beeches typically have paper-thin, bright green leaves. An afflicted, but otherwise healthy-looking tree first develops deep green patches between the veins of its leaves. In a later stage, the leaves become thick and leathery and eventually crinkle up. The buds on these branches die and stop producing leaves, says Pierluigi “Enrico” Bonello, a molecular and chemical ecologist of trees at the Ohio State University and one of the authors of a report on the emerging epidemic, as they refer to it, published December 25 in Forest Pathology.

The scientists don’t yet know exactly how the disease weakens the trees. “It seems to be cutting off some sort of photosynthetic pathway for the trees to maintain their leaf structure and produce new leaves over the years,” says coauthor Carrie Ewing, an environmental science graduate student. It’s still too early to tell how deadly beech leaf disease is, though younger trees seem particularly vulnerable. Within three years of showing symptoms, a young sapling can die.

■ **Invasive foreign pest**

We’re left with the host and the only long-term management option is to screen for, select, and breed resistant trees.

“In the meantime, the disease was spreading fairly fast. It was behaving in

many ways like a typical invasive, alien, forest pest,” Bonello tells The Scientist. “It’s first noticed on a very local basis. And then it starts spreading in a rate that is sort of exponential. I think we’re still in the exponential phase right now,” he says.

Because beech leaf disease moves so quickly, Bonello and colleagues don’t think the cause is an environmental factor such as water availability, temperature, or soil conditions. And because the leaves don’t appear chewed up, it’s likely not an insect chomping away. It “looks very much like a typical communicable disease, an infectious disease,” Bonello says.

An assortment of possible pathogens is under consideration: fungi, bacteria, viruses, and plant parasites called phytoplasmas. To get at what is killing these trees, Ewing is doing microbial profiling, grabbing the DNA and RNA of microbes associated with the leaves to get a sense of who’s there.

■ **Diseased trees**

Comparing the communities of microorganisms that live on diseased trees and asymptomatic trees in the hot zone with those far away from the infestation will hopefully reveal a potential culprit. Then to actually confirm the identity of a causal agent, the researchers have to infect new plants with the microbial suspect and see if it causes the disease.

Ewing has already observed differences in the forest since the disease appeared. “It’s quite remarkable actually how the canopy changes ... over time, going back to the same site and seeing how much more light is being let in because of the canopy cover becoming smaller,” she says.

(Source: the-scientist.com)

# Oceans are getting louder, posing potential threats to marine life: new study



Slow-moving, hulking ships crisscross miles of ocean in a lawn mower pattern, wielding an array of 12 to 48 air guns blasting pressurized air repeatedly into the depths of the ocean.

The sound waves hit the sea floor, penetrating miles into it, and bounce back to the surface, where they are picked up by hydrophones. The acoustic patterns form a three-dimensional map of where oil and gas most likely lie.

The seismic air guns probably produce the loudest noise that humans use regularly underwater, and it is about to become far louder in the Atlantic. As part of the Trump administration’s plans to allow offshore drilling for gas and oil exploration, five companies have been given permits to carry out seismic mapping with the air guns all along the Eastern Seaboard, from Central Florida to the Northeast, for the first time in three decades. The surveys haven’t started yet in the Atlantic, but now that the ban on offshore drilling has been lifted, companies can be granted access to explore regions along the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific.

■ **Underwater sonic tests**

The prospect of incessant underwater sonic tests is the latest example cited by environmentalists and others of the growing problem of ocean noise, spawning lawsuits against some industries and governments as well as spurring more research into the potential dangers for marine life.

Some scientists say the noises from air guns, ship sonar and general tanker traffic can cause the gradual or even outright death of sea creatures, from the giants to the tiniest — whales, dolphins, fish, squid, octopuses and even plankton. Other effects include impairing

animals’ hearing, brain hemorrhaging and the drowning out of communication sounds important for survival, experts say.

Endangered North Atlantic right whales number only 400 to 500, by some counts. They migrate to waters in the southern United States to calve. Seismic noise can mask ship sounds, leading to fatal collisions.

So great is the growing din in the world’s oceans that experts fear it is fundamentally disrupting the marine ecosystem, diminishing populations of some species as the noise levels disturb feeding, reproduction and social behavior.

A 2017 study, for example, found that a loud blast, softer than the sound of a seismic air gun, killed nearly two-thirds of the zooplankton in three-quarters of a mile on either side. Tiny organisms at the bottom of the food chain, zooplankton provide a food source for everything from great whales to shrimp. Krill, a tiny crustacean vital to whales and other animals, were especially hard hit, according to one study.

■ **Absence of life**

“Researchers saw a complete absence of life around the air gun,” said Michael Jasny, director of marine mammal protection for the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of several environmental groups suing the federal government in an effort to stop the seismic surveys.

Each seismic shot from the air guns is estimated to reach up to 260 underwater decibels, equal to about 200 decibels in the atmosphere. Container ships, another noise-maker on the seas, make sounds up to 190 decibels — the equivalent of 130 decibels in the atmosphere.

(Source: NYT)

# There’s a water ‘time bomb’ lurking beneath the planet’s surface, scientists warn

As climate change alters the world around us, scientists are warning that the impacts on groundwater reserves could take a century to catch up — which means it’ll be our grandchildren dealing with the fallout of the effects on their water supply.

Groundwater — fresh water cached underground in soil and between rocks — takes much longer to respond to temperature changes than surface water, the researchers point out.

We rely on rain to keep groundwater stocked up, which means areas seeing hotter weather and less rainfall are going to be lighting the fuse for a future ‘time bomb’ in which water supplies can’t keep up with demand. The time delay potentially makes these ‘hidden’ shortages even more dangerous.



“Our research shows that groundwater systems take a lot longer to respond to climate change than surface water, with only half of the world’s groundwater flows responding fully within ‘human’ timescales of 100 years,” says one of the team, Mark Cuthbert from Cardiff University in the UK.

“This means that in many parts of the world, changes in groundwater flows due to climate change could have a very long legacy. This could be described as an environmental time bomb because any climate change impacts on recharge occurring now, will only fully impact the base flow to rivers and wetlands a long time later.”

In areas more sensitive to climate change — so wet and humid spots like the Amazon and central Africa — the effects on groundwater could be seen within just 10 years, the new study says. In dry and arid regions it could take much longer.

Using readings taken in the field as well as data models, the team estimated that for nearly half the groundwater supplies on the planet, it might take 100 years or more to for levels to replenish or become balanced again.

In some places — such as under the Sahara — we know that groundwater supplies are still responding to climate change 10,000 years ago, when the area was much wetter.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

# Mechanical engineers develop process to 3-D print piezoelectric materials

The piezoelectric materials that inhabit everything from our cell phones to musical greeting cards may be getting an upgrade thanks to work discussed in the journal Nature Materials released online Jan 21.

Xiaoyu ‘Rayne’ Zheng, assistant professor of mechanical engineering in the College of Engineering, and a member of the Macromolecules Innovation Institute, and his team have developed methods to 3D print piezoelectric materials that can be custom-designed to convert movement, impact and stress from any directions to electrical energy.

The piezoelectric materials come in only a few defined shapes and are made of brittle crystal and ceramic -- the kind that require a clean room to manufacture. Zheng’s team has developed a technique to 3D print these materials so they are not restricted by shape or size.

The material can also be activated -- providing the next generation of intelligent infrastructures and smart materials for tactile sensing, impact and vibration monitoring, energy harvesting, and other applications.

Piezoelectric materials were originally discovered in the 19th century. Since then the advances in manufacturing technology has led to the requirement of clean-rooms and a complex procedure that produces films and blocks which are connected to electronics after machining. The expensive process and the inherent brittleness of the material, has limited the ability to maximize the material’s potential.

Zheng’s team developed a model that allows them to manipulate and design arbitrary piezoelectric constants, resulting in the material generating electric charge movement in response to incoming forces and vibrations from any direction, via a set of 3D printable topologies.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

# Scientists make gene-edited chickens in bid to halt next pandemic

British scientists are developing gene-edited chickens designed to be totally resistant to flu in a new approach to trying to stop the next deadly human pandemic.

The first of the transgenic chicks will be hatched later this year at the Roslin Institute at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, said Wendy Barclay, a professor of virology at Imperial College London who is co-leading the project.

The birds’ DNA has been altered using a new gene editing technology known as CRISPR. In this case the “edits” are to remove parts of a protein on which the flu virus normally depends, making the chickens totally flu-resistant.

The death toll in the last flu pandemic in 2009/10 - caused by the H1N1 strain and considered to be relatively mild - was around half a million people worldwide. The historic 1918 Spanish flu killed around 50 million people.

The greatest fear now is that a deadly strain could jump from wild birds via poultry into humans, and then mutate into a pandemic airborne form that can pass easily between people.

In research published in 2016 in the journal Nature, Barclay’s team found that a gene present in chickens called ANP32 encodes a protein that all flu viruses depend on to infect a host. Laboratory tests of cells engineered to lack the gene showed they cannot be infected with flu.

Teaming up scientists at the Roslin, Barclay said the plan is to use CRISPR to edit the chicks’ DNA so that only one part of the key protein is changed, leaving the rest of the bird exactly the same, genetically, as it was before.

(Source: Reuters)

# Green fluorescence from reef-building corals attracts symbiotic algae

Reef-building corals thrive in nutrient poor marine environments due to an obligate symbiotic relationship with symbiotic dinoflagellates, zooxanthellae. Corals cannot survive without symbiotic zooxanthellae. Most coral species gain symbionts from the environment early in life, and possibly again after bleaching, i.e., the loss of symbionts in response to heat stress.

The study led by researchers at the National Institute for Basic Biology (Japan), Tohoku University (Japan), National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (Japan) and James Cook University (Australia) discovered a biological signal from corals that attracts potential symbionts.

“Corals have been expected to signal free-living zooxanthellae in seawater to increase the chance of meeting potential symbiotic partners, but we did not know what the signal was or even whether such a signal actually existed,” said Associate Professor Shunichi Takahashi of the National Institute for Basic Biology in Japan. “We focused on the green fluorescence emitted by corals, and showed the first experimental evidence that corals attract free-living zooxanthellae by their green fluorescence.”

■ **Emitting green fluorescence**

“When corals are exposed to UV or blue light, they



emit green fluorescence. This fluorescence is related to the endogenous green fluorescent proteins (GFP). Most coral species express GFP, however the intensity of the fluorescence can differ, thereby some corals show strong green fluorescence that is detectable by our eyes. We knew that corals express GFP and emit green fluorescence. However, we did not know why corals emit green fluorescence. We then hypothesized that green fluorescence

may be a signal to attract potential symbionts.”

Dr. Yusuke Aihara said “We were very excited when we saw that corals, as well as green-fluorescent paint, could attracted free-living zooxanthellae under blue light, the light conditions where green fluorescence is emitted. We then studied how free-living zooxanthellae swim towards the green fluorescence emitted by corals and found that it is related to their phototaxis.”

“To examine whether green fluorescence still attracts free-living Symbiodinium on coral reefs, we designed field experiments. However, this was beyond our (laboratory researchers) ability.

Therefore, we invited Professor Andrew H. Baird, who is a top coral researcher in the world, to Okinawa in Japan to conduct the field experiments. We were lucky to be able to finish our field experiments the day before a typhoon hit Okinawa, with the results confirming that green fluorescence attracts zooxanthellae in nature” said Dr. Takahashi.

The “attraction of zooxanthellae by corals might help corals to recover from bleaching through recruiting new symbionts. However, we need further study to prove it.”

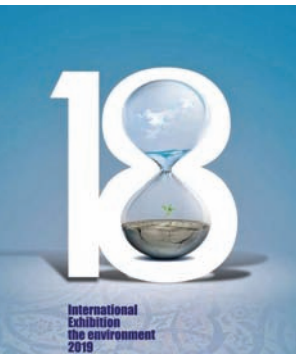
(Source: eurekaalert.org)



## Tehran to host International Environment Exhibition

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 18th International Environment Exhibition will take place at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground on February 21-24.

The exhibition paves the way to overcome the environmental issues the country is dealing with, through sharing concerns and experiences worldwide, the exhibition's executive director Arezoo Aqa Mohammadi noted.



She went on to say that the event providing a unique opportunity for participants to discuss and exchange information, can play a significant role in eradicating most of the environmental challenges.

The 18th edition of the event is hoped to be held more efficient even in economic and cultural fields, she further highlighted, adding, we try to train and learn many appropriate solutions to keep the environment alive.

The event is annually held, showcasing the latest innovations and achievements associated with the environment, which is participated by numerous domestic and international manufacturers presenting their cutting-edge products and technologies in environment sector, namely, clean energies, recycling, air filtration, water and sewage management, pollution monitoring equipment and green cars.

Eliciting public participation in protection of environment, enhancement of natural resources management by creating opportunities and introduction of environmental capabilities in both local and international level, and providing practical solutions to prevent the environment from depletion are among the main goals of the exhibition.

## Persian literature Olympiad to be held internationally next calendar year

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Persian literature Olympiad will be held internationally in Iran in the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21), deputy director at National Organization for Development of Exceptional Talents affiliated to Education Ministry has said.

In a collaborative attempt between National Library of Iran, ECO Cultural Institute, Allameh Tabatabaei University, Sa'di Foundation and Academy of Persian Language and Literature, the Olympiad will be held in Iran, Fars news agency quoted Enayat Salarian as saying on Wednesday.

However, Salarian didn't mention the exact time of the Olympiad. Moreover, he added, the first international student Olympiad on stem cells and regenerative medicine in the name of Iran will be held in 2020.

Moreover astronomy Olympiad and astrophysics Olympiad which used to be held jointly for 6 years will be held separately next year, he added.

This year's 9 Olympiad in various fields of mathematical sciences, experimental sciences, and human sciences were held on January 21 nationwide, he said, adding that 56 percent of the participants took part experimental sciences Olympiads and 30 percent partook in mathematical sciences Olympiads and the rest participated in human sciences Olympiad.

Most students were from provinces of Tehran, Mazandaran, Khorasan Razavi, East Azarbaijan, Fars, Isfahan, and Kermanshah respectively, Salarian highlighted.

In general the number of participants increased by one percent year on year, he concluded.

## LEARN ENGLISH The Zodiac and Horoscopes

Angela: Hey Lydia, what are you reading?  
Lydia: I'm looking at my **horoscope** for this month! My **outlook** is very positive. It says that I should take a vacation to someplace exotic, and that I will have a passionate summer!  
Angela: What are you talking about? Let me see that. . . What are horoscopes?  
Lydia: It's a prediction of your month, based on your **zodiac** sign. You have a different sign for the month and date you were born in. I was born on April 15th, so I'm an **Aries**. When were you born?  
Angela: January 5th.  
Lydia: Let's see. . . you're a **Capricorn**. It says that you will be feeling stress at work, but you could see new, exciting developments in your life. Looks like we'll both have interesting summers!  
Angela: That's bogus. I don't feel any stress at work, and my life is practically nonexistent. This zodiac stuff is all a bunch of nonsense.  
Lydia: No it's not, your **astrology** sign can tell you a lot about your personality. See? It says that an Aries is energetic and loves to socialize.  
Angela: Well, you certainly match those criteria, but they're so broad they could apply to anyone. What does it say about me?  
Lydia: A Capricorn is serious-minded and practical. She likes to do things in conventional ways. Ha, ha, ha... That sounds just like you!  
■ **Key vocabulary**  
**horoscope**: future predictions based on person's birth  
**outlook**: forecast; the way that a person thinks about things  
**zodiac**: 12 imaginary areas in the sky  
**Aries**: the first sign of the zodiac  
**Capricorn**: the 10th sign of the zodiac  
**astrology**: the study of how the positions of the stars affect our being

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**psychic**: a person who professes an ability to perceive information hidden from the normal senses through extrasensory perception  
**tarot**: Any of a set of cards depicting vices, virtues, and elemental forces, used in fortunetelling.  
**fortune teller**: A person that is able to predict your future by reading cards or your hands  
**voodoo**: a religious tradition originating in West Africa, also called black magic  
**oracle**: a person or agency considered to be a source of wise counsel or prophetic opinion

# ‘Vehicle inspection reduces PM 2.5 by 1.5% in Tehran’

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — While the low emission zone (LEZ) scheme, mandating vehicle inspection, went into effect in the capital city of Tehran to reduce emissions, only 1.5 percent of the particulate matter (PM) 2.5 is reduced in case of full implementation of the scheme, Mohammad Kazemi, an environmental policy researcher has announced.

LEZ is a defined area where access by certain polluting vehicles is restricted or deterred with the aim of improving the air quality. This may favor vehicles such as hybrid electric vehicles, or zero-emission vehicles such as all-electric vehicles.

To bring LEZ scheme into effect all the vehicles in Tehran are required to get inspection stickers indicating the level of emission they produce which are easy to track down by the traffic cameras thanks to the newly integrated vehicle inspection system.

The first phase of the scheme started in Tehran on September 5, 2016, aiming to mitigate air pollution in the metropolis, which was running from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day except for holidays, while the second phase is set up to run for 24 hours a day, which went into effect since past three months.

The scheme replaced the odd-even number license plate scheme (where depending on the weekday the cars with only odd or even number plate were allowed to drive) in a zone stretching over 80 kilometers of the central Tehran.

Kazemi went on to explain that Tehran's air pollution has been a particular concern over the recent years, due to causing problems for the residents' health and daily routine, nevertheless, limited studies have been carried out on determining the main pollutants and their sources in order to identify scientific and efficient solutions.

Referring to seven successful solutions and methods practiced in other countries to reduce PM 2.5 emissions, he noted that scraping the clunker vehicles, equipping buses with diesel particulate filters, replacing diesel motorcycles with electronic ones, improving the fuel quality, using alternative fuels including compressed natural gas and liquid petroleum gas, installing catalyst converter on gasoline engines, and traffic management plans, including the development of clean public transport and LEZ can cut air pollution.



## Tehran's air pollution has been a particular concern over the recent years, due to causing problems for the residents' health and daily routine.

Among the aforementioned effective solutions, installation of a catalyst converter on gasoline engines and improving the fuel quality have been the most effective in the country, in the metropolis of Tehran, however, other solutions have faced barriers and not achieved any good results since past few years, he added.

The LEZ scheme, which is one of the successful methods taken up in European countries, was taken into consideration in Iran as well, but it has been revised and changed after a time, and finally obligatory vehicle inspection approach went into effect, so that vehicles not undergoing an annual quality inspection are fined, he highlighted.

To measure the scheme's effectiveness, there are several main criteria which demonstrates how inspection affects reducing the PM emissions haunting the capital, he further said.

The first criterion refers to the car owner's participation rate, many car owners in the capital do not pay attention to the laws and some are unaware, Kazemi stated.

New cars under four years of age are exempted from the vehicle inspection law, which constitute some 25 percent of the whole vehicles running in Tehran, while about 15 percent of the heavy-duty vehicles did not refer to technical inspection centers at all, he lamented.

Pointing to cars with major defects as the second criterion, he stated that in the current autumn, some 546,000 cars have undergone quality inspection, out of which some 114,000 have been rejected to receive an inspection sticker.

Statistics show that about 20 percent of the vehicles referred to the inspection centers have failed in quality inspection, he noted.

Kazemi also added that repair and renovation of the emission producing cars is the third criterion for the LEZ scheme proficiency evaluation, given the high costs of repair, some car owners decide to avoid the expenses and repair some minor defects.

In order to prevent such repairs, inspection tests have been conducted for

## Iran, Germany to enhance agricultural development co-op

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A project on sustainable development of agriculture in Varamin county, southeast of Tehran, is piloted in a collaborative initiative between Sharif University of Technology and University of Stuttgart.

The governor of Varamin, Hossein Kaghazloo, and representatives from Sharif University and a research team from University of Stuttgart met on Monday to discuss the fields of cooperation and details of the pilot project, ISNA reported.

"A large part of Varamin's population depends on agriculture, so co-running environmental projects in cooperation with research institutes can play a significant role in development of the area," Kaghazloo stated.

Water scarcity as a barrier to agricultural development in the region, can be removed by exploitation of modern technologies, as well as waste water treatment and cultivating in greenhouses instead of open fields, he added.

He went on to explain that one of the effective measures for developing Varamin county is constructing a greenhouse town, in which more than 100 hectares of advanced greenhouses is set up to curb agricultural water consumption, in addition to creating sustainable job opportunities including organic agriculture and fish farming.

Water shortages resulting in dryness of the important wetlands of the region including Band-Ali Khan wetland



along with land subsidence have posed a serious threat to Varamin plain, he regretted, adding, scientific researches and projects on agricultural development can certainly reduce pumping water excessively out of the ground, and prevent the land subsidence phenomenon.

According to the report German research group will pursue sustainable energy management, which is being piloted in Varamin county due to its special capacity in renewable energy development.

The project will be implemented during the next three years through using human resources and renewable energy

in the region, additionally, social and economic activities are among the objectives, including offering training courses for the students at schools in order to accelerate the city's development process through public awareness and participation.

In September 2018, Mohammad Javad Bolourchi, geologist and the former spokesman for the Geological Survey and Mineral Explorations of Iran, said that in the Iranian calendar year of 1384 (March 2005-March 2006), the subsidence rate in Varamin county has been measured 12 centimeters.

It is likely that subsidence rate of Varamin plain would exceed Tehran plain, due to industries and urban areas have replaced agricultural lands in Tehran, while the aquifers in Varamin county are no longer capable of supplying agricultural water as they are severely depleted, he explained.

Head of water affairs of Varamin county Ahad Davoudi also said in September 2018 that there were 1,032 illegal and 7,170 legal wells in the region which pump some 124 million cubic meters annually, and only 70 illegal wells were closed down for good.

Land subsidence, a gradual settling or sudden sinking of the Earth's surface due to subsurface movement of earth materials is mainly caused by aquifer-system compaction, drainage and decomposition of organic soils, underground mining, oil and gas extraction, hydro compaction, natural compaction, sinkholes, and thawing permafrost.

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Iranian students snatch 4 medals at IOI 2018

Iranian students secured 4 colorful medals at the 30th International Olympiad in Informatics (IOI 2018) which was held in Tsukuba, Japan, on September 1 to 8.

Iran's team finished in eleventh place claiming one gold medal, two silver medals, and one bronze medal, Mehdi Safarnejad, head of the Iranian delegation said.

## کسب ۴ مدال توسط تیم دانش آموزی ایران در المپیاد جهانی کامپیوتر

به گزارش خبرنگار آموزش و پرورش خبرگزاری فارس، تیم چهار نفره دانش‌آموزان ایران موفق به کسب چهار مدال رنگارنگ در سی‌امین المپیاد جهانی کامپیوتر در ژاپن شد.

مهدی صفرنژاد سرپرست تیم اعزامی دانش‌آموزان المپیاد کشورمان به ژاپن، با اعلام این مطلب، افزود: تیم ایران از نظر کسب مدال، رتبه یازدهم این دوره از المپیاد را با کسب یک مدال طلا، ۲ نقره و یک برنز، تصاحب کرد.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “-cele, -coel, -coele”

■ **Meaning:** tumor or swelling  
■ **For example:** **Meningocele** is recognized as a rare condition not associated with acute neurologic symptoms.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Miss out on

■ **Meaning:** to lose an opportunity to do something  
■ **For example:** What a shame. If you leave before Saturday, you'll miss out on the party.

### IDIOM

#### Cook the books

■ **Explanation:** A person who cooks the books is one who changes the facts or figures in the financial accounts, often in order to steal money  
■ **For example:** The actor discovered after a while that his agent was cooking the books.



# Syria warns of attack on Tel Aviv airport if UN fails to halt Israeli aggression

➡ preventing the entire UN body from assuming its responsibilities.

Speaking at a UN Security Council meeting on the Middle East, Ja'afari said that if the 15-member body fails to adopt measures to stop Israel, Syria would practice its "legitimate right of self-defense" and retaliate against the regime's attacks.

"Isn't time now for the UN Security Council to stop the Israeli repeated aggressions on the Syrian Arab Republic territories?" he asked.

"Or is it required to draw the attention of the war-makers in this Council by exercising our legitimate right to defend ourselves and respond to the Israeli aggression on Damascus International Civil Airport in the same way on Tel Aviv Airport?" he continued.

Earlier this week, Syria wrote protest letters to the United Nations, urging the world body to take a decisive step against Israel after the regime launched fresh air raids against targets near Damascus, including an airport.

Israel frequently attacks targets inside Syria in what is considered as an attempt to prop up Takfiri terrorist groups that have been suffering heavy defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces.

In a recent interview with The New York Times, Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot, the Israeli army's outgoing chief of staff, said that the regime had carried out "thousands" of aerial assaults in Syria in recent years.



In a separate interview with The Sunday Times, he also confirmed long-running reports of Israel's collaboration with anti-Damascus militants, admitting that it had provided weapons to them.

■ **Foreign Ministry: Israeli aggression on Syria part of attempts to prolong crisis**

The Foreign and Expatriates Ministry on Monday that the Israeli aggression carried out at dawn on Damascus and its Country-side is an attempt to prolong the crisis in Syria and the.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Syria's UN

envoy stressed his country's firm and non-negotiable right to wrest control over the occupied Golan Heights, urging Israel to completely withdraw from the region.

He further said that Israel's attempts to change the status in Golan were "doomed to failure" and would not affect Syria's sovereign right to the territory.

Tel Aviv has for decades occupied and annexed Syria's Golan Heights, a move never recognized by the international community.

■ **U.S.-led airstrikes kill several Syrian civilians in Dayr al-Zawr**

Meantime, several civilians have lost

their lives and sustained injuries when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group carried out a number of aerial attacks in Syria's troubled eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Local sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA that the airstrikes targeted vehicles carrying civilians fleeing from areas controlled by the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group in the town of al-Baghuz early on Wednesday.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying ISIL.

Syria has on numerous occasions condemned airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition, asking the UN to force Washington and its allies to put an end to their military intervention in the country.

Local sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told SANA on January 18 that 20 people were killed when the U.S.-led warplanes bombarded residential buildings in the village.

(Source: Press TV)

## Diplomats: Pompeo might cancel Warsaw conference

➡ Russia, a growing player in the Middle East, announced Tuesday that it had declined the invitation to the Warsaw meeting, scheduled for Feb. 13 and 14. Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, has indicated she won't attend, officials have said.

Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia called the conference "counterproductive" and asked the U.S. why Iran, a regional power, wasn't invited if the conference was aimed at tackling regional stability.

"Attempts to create some kind of military alliances in the region by holding conferences and focusing on having a simplified, unilateral approach that is clearly linked just to Iran are counterproductive," Mr. Nebenzia told the council.

Diplomats said that the Polish Foreign Ministry has asked European foreign ministers to attend the conference, although some European diplomats speculated that Mr. Pompeo might even cancel the conference last minute due to low attendance or attendance by junior-level officials.

## Upcoming Poland conference not a stage to 'demonize' Iran, U.S. says

Diplomats said the Polish foreign minister on Tuesday briefly discussed the Warsaw conference at a meeting with foreign ministers and assured counterparts that Poland supports the Iran nuclear agreement and that it plans to give a readout of the meeting to Iran.

Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, has slammed the conference as an "anti-Iran circus" and complained at Poland for co-hosting the event.

In September, during the annual UN General Assembly gathering, U.S. plans for a Security Council session on Iran hosted by President Trump were broadened to include non-proliferation issues after it became clear that other world leaders would disagree with Mr. Trump on Iran, according to council diplomats.

## Qatari emir hosts Bashir, backs 'unity' in restive Sudan

The ruler of Qatar offered support for Sudan's "unity and stability" Wednesday at a meeting with President Omar al-Bashir on his first foreign visit in more than a month of protests against him, a statement said.

The tiny but wealthy Persian Gulf state vies with regional rivals for influence in Sudan, strategic in part for its access to the Red Sea, and last year agreed a \$4 billion deal to jointly develop Suakin port.

But no new financial assistance was announced Wednesday. Bashir arrived in Qatar Tuesday as protests raged at home. Anger at inflation and shortages has coalesced into calls for an end to his 30-year rule.

"President Bashir briefed the Emir on the latest updates regarding the situation and challenges facing the country," said a statement from the court of Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

"The Emir affirmed Qatar's firm stance on Sudan's unity and stability, and they discussed the latest developments in the Darfur peace process."

Bashir has blamed the unrest on foreign "agents" and rebels from the western region of Darfur.

Qatar was among the first countries to express support after protests broke out on Dec. 19, with Sheikh Tamim calling Bashir to offer "all that was necessary", according to Sudan.

The official death toll from the unrest stands at 26, including two security personnel.

Rights groups say at least 40 have died.

(Source: Reuters)

## Poll shows Russia's trust in Vladimir Putin falls to all-time low

Russia's trust in its President Vladimir Putin has fallen to its lowest level since 2006, falling more than 33 percent, according to a recent poll conducted by the Russian-state Public Opinion Research Center.

Confidence in Putin's government fell 33.4 percent last week amid sluggish economic growth, a decline in disposable income, and a deeply unpopular rise in the retirement age.

The trust level was at 71 percent in July 2015 after Russia's annexed Ukraine's Crimea.

Another survey by the Moscow-based independent pollster the Levada Center in December 2018 showed that 53 percent of respondents disapprove of the Russian government.

However, Putin has an overall approval rating of about 63 percent, declining from 89 percent in June 2015, according to the Levada Center.

When Putin came to power in the midst of economic turmoil in 1998, he promised Russians better living conditions and decent salaries, in exchange for freedom of expression - the social contract.

But the country's involvement in the ongoing war in Syria, and the smoldering conflict in Ukraine has come at an enormous cost to the population's living standards.

Since 2014, disposable income has decreased and is predicted to drop further this year, according to the Higher School of Economics in Moscow.

After increasing by 1.7 percent last year, Russia's gross domestic product is predicted to grow by 1.4 percent in 2019, according to a Reuters poll. Russia's foreign policy has come at an enormous political cost. Almost five years of the United States and European Union sanctions imposed after Moscow's annexation of Crimea have placed large businesses under increasing strain.

Hopes of the sanctions being lifted this year have dissipated since Russia seized three Ukrainian ships off the coast of Crimea last November.

The European Union has extended its sanctions targeting Russia's defense, energy and banking sectors until mid-2019, and there is currently a discussion in the U.S. about imposing more sanctions.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Four arrested for plotting to bomb New York Muslim community

Three men and a high-school student have been arrested for allegedly planning to bomb a Muslim community in upstate New York, authorities said on Tuesday.

The Rochester-area residents are accused of plotting to attack the small Muslim enclave of Islamberg, a rural settlement about 150 miles (241km) northwest of New York City.

Brian Colaneri, 20, Andrew Crysel, 18, and Vincent Vetromile, 19, face weapons and conspiracy charges. A 16-year-old student at Odyssey Academy, a school in Greece, New York, was charged with the same offences but was not identified due to his age.

At the time of their weekend arrests, the men, three of whom were in the Boy Scouts together, had access to 23 rifles and shotguns and three home-made explosives.

A lunchroom comment by the student during school on Friday launched the investigation, Greece Police Chief Patrick Phelan told reporters at a news conference.

"He looks like the next school shooter, doesn't he?" the student allegedly said while showing students a picture of another boy on his phone, according to Phelan.

The remark was reported to school security, which along

with local police interviewed both the student who had the photograph, as well as the student in the picture. The pictured student was not charged, Phelan said.

The investigation eventually led police to execute several search warrants and arrest four people, including the student who showed off the photograph.

Police also searched five locations and seized 23 weapons and numerous electronic devices, including phones and computers. Most of the weapons were rifles and shotguns, some of which were legally owned by relatives of the suspects, authorities said.

Three improvised explosive devices were found at the 16-year-old's house, Phelan said.

"They were homemade bombs with various items - black powder, BBs, nails, inside a container," he said.

Phelan credited the students who reported the lunchroom comment with saving lives.

"If they had carried out this plot, which every indication is that they were going to, people would have died," the police chief said. "I don't know how many and who, but people would have died."



Islamberg was founded more than three decades ago by a group of black Muslims who follow the teachings of Pakistani Sufi scholar Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani.

The town in Delaware County has been targeted in the past. Two years ago, a Tennessee man was sentenced to nearly 20 years in prison for plotting to attack the enclave.

(Source: agencies)

## Russia says 'arbitrary' Israeli airstrikes on Syria must stop

Russia said Wednesday that Israel should stop carrying out what it called arbitrary airstrikes on Syria days after the Israeli air force targeted Iranian forces there.

"The practice of arbitrary strikes on the

territory of a sovereign state, in this case, we are talking about Syria, should be ruled out," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said, in answer to a question from Russian news agency TASS about recent Israeli airstrikes on Syria.

She said such strikes added to tensions in the region, something she said was not in the long-term interests of any country there, including Israel.

"We should never allow Syria, which has suffered years of armed conflict, to

be turned into an arena where geopolitical scores are settled," TASS cited her as saying.

Her comments follow Israeli strikes in Syria Monday.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Thailand to hold first election since 2014 coup d'état

After more than four years of military rule, Thailand will finally hold elections on March 24.

The poll will be the first since generals ousted a democratically elected government in 2014 after months of violent street protests.

The election commission announced the decision on Wednesday after having postponed the vote's date several times.

In December the commission said the elections would be held on February 24, but the military government expressed concern that election-related events would clash with early preparations for the coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, scheduled for May 4-6.

The monarchy is revered in Thailand, and this year's coronation will be the first in living memory for most of the population.

"The Election Commission agreed to set the election date for March 24," chairman Ithiporn Boonprakong told reporters.

He added the new date "is appropriate based on different factors, including early ballots and candidate registration".

Political parties will submit lists of parliamentary candidates and up to three candidates for prime minister to the commission between February 4-8, he said.

The junta has pushed back the election several times for various reasons after overthrowing former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014, citing the need



for peace and order after months of street protests.

In a statement, the Office of the Prime Minister said it would be inappropriate for election events to "unnecessarily coincide or overlap with the scheduling of the Coronation Ceremony or other annual Royal Ceremonies".

It also said the new date would not be "too late to the extent that such a delay will have detrimental effects on the country and the Thai people".

Under the law, the Election Commission has to endorse winning members of parliament within 60 days of a vote, and parliament must convene within

15 days of the results. The king will then preside over the opening of parliament.

King Vajiralongkorn, 66, has been on the throne since shortly after his father died in 2016 following a 70-year reign, but he has not been officially crowned during a lengthy mourning period.

Hundreds of activists have protested delays in holding the election since early January, the first such gatherings since the government lifted a ban on political activity in December.

Thailand's two largest political parties previously said they had no objections to the election being re-scheduled for the coronation.

"The coronation ceremonies are important... Everybody is happy to see the event held for all Thais. Whether the delay is long or short is not a problem," Thana Chirawinit, spokesman for the Democrat Party, told Reuters news agency.

But some parties decried the delay, saying the military wanted to hold on to power.

"The delay doesn't mean just the date but also affects the country's credibility ... and economy," said Pannika Wanich, spokeswoman for the new Future Forward Party.

"Now that we have a new date, we hope the junta will not use its special powers to create situations to further delay the polls."

(Source: agencies)

## Ball in UK court on Brexit: EU's Moscovici

European Union Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici said Wednesday that the risk of a no-deal Brexit had increased in last few weeks and it was up to the British to tell the EU how they proposed to break the impasse.

"Certainly the EU is there, the EU is waiting, the EU is ready but first we need to know clearly what are the British intentions and

we need some clarifications from London," Moscovici told Reuters at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"Of course the door is always open for discussion but it's not up to us to tell now the British side where it wants to go. The ball clearly is in the British side again. It's not a problem that can be solved by Brussels, maybe in Brussels later, but it has to be first

dealt with in London."

Britain is due to leave the EU on March 29 but no agreement is yet in place on divorce terms and future relations, as parliament last week comprehensively rejected the deal that Prime Minister Theresa May had reached with Brussels.

Many British and EU businesses fear massive disruption if Brexit goes ahead in

just over nine weeks' time without a framework in place.

"Nobody wants a no-deal [Brexit] that is clear. The British parliament doesn't want a no-deal, the British government doesn't want a no-deal, and the EU is not willing a no-deal, so we need to explore all options which are not a no-deal," Moscovici said.

(Source: Reuters)



## Paris Saint-Germain fined \$114,000 for racially profiling players

French football club Paris Saint-Germain has been fined €100,000 (\$114,000) for racially profiling youth players.

Investigative website Mediapart published leaked documents in November last year revealing that PSG detailed the ethnic origins of potential recruits, listing prospective players as French, North African, black African or West Indian.

It is illegal in France to collect data based on an individual's race, religion, or ethnicity.

The French champion released a statement at the time saying it felt the club's "spirit and values were betrayed" by the practice which took place between 2013 and 2018, acknowledging that an "unacceptable identification field" had been used in the scouting of players.

An investigation by the French league's disciplinary committee announced the fine on Tuesday, saying that PSG did not use the data for discriminatory reasons.

LFP disciplinary commissioner Sebastien Deneux said it was "more a case of individual clumsiness and collective negligence."

"From what we can see PSG did not use the information on ethnicity for discriminatory ends," Deneux added. "There is no case of discrimination that can be proved."

PSG director Bertrand Rezeau received a suspended fine of €10,000 (\$11,400), while recruitment heads Marc Westerloppe and Pierre Reynaud both received suspended charges of €5,000 (\$5,600).

The club currently holds a comfortable lead at the top of Ligue 1, undefeated after the first 19 games of the season and will play Manchester United in the Champions League last 16 round on February 12 and March 6.

French football is often upheld for as a positive example of the country's ethnic diversity. The squad that won the 2018 World Cup featured 15 players of African heritage, including PSG star Kylian Mbappe.

(Source: CNN)

## Beckham to become shareholder of National League club Salford

Former England captain David Beckham is set to take a 10% stake in National League club Salford City.

Beckham, 43, will become a part-owner alongside former Manchester United team-mates Gary and Phil Neville, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt.

The 'Class of 92' now own 60% of the club, with the remaining 40% being held by Singapore businessman Peter Lim.

Beckham already owns American club Inter Miami, who will join Major League Soccer in 2020.

The Football Association still needs to approve Beckham's ownership before it is made official and Gary Neville said Beckham will attend a Salford game in the "next two or three weeks".

Salford are third in the fifth tier of English football and promotion this season would see them reach the Football League for the first time in their history.

"It is a really special club with a special group of people," said Beckham, who joined United as a youth player and played 11 seasons for the first team, winning the treble of the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in 1998-99.

"My early years in Manchester were all spent in Salford. I grew up there in many ways so to be able to finally join the lads and the club today is a great feeling.

"Salford City has achieved so much success in a short space of time, the fans are incredible and I'm really excited to be spending more time in Salford again."

The 'Class of 92' bought the club in 2014 and have overseen three promotions in four seasons, and redeveloped the ground.

"From the very beginning we wanted David to be involved and be with us on this incredible journey however circumstances and commitments didn't allow that," the club said in a statement.

(Source: BBC)

## Chelsea closing on Higuain deal, says Sarri

Chelsea are in final talks to sign Juventus striker Gonzalo Higuain, head coach Maurizio Sarri said on Wednesday as he looks to bolster his team's firepower.

Sarri previously coached Higuain at Napoli when he scored a Serie A record 36 goals in a league campaign in 2015/16.

That sort of goalscoring prowess is what Chelsea have been badly missing in recent months, with Sarri's lack of confidence in Alvaro Morata and Olivier Giroud forcing Eden Hazard into an unfamiliar centre-forward role.

"They're a few hours into signing a contract today," Sarri said.

Chelsea play Tottenham in Thursday's League Cup semi-final second leg at Stamford Bridge, bidding to overturn a 1-0 deficit to reach the February 24 final.

The Blues had until 1200 GMT to register Higuain for the match, but Sarri says "it's impossible" for the Argentina international to feature.

Higuain has been on loan at AC Milan from Juventus this season, scoring just once in his past 12 appearances for the Rossoneri.

"We hope he'll bring goals, he'll start scoring for us," Sarri said.

"It's very difficult in January to find one of the most important strikers in the world. So I think the club is working very well because it's not easy to get a new striker."

Sarri criticised his players following last Saturday's Premier League loss to Arsenal, saying his group of players were difficult to motivate.

Asked about the response from his players this week, he said: "I think we need to react on the pitch. The rest is nothing."

"We discussed with the players how to try to improve the approach, the motivation, the determination, so we are trying to change something in training, in pre-match, in everything. I think we all have to react on the pitch, of course."

(Source: AFP)

# Hopes fade for football star Sala as rescuers search English Channel

A search for soccer star Emiliano Sala swept the seas between France and England on Wednesday more than 36 hours after the plane he was flying in disappeared, as a recording emerged of a fearful voice message he apparently sent from the aircraft.

Two planes scoured an area northwest of the Channel Island of Alderney where unidentified debris was earlier spotted, but rescuers said chances of finding Cardiff City-bound Sala or the pilot alive were fading fast.

"We're up there looking for stuff that we don't expect to find," John Fitzgerald, chief officer of the Channel Islands Air Search told Reuters. "If there was anything on the surface I think we would have found it on the first night because the weather conditions were really good."

The 28-year-old Argentina-born forward was flying from Nantes in western France to Cardiff for his debut with his Premier League club.

In a chilling voice message sent to friends, which Argentina's Clarin newspaper said was authenticated by Sala's father, Horacio, the player expressed concerns about the single-engine Piper Malibu aircraft he was flying in.



"I'm in the plane and it looks like it's going to fall apart," he said. "Dad, I'm really scared."

Air traffic controllers had guided searchers along the path flown by the light aircraft before it disappeared from radar screens at just over 2,000 feet (600 metres), Fitzgerald said.

Sala joined struggling Cardiff from FC

Nantes last week for a club record fee of about 17 million euros (\$19 million), having scored 12 goals for the French club this season.

Both clubs were fearing the worst.

Cardiff City fans laid tributes outside their stadium to a player they barely knew but had built high hopes around.

## Serena Williams loses at Australian Open, so no Osaka rematch



After being defeated by Naomi Osaka in the US Open final when Williams called chair umpire Carlos Ramos a "thief" and accused him of sexism, Williams departed the Australian Open at the quarterfinal stage in dramatic circumstances.

There was no umpire controversy this time, rather a left ankle injury to Williams that surely contributed to squandering a massive 5-1 advantage and four match points to Karolina Pliskova -- even if the 37-year-old played down the problem and its effect on the outcome.

"I don't think it had anything to do with my ankle per se," said Williams. "I just think she was just nailing and hitting shots. Obviously I made some mistakes but she played really well after that."

The Czech, who also beat Williams at the 2016 US Open, prevailed 6-4 4-6 7-5 in a shade past two hours in Melbourne.

Williams will thus have to wait for that record-tying 24th grand slam title and rematch with Osaka, who earlier swept past WTA Finals champion Elina Svitolina 6-4 6-1 in much more straightforward fashion. Williams' last title success at a major came in Melbourne in 2017 while pregnant.

Former world No. 1 Pliskova might believe destiny is on her side following the proceedings at Rod Laver Arena.

If she does land a maiden major, she would follow in the footsteps of the likes of Caroline Wozniacki, Angelique Kerber and Li Na here. They all lifted the trophy Down Under having saved match points along the way.

A double-digit grand slam winner in the men's game, Novak Djokovic, didn't have nearly as much drama in his quarterfinal.

The 15-time major winner advanced in under an hour when Kei Nishikori retired trailing 6-1 4-1 with a thigh injury. The 2014 US Open finalist paid the price for playing three five-setters, including going five hours in the fourth round against Pablo Carreno Busta.

Djokovic meets 28th seed Lucas Pouille on Friday. France's Pouille upset Milos Raonic 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 6-7 (2-7) 6-4 to reach his first grand slam semifinal.

Rafael Nadal, who owns 17 majors, battles 'Next Gen' star Stefanos Tsitsipas on Thursday in the other semifinal.

### ■ Momentum changer

Not for the first time, Williams, 37, rallied from a set and break deficit at a grand slam to put herself in a winning, seemingly impregnable position.

But serving at 5-1, 40-30, Williams turned her left ankle on her first match point while changing direction. She double faulted on the next point, part of a stretch where she didn't claim another point on serve in the set, losing 10 in a row.

Williams, though, never called for the trainer.

"I like to just tough it out," said Williams.

She, however, had three more match points at 5-4. On one, the trajectory of a Pliskova second serve initially threatened a double fault but looped in to the world No. 8's relief. When Williams struck a forehand into the net on her foe's third match point, a jubilant and probably disbelieving Pliskova officially advanced.

Comebacks like the one she engineered against Williams are unheard of.

(Source: CNN)

## 'I couldn't play on one leg' – Djokovic into Australian Open semis as Nishikori quits



Six-time champion Novak Djokovic reached the Australian Open semi-finals after Japan's eighth seed Kei Nishikori retired injured in their quarter-final.

Serbia's Djokovic, 31, was leading 6-1 4-1 when Nishikori quit with a thigh problem.

Every time Djokovic has reached the last four in Melbourne he has gone on to win the tournament.

The top seed will face Lucas Pouille in Friday's semi-final, after the Frenchman defeated Milos Raonic.

Spanish second seed Rafael Nadal and Greece's talented 20-year-old Stefanos Tsitsipas will contest the other semi-final on Thursday.

Djokovic has not lost to Nishikori in their past 15 meetings, stretching back to the Japanese's victory in their 2014 US Open semi-final. "I love to battle especially against Kei, we have played so many matches in our careers," Djokovic said.

"I hope he can recover and it is not something very serious that will take too long.

"I am sorry for everyone not having a full match tonight but thank you for showing up."

### ■ This is what the doctor ordered - Djokovic

After beating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in a gruelling last-16 match on Monday, Djokovic said he had a back injury which he "hoped" to manage before facing Nishikori.

Any fears the 14-time Grand Slam champion may be hampered were quickly allayed.

Once he broke in the second game for a 2-0 lead, plus again in a sixth game where Nishikori coughed up two double faults for 5-1, it never looked like he would lose on Rod Laver Arena.

"Sala a Bluebird. R.I.P. Bro. Big Love," read one, in reference to the team's nickname.

In Nantes, supporters laid rows of yellow flowers and held club scarves aloft in the city centre late on Tuesday.

The plane had been cruising at 5,000 feet (1,525 m) when the pilot requested to descend to a lower altitude on passing Guernsey. It lost radar contact at 2,300 feet (700 m), Guernsey police said.

Channel Island Air Search's Fitzgerald said the pilot had filed a 'VFR' flight plan, which requires pilots to avoid bad weather, have sight of the ground, and stay out of certain air corridors.

Police on Tuesday said the chance of finding survivors was slim and the prospect appeared bleaker a day later, with the water temperature in the Channel barely 10 degrees centigrade.

"There's no chance. You'd have to be really, really fit to survive even four or five hours in the water," Fitzgerald said.

British media on Wednesday cited Cardiff chairman Mehmet Dalman as saying the club had not organised Sala's travel plans. "He declined and made his own arrangements."

(Source: Reuters)

## Angry New Orleans Saints fans file lawsuits, put up billboards in Atlanta

New Orleans Saints fans are having their say. After a stunning missed call by officials helped to keep the Saints out of the Super Bowl, angry fans have been reacting in various ways -- from lawsuits and petitions, to billboards in Atlanta, to boycotts throughout the New Orleans area, to a letter from Louisiana's governor that chastised NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

At least two lawsuits have been filed by local attorneys on behalf of Saints fans who want to compel Goodell to use his power under the NFL rulebook to replay the final 1 minute, 49 seconds of regulation of New Orleans' overtime loss to the Los Angeles Rams in Sunday's NFC Championship Game.

Meanwhile, Saints fan Matt Bowers has rented billboards in and around the Atlanta area -- where Super Bowl LIII is being held -- to voice his displeasure with the league.

"And I'm not done yet," Bowers, who owns car dealerships throughout the Southeast, told ESPN. "I'm going to do my best to bring as much attention to this as possible -- and I'm not going to stop until I make them miserable."

Saints running back Alvin Kamara was among those who supported Bowers' cause on social media.

Several New Orleans-area bars and restaurants have already vowed to have anti-Super Bowl parties by refusing to show the championship game. One local bakery was selling cookies with the face of referee Bill Vinovich with a red



slash through it. And local businesses throughout the area have posted signs with clever references to the botched call.

Also, a petition that started on Change.org to replay the game had nearly 600,000 signatures as of Tuesday afternoon.

Fans (and some Saints players) clamoring for a rematch have pointed to an obscure NFL rule that deals with "Extraordinarily Unfair Acts."

According to Rule 17, Section 2, Article 1, the NFL commissioner has the "sole authority to investigate and take appropriate disciplinary and/or corrective measures if any

club action, non-participant interference, or calamity occurs in an NFL game which the Commissioner deems so extraordinarily unfair or outside the accepted tactics encountered in professional football that such action has a major effect on the result of the game."

However, Article 2 states, "The Commissioner will not apply authority in cases of complaints by clubs concerning judgmental errors or routine errors of omission by game officials. Games involving such complaints will continue to stand as completed." The Saints have taken no formal action against the league so far, but owner Gayle Benson released a statement Monday saying she has "been in touch with the NFL regarding yesterday's events and will aggressively pursue changes in NFL policies to ensure no team and fan base is ever put in a similar position again."

In her statement, Benson added: "It is a disservice to our coaches, players, employees and, most importantly, the fans who make our game possible. The NFL must always commit to providing the most basic of expectations -- fairness and integrity."

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards sent a letter Tuesday to Goodell to express the "deep disappointment" of the people of Louisiana and Saints fans.

(Source: ESPN)





Abu Dhabi: Islamic Republic of Iran head coach Carlos Queiroz has declared that his side are aiming to make the most of their undoubted experience when they face China PR in an eagerly anticipated AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 quarter-final encounter on Thursday.

After beating Oman 2-0 in the Round of 16, the Iranians head into the game having impressively won all four of their games en route to the last eight, and eager to claim what would be the nation's first Continental crown since 1976.

Team Melli's last attempt at AFC Asian Cup glory ended at the same stage when they dramatically lost on penalties to Iraq four years ago in Australia.

Although mindful of that result, Queiroz is determined for Iran to put what they have learned between then and now to good use when they face the East Asians.

"No two games in football are ever the same, in football it is always a different story," declared the Portuguese tactician.

"The game versus China is a new game, a new adventure, and one in which we can try to do our absolute best. However, what is key is to remember all the lessons we have learned – both when we have won and when we have lost – and put them to good use.

"This is just like a cup final as they are games which do not have a history, they do not have a past. You cannot lose a game because of history or statistics. This type of cup final match is very different to those we faced in the group stage and I believe the experience my players have will count for something in the game."

"We are not favourites as I feel there are never favourites in a game like this. We are proud to be here for a game which is the most important game of our lives because it is the next game, and that is always the most crucial for both players and coaches."

Despite China having impressed at the tournament so far, Queiroz is eager that his charges embrace the challenge



JANUARY 24, 2019

S P O R T S

# AFC Asian Cup 2019 Quarter-final: Team Melli banking on experience



rather than be distracted by what will undoubtedly be a formidable test.

"It will be a difficult game against a very tough team," he said.

"China are a solid and well-prepared team with a great coach. We know a difficult task is in front of us, but we are excited and fully prepared. We are confident that we will play

well, as we have the ability, our ambitions and our dreams.

"I want my players to keep it simple as football really is a simple game. It is just 90 minutes of 11 versus 11 and the players need to enjoy the match, enjoy the experience. If we are able to play with freedom and joy, I believe we will do well."

(Source: AFC)

## Team Melli capable of beating China: Mustafa Denizli

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Former Persepolis coach Mustafa Denizli believes that Iran national football team are capable of defeating China.

On Thursday, Team Melli will face China in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

"Defeating Oman in the Round of 16 was a normal thing for Iran. It was predictable," Denizli said in an interview with Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

"I believe that Iran have an easy task ahead to beat China. I hope Iran will emerge victorious in the semi-finals and then will beat their opponents in the final match. It does not seem to be too far-fetched to win the

title for the Iranian football team as Team Melli take advantage of so many valuable players," the ex-Persepolis coach added.

Still unbeaten, and still yet to concede a goal, Iran are building nicely as they look to win their first AFC Asian Cup title since 1976.

"Now, I am concentrating on my team's performance in Turkish Süper Lig and I cannot follow the Asian Cup completely. However, I sometimes follow Iran's matches in the UAE and I wish them all the best as a person who is interested in them," the Kasimpasa coach stated.

"I have kept my relationship with my Iranian friends and I have good memories of working there," Denizli concluded.

(Source: AFC)

## Asian Cup quarter-finals: four matches and a video ref

AFP Sport's guide to the Asian Cup quarter-finals, which begin on Thursday and will see the video assistant referee (VAR) system used in the tournament for the first time.

### ■ Vietnam v Japan

Japan should brush Vietnam aside but the four-time champions have been so unconvincing that a defeat would not be a major surprise.

Hajime Moriyasu's side have stumbled through the tournament, winning by a single-goal margin in each of their four games and conceding twice in their 3-2 Group F victory over Turkmenistan, ranked 127th in the world.

They allowed more than 75 percent possession to Saudi Arabia in a dire last-16 outing that was settled by Takehiro Tomiyasu's header from a corner against the run of play.

### ■ South Korea v Qatar

Son Heung-min's belated arrival gave South Korea a significant boost in their final group game, a 2-0 win over China, but needed extra time to beat Bahrain's part-timers 2-1 in the first knockout round.

Injuries could prove critical for the Taeguk Warriors, who in recent days have lost Newcastle midfielder Ki Sung-yeung to a hamstring problem.

### ■ UAE v Australia

Defending champions Australia finished second in their group but it's worked out well, with a favourable draw and no chance of meeting Iran until the final.

Despite only just squeezing past Uzbekistan on penalties, the Socceroos are heavy favourites to extinguish the hopes of Alberto Zaccheroni's lifeless UAE.

The hosts, who are a world away from the dynamic football that lit up their appearance in the 2015 edition, have had some eccentric refereeing decisions to thank for keeping them in the tournament.

### ■ VAR arrives -

The technology that shook up the World

Cup in Russia will be used for the first time at an Asian Cup from the quarter-finals. Decisions on whether the ball crossed the goal line, penalties, red cards and mistaken identity can all be video-reviewed before the on-field referee makes the final decision.

It could have been a very different competition if VAR had been used all along: two late penalties for UAE, and two goals in Australia's win over Syria are among the incidents which may have faced scrutiny. It will bring an extra element of interest and, as defenders will be keenly aware, potentially more penalties.

(Source: AFP)

## Beiranvand one of The Top 10 in AFC Asian Cup 2019 Round of 16

Go back 12 months and few people across Asia, let alone the world, knew the name Alireza Beiranvand. Then just 25, the lanky shot-stopper had established himself as the number one goalkeeper for both club and country, but now he is one of the best players in Asia. FOX Sports Asia football editor Gabriel Tan picks the ten best performers from the AFC Asian Cup 2019 Round of 16.

### ■ 1) Doan Van Hau (Vietnam)

Considering he is still only 19, it is remarkable how much maturity Doan Van Hau shows on the field and he was integral in Vietnam's stunning progress to the quarter-finals following a penalty shootout victory over Jordan.

Despite being a left wing-back, Van Hau looked like his side's likeliest source of an equalizer in the first half as he showed plenty of attacking intent and a willingness to test opposition goalkeeper Amer Shafi.

### ■ 2) Zheng Zhi (China PR)

From one of the tournament's youngest players, we move on to an evergreen veteran who rolled back the years to help China PR come from behind and beat Thailand 2-1.

At the age of 38, Zheng Zhi may no longer be the all-action midfielder than formerly played in the Premier League with Charlton but is thriving in his new role as a deep-lying playmaker.

### ■ 3) Theerathon Bunmathan (Thailand)

While Thailand came up just short in their bid to reach the Asian Cup quarter-finals, many of the War Elephants can head home with their heads held high and one such player is Theerathon Bunmathan.

His season-long loan spell in the J1 League with Vissel Kobe has certainly been beneficial, with the left-back displaying new levels of strength, confidence and tactical knowledge.

### ■ 4) Alireza Beiranvand (Iran)

It seems strange to highlight a goalkeeper as the best performer when his team claimed a comfortable 2-0 win but, were it not for Alireza Beiranvand's heroics, the game between Iran and Oman could have been a far different story.

Having seen Majid Hosseini concede a penalty inside the



opening 60 seconds, Beiranvand did brilliantly to keep out Ahmed Al-Mahajri's spot-kick and then produced another fine save just before halftime to ensure Team Melli went into the break with a two-goal cushion.

Following his heroics at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the 26-year-old continues to grow in stature and has firmly established himself as one of the continent's best shot-stoppers.

### ■ 5) Takehiro Tomiyasu (Japan)

Heading into the tournament with just two caps to his name, Takehiro Tomiyasu has been a revelation and is one of just three to have been involved in all four of Japan's matches thus far.

After being deployed in the heart of midfield in the opening match, Tomiyasu has since been shifted to his natural position of centre-back and looks a solid option alongside captain Maya Yoshida.

### ■ 6) Tom Rogic (Australia)

For the second consecutive match round, Tom Rogic gets the nod in "The Top 10" following another impressive display for Australia as they edged past Uzbekistan 4-2 on penalties following a 0-0 draw on Monday.

After a slow start to the tournament, the Celtic star continues to grow in influence for the Socceroos and he constantly looked the likeliest source of the breakthrough

with his probing in the attacking third.

### ■ 7) Hwang Hee-Chan (Korea Republic)

On an evening where their talismanic captain Son Heung-min looked a little out of sorts, Korea Republic were thankful that Hwang Hee-chan was able to step up in their 2-1 extra-time triumph over Bahrain.

The Hamburg forward was the Taeguk Warriors' live-liest player in the opening 45 and it was no surprise that he opened the scoring with a calm finish after Lee Yong's right-wing cross had been diverted into his path.

### ■ 8) Hamad Al-Shamsan (Bahrain)

In the end, Bahrain's adventurous run at the Asian Cup came to an end in the Round of 16, but they definitely came out of the tournament with enhanced reputations.

Their defence, in particular, was a standout and Hamad Al-Shamsan led the way well as he manfully battled with the opposition's best strikers while also showing good composure on the ball.

### ■ 9) Bassam Al-Rawi (Qatar)

Having been born in Iraq, with his father being a former international no less, it was quite a story that Bassam Al-Rawi popped up as Qatar's match-winner in the final Round of 16 tie on Tuesday.

With the usually deadly Almoez Ali and Akram Afif both misfiring, Bassam came to the rescue with a sublime freekick that cleared the wall by the finest of margins before nestling perfectly into the bottom corner.

### ■ 10) Marcello Lippi (China PR)

With his side's hopes of staying in the Asian Cup hanging in the balance as they trailed Thailand 1-0, Marcello Lippi's decision to throw on Xiao Zhi proved to be a masterstroke as the towering striker took just three minutes to level the scores after being introduced.

Following a lacklustre first half, the Chinese did show plenty more urgency and intensity after Lippi's halftime team talk, with the likes of Gao Lin and Zheng Zhi leading for their coach on the field.

(Source: Fox Sports)

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TEHRANTIMES

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## Ex-Iran goalkeeper Amir Aghahosseini passes away

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Former Iran national football team and Shahin club Amir Aghahosseini has died at the age of 88 on Tuesday.

Aghahosseini was a member of Iran national football team who won the silver medal at the 1951 Asian Games in New Delhi, India.

At the age of 19, he saved Japan's penalty in the Games' semis and Team Melli qualified for the final, where they lost to hosts India.

Aghahosseini was a member of Tehran based football club Shahin from 1948 to 1955.

An accident left him blind in one eye, but he was playing in Shahin for a while.

He also represented Team Melli five times.

The Tehran Times staff offer heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family.



## Beiranvand: Now I have the chance to play against the best footballers

Now regarded as one of Asia's best goalkeepers, Alireza Beiranvand had toiled hard to even make a career out of football, living rough on the streets of Tehran and working odd jobs just to make ends meet. "I have lived a hard life and have had some very difficult moments; nobody knew me when I left home and came to Tehran," Beiranvand explained.

"I used to have trials at different clubs to try and prove that I was good enough to offer a professional contract. But I also needed somewhere to sleep at nights, so because of that I worked in restaurants and at carwashes, for example, to be able to afford it."

"Now I have the chance to play against the best footballers in the world, like at the World Cup in Russia, and live a nice life with my family and teammates. I think this is the result of the hard work I put in when I was younger.

"I'd say half of my dreams and wishes have already come true, but my background is always the motivation that drives me forward to progress more and more."

(Source: AFC)

## VP Says to Travel to UAE If Iran Reaches Asian Cup Final

**TASNIM** —Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said he would travel to the United Arab Emirates for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup if the national football team, known as the Team Melli, becomes a finalist.

Speaking on the sidelines of a visit to the southern province of Kerman on Wednesday, Jahangiri hailed the Iranian team's efforts and said he closely follows their games in the Asian Cup. "Along with Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar, I plan to accompany the Iranian team if it reaches the final game of the Asian Cup," he noted.

He hoped that, God willing, the Iranian players would win the Asian Cup. The Team Melli booked a place in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 quarter-finals on Sunday thanks to a 2-0 win over Oman at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

The victory leaves coach Carlos Queiroz's charges still on track to win the nation's first continental title since 1976, and looking ahead to Thursday's meeting with China in the next round.

## Japan improving with every game, says Hajime Moriyasu

The gist of what Hajime Moriyasu had to say in Wednesday's pre-match news conference was clear: outcome matters more than process.

The Blue Samurai topped Group F by beating Turkmenistan (3-2), Oman (1-0) and Uzbekistan (2-1). Then they overcame Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the last 16.

On the other hand, the Golden Dragons progressed as one of the four best third-placed teams in the group stage despite having won just one game in Group D - a 2-0 result against Yemen. And yet, there is good reason for Japan to be wary of Vietnam: they shocked Jordan in a penalty shootout in the last 16.

Moriyasu was cognizant of this fact on Wednesday.

"Vietnam are a good team and they have shown their abilities in no small way," he said. "They are one of the most improved teams in East Asia, and they will be motivated after reaching the last-eight stage."

The former Japan international, however, insisted his side are improving with every game.

(Source: The National)

## Esmael Goncalves Linked with Iran's Esteghlal

**TASNIM** — Bissau-Guinean striker Esmael Goncalves has been linked with a move to Iranian football club Esteghlal.

Iranian media reports suggest that the 27-year-old striker has negotiated with Esteghlal officials in Turkey's training camp.

Goncalves started his playing career in Nice and has also played at Portuguese club Rio Ave, Scottish club Heart of Midlothian and Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor.

Though born in the Guinea-Bissau, Goncalves is a naturalized citizen of Portugal. He has represented Portugal at under-17 level.

In 2010, he was called up to the Portugal under-20 team to participate in training sessions as the team was preparing for the 2011 FIFA U-20 World Cup.

Goncalves, however, showed up to the camp out of shape and was, ultimately, not considered for the tournament by coach Ilidio Vale.

On 22 March 2018, Goncalves made his debut for Guinea-Bissau starting in a friendly match against Burkina Faso, where Guinea-Bissau suffered a 2-0 defeat.



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Knowledge is the missing goal of a believer, so obtain it event from a man of discord.

Imam Ali (AS)

Deputy Culture Minister Mohammad Soltanifar resigns

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Deputy Culture Minister for Press Affairs Mohammad Soltanifar has resigned from his position allegedly in response to intervention in his duties by other officials.



Mohammad Soltanifar in an undated photo.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi accepted his resignation, Persian media announced on Tuesday. Soltanifar, a media expert who was the managing director of the Tehran Times during the 1990s, was appointed to the post last January. Hossein Entezami, the current director of the Cinema Organization of Iran (COI), held the position for about four years.

War photog Saeid Sadeqi tracing his subjects of the past for new collection

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Veteran photojournalist Saeid Sadeqi who is mostly famous for his collections on the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war is searching for persons whose photos he snapped on the warfronts to feature their current lives in his upcoming pictorial book.



A photo by photojournalist Saeid Sadeqi.

“The project will be a comparative study between the life of the soldiers on the warfronts and their lives as citizens of today which can actually open a new window to the post-war era,” Sadeqi told the Persian service of Mehr News Agency. Sadeqi, who has recorded great moments of the war during his stay on the warfronts, added that he has long been thinking of the project and that he hopes to gain positive achievements. “The photos will surely tell new stories of the war. These soldiers are not fake heroes for me. They are individuals who each can narrate different stories of the situations they have been through,” he explained.

He added, “When I began the project I found out that many of the soldiers in the photos were martyred and when the families came across with their unseen photos they were highly impressed, and I also recorded those moments with my camera.”

Sadeqi also said that he is seeking the truth in this endeavor and that is why he has decided to manage the financial assets himself and that he hopes the honesty of those years of the war would remain in this project.

Sadeqi has so far showcased his photos on war, children, modern Iran and women in several solo and group exhibits.

Sadeqi’s black and white photograph “Conquest of Khorramshahr” that depicts Iranian soldiers celebrating the liberation of Khorramshahr at the Friday Mosque of the city was sold for 750 million rials (about \$18,000) at the 10th Tehran Auction on January 11.

“Owing without Oars” at Iranian bookstores

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Famous Swedish journalist Ulla-Carin Lindquist’s memoirs “Owing without Oars” has recently been published in Persian by Rozaneh Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Parisa Musavi, the 2005 book is about the last year of Lindquist’s life, after being diagnosed with the terminal illness ALS, which causes the death of neurons controlling voluntary muscles’ movements.

Lindquist, who died in 2004 at the age of 50, devoted her energy and time in the last few months to write about the disease, her four children, motherhood and about finally letting go.

She also recorded a documentary film “My Fight Against Time” at the same time. She died the same evening the documentary was broadcasted on Swedish national TV.

Ecuadorian pan flutist Leo Rojas to perform in Tehran during March

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Ecuadorian pan flutist Leo Rojas, famous for his hit song “The Lonely Shepherd”, will come to Tehran during March to perform his second series of Iranian concerts.

The second series of his concerts, which are scheduled to be organized at Milad Tower on March 7 and 8, will be different from the first series, coordinator Mahmud Shobeiri said in a press release on Wednesday.

“After his first performance in Tehran’s Milad Tower in late March 2018, there were many requests for the second concert since many were not able to attend because of the Noruz holiday,” Shobeiri said.

Silvio d’Anza, the Croatian-German singer, accompanied the 34-year-old Rojas in his previous concerts in Tehran named “Son of the Sun”.



Ecuadorian pan flutist Leo Rojas performs a concert at Tehran’s Milad Tower on March 28, 2018. (Honaronline/Amin Rajabi)

Milan art fair to display artworks from Iran



Aneh Mohammad-Tatari’s mixed media “Persistence” (2018).

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Affordable Art Fair opening at the Superstudio Più Milan on Friday will showcase works by four Iranian artists.

Aneh Mohammad Tatari, Omid Halaj, Kaveh Kavusi and Siamak Azmi are the four artists whose paintings were selected by Iran’s Nian Art Gallery for the fair, which will run for three days, the organizers have

announced. About 85 exhibitors are attending the fair, which is scheduled to showcase a collection of paintings, graphic designs, sculptures and photographs in an inspiring, friendly atmosphere. The Affordable Art Fair is a contemporary art showcase, which was organized for the first time in London in 1999. The fair has also been held in America and Asia.

Chinese stars hit with \$1.62 billion in “cold winter” tax crackdown

**BEIJING/SHANGHAI (Reuters)** —Chinese authorities have collected more than 11 billion yuan (\$1.62 billion) in unpaid taxes from celebrities and entertainment companies since they hit the industry with a crackdown, state media Xinhua reported on Tuesday.

Xinhua, citing the national tax bureau and content watchdog, said the campaign, which began in October, had ended and companies and workers had been ordered to correct their tax records.

The most famous star to get caught up in the campaign was actress Fan Bingbing who has 62 million online followers.

She was ordered to pay about \$129 million in overdue taxes and fines in October, after a four-month disappearance from the public eye, Xihua reported earlier.

Fan issued an apology after being ordered to pay up, saying she accepted the decision, would overcome “all difficulties” to pay the penalties and would step up

supervision of her companies. Industry insiders have lamented that a “cold winter” has descended on the business since authorities launched the checks, with film projects stalling and investors selling off related company shares.

Huayi Brothers Media Corp, a company linked to Fan Bingbing, has seen its share price halved since last year, while movie box office revenue growth in the world’s second-largest movie market after the United States, slowed last year.

Authorities said the industry should set its mind at rest and focus on work, but added that it would continue to target companies and individuals deemed highly exposed to tax-related risks.

Industry workers should “practise socialist core values ... and strive to be entertainment workers with belief, empathy and sense of responsibility in the new era”, authorities said, according to Xinhua.

Fajr music festival to review musical docs



A scene from “Iranian Symphony” by Vahid Musaian.

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of 25 documentaries on Iranian music will go on screen at the Iranian House of Cinema during the 34th Fajr International Music Festival, the organizers announced on Wednesday.

“Six Centuries and Six Years” by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, “Iranian Symphony” by Vahid Musaian and “A

French Musician in Qajar Court” by Mehran Purmandan are among the films. The lineup also includes “Two Kamanchehs” by Bahman Kiarostami, “The Last Bakhshi” by Farshad Fadaian and “Fight Feast” by Seyyed Vahid Hosseini. The 34th Fajr International Music Festival will take place in Tehran from February 13 to 19.

Lebanese director credits street children actors for Oscar nod

**BEIRUT (Reuters)** — Tuesday’s Oscar nomination for the Lebanese film “Capernaum”, praised for its depiction of poverty in the slums of Beirut, is a “huge victory” for the street children who acted in it, according to director Nadine Labaki.

The nomination of a Lebanese picture for the Best Foreign Language Film award for the second year running is also a milestone for Arab and Lebanese cinema, Labaki told Reuters after the nominees were announced.

“It’s a huge victory for each one of the actors who are ... putting their own struggle out there through the film, being the voice of the voiceless, each one with his own story and own struggle and own problems,” she said.

Labaki cast street children in the town of Capernaum to tell the story of a 12-year-old boy trying to stop his younger sister being married off as soon as she reaches puberty. Much of the plot is based on events that

Labaki witnessed or cast members experienced, and its biting social commentary helped secure the Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival in May.

The protagonist is played by a young Syrian refugee, while another young cast member was thrown in jail during the shoot, and a third was deported to Kenya with her mother.

Last year, Lebanon gained its first nomination for a foreign language Oscar with “The Insult” by Ziad Doueiri, a film that examines Lebanon’s sectarian tensions through a street argument that leads to a trial.

“This is definitely very important for Arab cinema, the Lebanese especially,” Labaki said. “It’s like we started our first steps in international cinema.”

Lebanese film maker Oualid Mouaness agreed, saying: “It’s an incredible honor for the country, and I think it really creates a visibility to Lebanese cinema and creates support.”

History-making Oscar nominations leave top prize up for grabs



Best director Oscar nominees for the 91st annual Academy Awards (L-R) Alfonso Cuaron, Pawel Pawlikowski, Adam McKay, Spike Lee and Yorgos Lanthimos are seen in a combination of file photos. (Reuters/Staff)

was “humbled and honored.”

“As a daughter of a domestic worker and an indigenous woman myself, I am proud this movie will help those of us who feel invisible be seen,” she said in a statement.

The Oscars, chosen by the 8,000 members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, will be handed out in Hollywood on Feb. 24.

“The Favourite”, set in the court of 18th-century British monarch Queen Anne, garnered nods for its British star, Olivia Colman, and supporting actresses Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz. Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos was also nominated for the film.

“Yorgos has such a unique vision. He is very witty, he takes a lot of risks,” Ceci Dempsey, one of the film’s producers, said in a telephone interview. “It’s a remarkable feeling to have a film with so many women in it get so many nominations.”

Warner Bros. “A Star is Born”, led by best actress contender Lady Gaga in her debut in a major movie, earned eight nods, including for Gaga’s hit song “Shallow.” But while Bradley Cooper will compete in the best actor category, he was snubbed in the director’s race.

Other snubs included the all-Asian cast romantic comedy “Crazy Rich Asians”, which got nothing, “Black Panther” director Ryan Coogler, and “If Beale Street Could Talk,” which was excluded from the best picture race but won a supporting actress nod for Regina King.

Crowd-pleaser “Bohemian Rhapsody” was nominated for five awards, including Egyptian-American Rami Malek for his role as Queen front man Freddie Mercury, who died of AIDS in 1991.

Veteran actress Glenn Close, who has yet to win an Oscar, will compete for the seventh time, this year for her lead role in “The Wife.”

“Green Book” about the friendship that develops between a black pianist and his white driver in the 1960s, won nods for stars Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali, but not for director Peter Farrelly. Nevertheless, the film remains a strong best picture contender after a win at the Producers Guild Awards on Saturday.

The Oscar ceremony looks set to take place without a host after the withdrawal in December of comedian Kevin Hart due to past comments he made on Twitter.