



Tehran hits back at French sanctions threats **2**



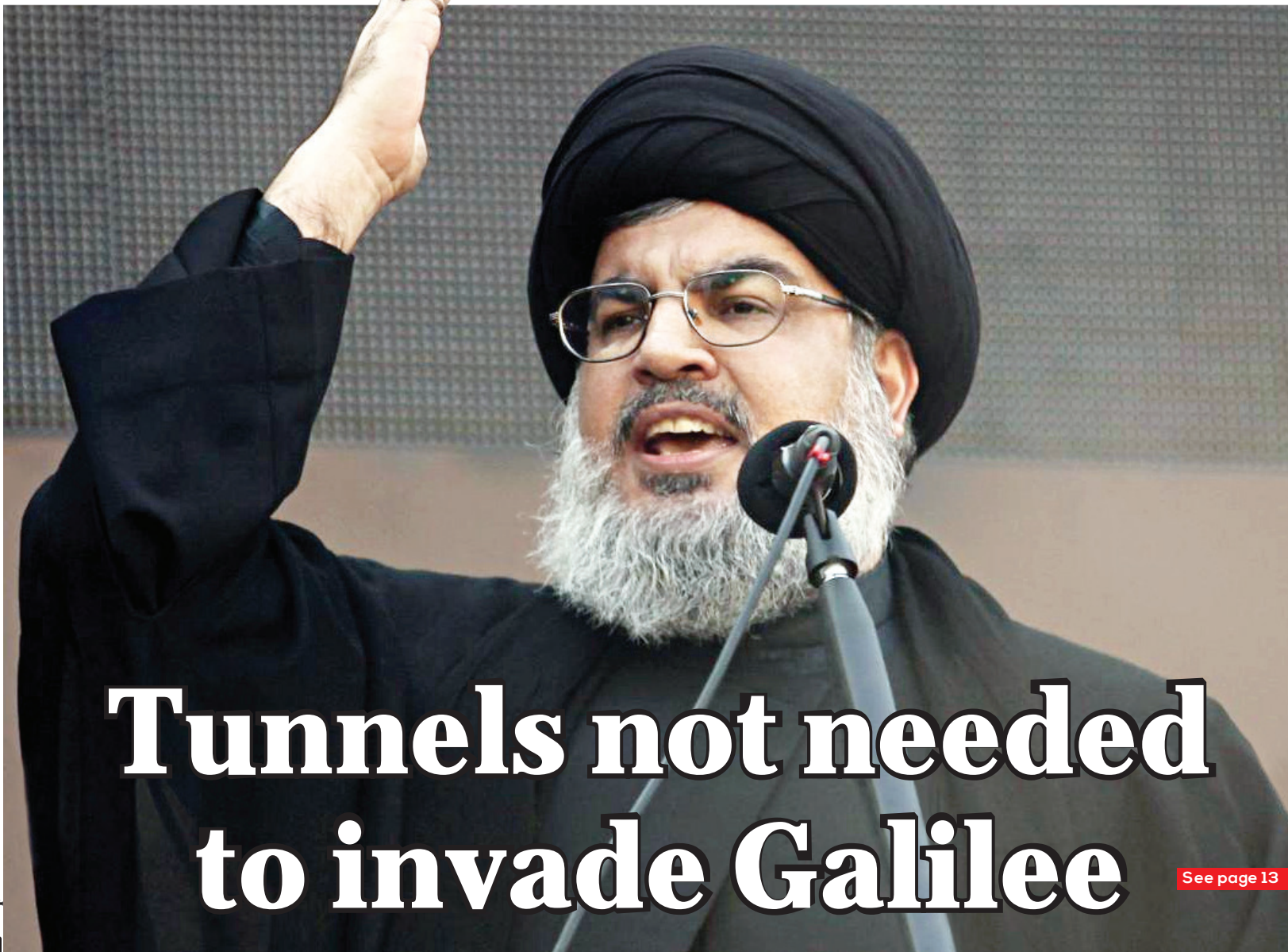
U.S., allies undermining Venezuela sovereignty **3**



The best is yet to come: Karim Ansarifard **15**



“Kupal” named best at Arthouse Asia film festival **16**



Tunnels not needed to invade Galilee

See page 13

Iran not to merely rely on SPV to develop trade: TPO head

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — The Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said Iran will not solely rely on Iran-Europe trade mechanism, known as special purpose vehicle (SPV), for developing foreign trade and it will rather use its own capacities and capabilities in doing so.

Speaking to Tehran Times in a press conference on Saturday, Mohammadreza Modoudi noted that the Europeans should be more eager than Iran for establishing the

promised trade mechanism since otherwise the EU credibility will be seriously questioned. The official further noted that despite U.S. efforts for isolating Iran, the country has a good economic relationship with its neighbors and Iran's foreign trade is flourishing strongly.

"The country's non-oil trade balance for the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 - December 21, 2018) was over \$700 million positive", he said. **→4**

Expediency Council to decide on Palermo Convention in next session

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Expediency Council on Saturday decided to discuss the issue of Iran's accession to the Palermo Convention in the next session.

"Given that the Palermo Convention is an important legal issue and all the members are supposed to talk about it, we set the next session to further discuss

the issue," Majid Ansari, a member of the Expediency Council, told IRNA.

He noted that the Palermo Convention has various political, economic, legal and security aspects which were discussed in Saturday's session.

The session was chaired by Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, the new chairman of the council. **→2**

Saudi Arabia blacklisted for posing threat to EU

Saudi Arabia has reportedly been included in an EU draft list of countries that pose a threat to the bloc due to their alleged lax control on money laundering and terrorism financing.

An EU source and a Saudi source told Reuters that the European Commission had added Riyadh to its blacklist, which already includes 16 states based

on criteria used by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a Paris-based watchdog.

The EU claims that the countries blacklisted "have strategic deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism regimes that pose significant threats to the financial system of the Union." **→13**



ARTICLE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

French performance in favor of Trump

There is no end to the French direct play on Trump's ground! In their latest speeches against Iran's missile program, the Elysee Palace authorities have called for the immediate stop of Iran's ballistic missile testing, and this is the same position they were taking during the past two years. French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Agnes Von der Muhll said in a daily briefing: "France recalls that the Iranian missile program (does) not conform to UN Security Council Resolution 2231. It calls on Iran to immediately cease all ballistic missile-related activities designed to carry nuclear weapons, including tests using ballistic missile technology."

The French officials' opposition to Iran's missile program is raised at a time when the American and European authorities are preparing to hold the anti-Iran conference in Warsaw. And before that, we have witnessed the imposition of EU security sanctions against our country. What exactly has happened?! Should the French insistence on the immediate stop of Iran's missile program be considered as an "independent phenomenon" in the international system? Or is there a secret behind this mysterious insistence?

1: In August 2018, while 3 months has passed since the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, in a warning letter addressed to the foreign policy apparatus of our country, said that Iran can't ignore the regional concerns of France and other European countries! He stated that it's inevitable to hold negotiations with Iran on the ballistic missiles program, and over Iran's so-called destructive activities in the region.

Subsequently, Le Drian announced that the Europe's package of proposals for the maintenance of the JCPOA would probably be offered by November 2018. It is now in 2019 and there is still no sign of Europeans' Special purpose vehicle (SPV). In other words, today European officials are still talking about their "unacceptable demands from Iran", while saying nothing of their obligations and guarantees which had to be offered long ago to our country. **→7**

Army holds last day of war games

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Army on Saturday held the last day of its most recent military exercises, practicing a tactic to prevent the enemy from closing in on the battlefield by creating a long row of blasts using remote-controlled land bombs during a military exercise in central Iran.

During the final stage of the "Eqtedar (Power)" war game, the Army Ground Force's combat engineers created a line of explosion 6 kilometers long to block the forward movement of the mock enemy's personnel carriers and armored vehicles.

According to Tasnim news agency, a commander said the military engineering units had been deployed to the drill zone 10 days in advance of the war game to design and prepare the line of



explosion and plant remote-controlled bombs.

In another operation on Saturday, two F-7 fighter-bombers of the Air Force were scrambled to hit the enemy's armored equip-

ment with smart bombs.

During today's operations, the Ground Force's fixed and mobile artillery units practiced hitting the enemy's positions with smart and precise shells with a range of 10 to 30 kilometers.

The final phase of the war game, involving 12,000 assault forces from all units of the Army Ground Force, began on Saturday morning with Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi in attendance.

Troops from the artillery, armored unit, rapid-reaction forces, mechanized infantry, combat engineering, telecommunication and electronic warfare, and airborne unit have been arrayed in the operation zone with the support of the Air Force fighter jets.

Western MSM coverage of Hashemi's detention: Double-standard on steroids

By Alireza Hashemi

TEHRAN — Marzieh Hashemi, the U.S.-born anchorwoman who was arrested without charges on January 13 in her homeland, was finally set free on Wednesday, after she appeared before a 23-member grand jury for a third hearing on an unspecified federal court case.

Probably, her release could not be secured without efforts by independent journalist and intuitive citizens to shine light onto this grave injustice, highlighting the seemingly lawless seizure, the abusive treatment she received and a cloak of secrecy surrounding the case caused outrage across the globe.

Earlier, U.S. officials had shown signs they are folding under the weight of public opinion, providing

her with halal food and proper clothes for hijab.

Since its beginning, the case seemed more like a play written by the Donald Trump administration to carry out the U.S. president's 2017 threat that Iran would face "new and serious consequences" unless four U.S. nationals held in Iran prisons were freed.

The January 9 confirmation of the arrest of Michael White, the fifth American held by Iran, has probably pushed Trump to do something to force the Iranian government, who in 2017 had rejected Trump's offer for talk on prisoners, to come to the negotiating table.

But Trump apparently decided to stop his childish game after the arrest of the respected news presenter caused an unprecedented alliance

around the globe, bringing together a wide array of outlets and media activists to support the U.S.-born journalist who was under an open-ended detention in her homeland without charges.

Twitter users flooded the platform with messages calling to #FreeMarziehHashemi, working to make her name reaches the ears of the masses.

Press TV itself pushed the story hard, breaking into its planned broadcasting last week to air footage with dramatic music of her anchoring news programs and cover reactions and controversies regarding her arrest round-the-clock.

■ Skeptical Narrative

However, this case brought to surface long-standing double standards in the western media. **→7**



© Tehran Times / Alich Saadatpour

‘Needlework’ a common craft in southern Iran

A woman completes patterns of needlework on a traditional dress in Jask, a port city in southern Iran, January 26, 2019.

Needlework (Souzan-douzi in Persian) is a very common occupation among females in southern regions of the country.

It is the art of drawing images on plain fabrics by sewing delicate stitches using needle and colorful yarns.



PERSPECTIVE

Heshmatollah Rahnama
Latin American expert

What goes on in Venezuela?

To clarify what is happening in Venezuela one must begin with some background information on the latest in Caracas.

Approximately a quarter of U.S. resources are supplied from Latin America through contracts that allow Americans, among other things, to exploit Venezuelan resources shamelessly. The royalties paid are peanuts considering the resources (mining, oil, agricultural products) not to mention the irreversible damages to the environment and the trampling on Venezuela's rights and culture.

Latin American countries have multi-billion dollar debt to international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank whose main shareholders are American banks. This is while a majority of people in Latin America and the Caribbean live in poverty and want to migrate to the U.S. Many reach the U.S.-Mexico border. Some don't get to cross the border while others get into the U.S. to serve as cheap labor in physically demanding jobs.

Latin America is tightly controlled by over 70 U.S. military bases for its energy sources and other natural resources. Washington considers Latin America its own backyard for its vast fresh water reserves and strategic location.

The U.S. has a long history of intervention in Latin America and around the world. Today, however, the interference has changed shape and style and evolved. For the past three decades, Washington no longer deploys troops to Latin America but initiates a soft coup d'etat. The U.S. has overthrown Latin American governments in the past two decades including the 2002 failed coup in Venezuela against Hugo Chavez, the 2004 coup in Haiti, the 2008 failed coup in Bolivia, the 2009 coup again in Bolivia, the 2010 failed coup in Ecuador, the 2012 coup in Paraguay, and the 2016 coup in Brazil.

It is clear now who's behind the recent coup in Venezuela. The January 22, 2019 failed coup in Caracas was an organized attempt to bring about a national crisis with Nicolas Maduro's opposition group, Washington and other regional right wing-countries played a role in the coup. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran to demand JCPOA rights even after Trump: Takht Ravanchi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majid Takht Ravanchi, deputy director for political affairs at the presidential office, has said Iran will pursue its rights under the nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), even after the current U.S. administration.

In an interview with the Shargh newspaper published on Saturday, Takht Ravanchi said Iran and other parties to the JCPOA expect the U.S. to comply with its undertakings within the deal's framework.

Takht Ravanchi who acted as a nuclear negotiator also expressed doubt that President Donald Trump's successors would adopt a different approach towards Iran, emphasizing that the JCPOA has special conditions which should be implemented under any administration.



Military set to show achievements as Islamic Revolution turning 40

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A senior spokesman for the Iranian armed forces said on Saturday that the Islamic Republic's latest military achievements will be showcased in four exhibitions ahead of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said the theme of the first exhibition, which will be held in Tehran by the Defense Ministry at Tehran's Grand Mosalla on January 31st, would be Iran's "military power", Fars reported.

The exhibition will showcase more than 560 types of homegrown defense equipment in areas of missile systems, telecommunications, electronics, security and law enforcement, Shekarchi added.



Hashemi recounts ordeal during time in U.S. jail

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Rallies were held in some cities in the world to protest the U.S. legal system, in the wake of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s imprisonment of Press TV anchor Marzieh Hashemi.

In an address to demonstrators gathered in Washington, D.C. on Friday, Hashemi recounted her ordeal during her time in jail and mistreatment by the American justice system, Tasnim reported.

"It can be called whatever they want to call it, but I was kidnapped from the St. Louis airport. Fortunately my son Reza was with me otherwise who knows what could have happened. You can be made to disappear very easily," she said.



Not joining FATF would be 'detrimental': businessperson

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Pedram Soltani, the vice chairman of the Iranian chamber of commerce, has argued that if Iran fails to join the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the country will deprive itself from selling oil, even to China.

"Under the current circumstances, in order to be able to keep open our banking and financial channel with the European Union and China and all countries that are willing to buy petroleum from us, Iran's monetary and banking transactions need to be recognized as low-risk transactions," IFP on Saturday quoted Soltani as saying, citing Khabar Online.



Iran-Russia ties deepening despite sanctions, envoy says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** —Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Mehdi Sanaei has said despite new U.S. sanctions, Iran's relations with Russia have been expanding.

"Sanctions are not a new phenomenon and Iran is trying to become more self-sufficient in the sanctions era," Fars on Saturday quoted Sanaei as saying.

He also said unlike past sanctions the new ones were unilaterally imposed by the U.S. and create the opportunity "to boost bilateral cooperation and reduce our dependency on other countries' decisions."

In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew Washington from the 2015 nuclear deal and ordered sanctions against Iran.



'Warmonger-in-chief Bolton' push against Iran falling flat: Gareth Porter

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Gareth Porter, investigative historian and journalist, has called U.S. national security advisor John Bolton "warmonger-in-chief" and said his "tricks" to bring new accusations against Iran over its nuclear program are getting nowhere.

"Warmonger-in-chief Bolton never rests. His latest trick: trying to gin up a new #Iran crisis by claiming Iran has lied to international atomic watchdog IAEA. But it's fallen flat. Neither the IAEA nor the Europeans took his antics seriously," Porter tweeted on Friday, referring to a recent Bloomberg report that says Bolton's anti-Iran push is failing to gain traction.

Tehran hits back at French sanctions threats

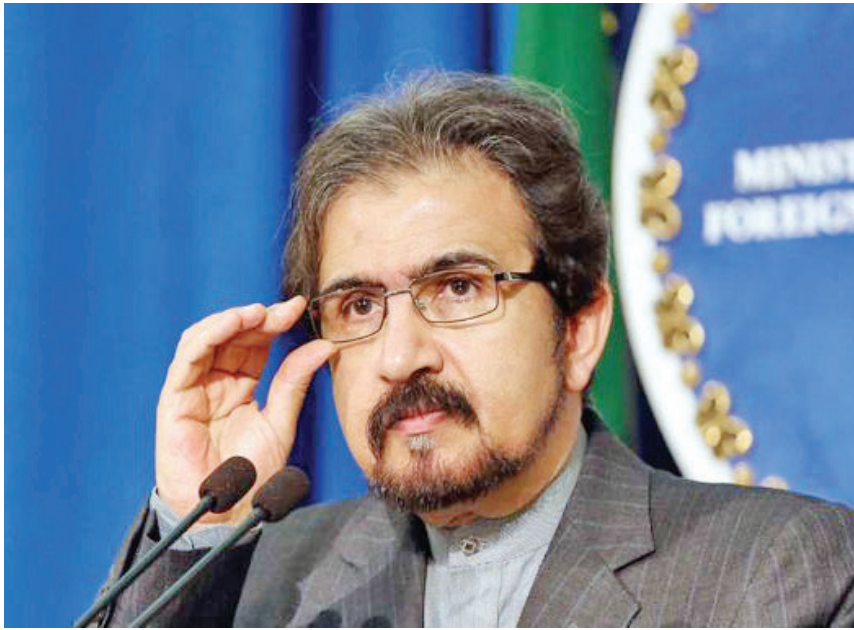
POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has strongly criticized France for threatening Tehran with new sanctions over its missile program, vowing to reconsider its relations with European countries if such sanctions are imposed.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi made the remarks on Friday, in reaction to earlier comments by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who said his country is ready to impose further sanctions on Iran if no progress is made in talks over Tehran's ballistic missile program.

"We are ready, if the talks don't yield results, to apply sanctions firmly, and they know it," Le Drian told reporters.

The spokesman said Le Drian's threat to impose new missile sanctions is against the spirit of political talks and cooperation between the two countries.

"Iran has always sought to consolidate peace and stability in the region, and believes the mass sale of sophisticated and assault weapons by the U.S. and some European countries, including France, has undermined



Elections to become transparent: Interior Ministry spokesman

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The government has okayed a bill in line with reforming the election system and plans to present it to parliament for a passage, a move that if gets finalized will make the elections "transparent", an Interior Ministry official has said.

"One of the most important issues in our general policies was using new technologies in line with boosting

transparency in the process of voting and announcing the results. This bill has focused on electronic elections," Interior Ministry spokesman Salman Samani told the Iran newspaper published on Saturday.

All the stages of elections ranging from the competence of candidates, voting, counting ballots and result of election will be done electronically.

Samani said for more transparency candidates are

obliged to announce a bank account to the Interior Ministry election headquarters and all the money paid to candidates should be through that bank account.

According to the bill, armed forces have no right to interfere in implementation and monitoring of elections, he stated, adding that using military personnel either from Army, the IRGC, police, Basij and intelligence forces in conducting and supervising elections is banned.

Expediency Council to decide on Palermo Convention in next session

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, central bank governor Abdolnasser Hemmati, and Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also attended the meeting.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which is also called the Palermo Convention, is a 2000 United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime.

The CFT (the convention combatting financing of terrorism) and Palermo Convention are prelude to join the FATF (Financial Action Task Force).

■ MP says Shamkhani not favoring CFT

An MP has claimed that Supreme National Security Council secretary Ali Shamkhani in a closed session of the parliament has clearly said that joining the CFT is not beneficial to Iran.

"Mr. Shamkhani said clearly in the session that from the Supreme National Security Council's view the CFT is not beneficial for the country, however, if the Expediency Council approved it we will



(Left to right) Vice President for Legal Affairs Laya Joneidi, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and Expediency Council member Saeed Jalili attend a meeting of the council on January 26, 2019.

respect it," Abolfazl Hasanbeigi told the Mehr news agency.

The lawmaker added, "We are waiting

for the Expediency Council's view and will respect it."

However, Mohammad Rezaz Nobakht,

Zarif discusses unrest in Venezuela with country's FM

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has made separate phone conversations with his Venezuelan and Turkish counterparts to discuss the recent unrest in Venezuela.

During his call to Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza on Friday, Zarif expressed Tehran's support for the Venezuelan government and nation in the face of U.S. plots.

The two sides exchanged views on methods of countering the U.S. plots against independent governments, especially that of Caracas, at the international level.

Zarif and Arreaza also conferred on the recent offer by the governments of Mexico and Uruguay to mediate in the dispute, other methods of strengthening national dialogue, and political solutions for settling the conflict between the Venezuelan government and the opposi-

tion groups.

In a plaza in Caracas, surrounded by supporters carrying flags and chanting for democracy, Juan Guaidó, a 35 year-old legislator from a coastal town in Venezuela swore on Wednesday "to assume all the powers of the presidency to secure an end to the usurpation." The event was widely reported as "Guaidó declares himself President of Venezuela," according to CNN.

Risking arrest, Guaidó attended a rally on Friday in his first public appearance since he declared himself president, and told supporters to maintain pressure on the authorities "if they dare to kidnap me."

At the same time, President Nicolás Maduro, who had been furiously describing his adversary as the lackey of an American-backed coup plot, appeared to take a more conciliatory approach, calling for dialogue, according to the New York Times.

On Thursday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman voiced support for Venezuela in the face of illegal moves to stage coup in the country and foreign interventions in the affairs of Venezuela.

Pointing to recent political incidents in Venezuela and open and illegitimate interventions by the U.S. in the affairs of that country, Bahram Qassemi expressed support for Venezuela.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the Venezuelan government and nation in the face of foreign interventions in Venezuela's internal affairs and any illegitimate and illegal move such as trying to [stage] coup or anti-people moves," he said in a statement.

"We hope that as soon as possible any political difference and problem in Venezuela is solved by the people and government of the country using legal and peaceful methods," he said.

U.S. hits a wall in efforts to turn the screws on Iran, diplomats say

Diplomats in Vienna are focused on preserving nuclear accord

The Trump administration is pushing to re-open a special investigation into the alleged military dimensions of Iran's past nuclear work. But it's not gaining traction among the international officials who can make it happen.

American officials have been ratcheting up pressure at the International Atomic Energy Agency in recent weeks, threatening new sanctions and advocating for more aggressive inspections, according to documents obtained by Bloomberg and interviews with diplomats.

However, the efforts are falling flat, say three diplomats who participated in a meeting convened next to the U.S. IAEA embassy last week in Vienna.

It's a rare pushback for the U.S. at the IAEA. The episode illustrates the rising difficulty American officials face in convincing allies to follow the U.S. on Iran.

The diplomats at the Vienna meeting asked not to be identified in return for discussing details of the private Jan. 20 briefing attended by 70 diplomats assigned to the IAEA, the body charged with

verifying the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers that U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned in May.

■ 'Administration frustrated'

The envoys heard details of what National Security Adviser John Bolton called "substantial evidence" that Iran lied to IAEA inspectors.

"There is a sense that the administration is frustrated that their campaign to renegotiate the deal isn't working," said Ellie Geranmayeh, a senior fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "What we see is the U.S. maximum pressure campaign is heating up even further."

The basis for Bolton's allegation was an analysis by two long-time opponents to the Iran deal -- The Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Institute for Science and International Security.

The U.S. is threatening sanctions on IAEA technical cooperation projects with Iran, according to a separate document seen by Bloomberg and distributed to diplomats in Vienna last month.

The U.S. embassy in Vienna declined

to comment, citing the U.S. federal government shutdown.

The IAEA also declined to comment. It ended a 12-year investigation of Iran in 2015. The agency subjects new information to "rigorous review," said Director General Yukiya Amano in October. He's said the deal provides inspectors with "the most rigorous monitoring mechanism ever negotiated."

■ Iran abides nuclear limits

The diplomats said that the Israeli data reinforced the need for a nuclear deal with Iran, which gives inspectors real-time monitoring of nuclear material from cradle to grave. They pointed to the record level of IAEA snap inspections called in Iran, as well as three years of monitoring reports that show Tehran has stuck to its side of the bargain.

"There has been a concern that the U.S. and some other countries want to precipitate an inspection crisis," said Geranmayeh, who advises European governments on Iran. "But there's been resistance to this. The deal's stakehold-

regional stability and balance," he stated.

"Iran's military capabilities are part of the country's legitimate defense power and a guarantor of the Islamic Republic's national security, which is based on the doctrine of deterrence," Press TV quoted Qassemi as saying.

"The Islamic Republic has designed its defense capabilities based on a realistic assessment of the existing threats," he said, reiterating that Iran's missile capability is "non-negotiable".

Le Drian's remarks came as the European Union is expected to launch its exclusive payment mechanism, known as the special purpose vehicle (SPV), for facilitating non-dollar trade with Iran in a bid to circumvent U.S. sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

The SPV "should be implemented in the coming days," the French foreign minister announced on Wednesday.

"It will work as a sort of clearing house that will allow in euros for Iran to benefit from some of its oil resources and at the same time buy essential products from the three main (European) partners," he added.

a close associate to President Rouhani who heads the Budget and Planning Organization, has said the Supreme National Security Council favors FATF.

On January 21, the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) sent the CFT bill, which the Guardian Council says there is still 19 faults with it, to the Expediency Council for final decision.

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

Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh told reporters on January 20 that three of the faults have been corrected.

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

According to the constitution, in cases when the parliament and the Guardian Council disagree on a bill the issue is referred to the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

U.S., allies undermining Venezuela sovereignty

Russia slams ‘destructive’ U.S. policy on Venezuela

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has lashed out at the United States for its “destructive” policy on Venezuela, after Washington threw its weight behind the anti-government opposition and its self-proclaimed president despite international support for President Nicolas Maduro’s legitimate government.

“The (U.S.) policy concerning Venezuela, as with many other countries, is destructive in my opinion,” he said, adding that “this (U.S.) behavior is unacceptable. It undermines the principles of the UN Charter and the international community’s standards,” Lavrov said during a press conference with his Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita, in Morocco’s capital of Rabat on Friday.

The Russian foreign minister also called on the Venezuelan opposition group “not to be pawns in someone else’s dirty game.”

Venezuela plunged into a political crisis earlier this week when a group of soldiers rose up against Maduro and sparked a number of protests that led to rival rallies between the socialist leader’s supporters and opponents.

The president of the Latin American country’s opposition-led National Assembly, Juan Guaido, then declared himself interim president of the country, a move that was immediately recognized by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

On Thursday, Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced support for the Maduro government “in the context of a domestic political crisis that has been provoked from the outside.”

Putin pledged to support Maduro against a “destructive external interference that grossly violates the most basic norms of the international law.”

Besides Russia, a number of other countries including Iran, China, Turkey, Bolivia, Mexico and Cuba have also sided with Maduro and condemned outside interference in Caracas.

At least 20 people have been reportedly killed in Venezuela’s recent clashes, prompting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to call on Friday for an independent investigation into the deaths.

Shortly after the Trump administration’s recognition of Guaido as Venezuela’s acting president, Maduro said he was severing diplomatic and political ties with Washington, ordering the closure of Venezuela’s embassy and consulates in the U.S.

The Venezuelan president also gave officials in the U.S. diplomatic mission in Caracas 72 hours to leave the country.

■ Germany, France, Spain poised to recognize Guaido

Four major European countries – the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Spain – have come out Saturday saying they are ready to recognize Juan Guaido as Venezuela’s interim president if elections are not called within eight days.



“The government of Spain gives Nicolas Maduro eight days to call free, transparent and democratic elections,” said Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in statement. “If that doesn’t happen, Spain will recognize Juan Guaido as interim president in charge of calling these elections.”

In what appears to be a coordinated message from European Union countries, at almost the same time French President Emmanuel Macron sent a tweet echoing Sanchez’s comments. “Unless elections are announced within eight days, we will be ready to recognize @jguaido as ‘President in charge’ of Venezuela in order to trigger a political process,” Macron said.

A spokesperson from the German government tweeted the same message shortly after the comments from Madrid and Paris.

“@jguaido is the right person to take Venezuela forward,” British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt tweeted.

Guaido proclaimed himself interim president on Wednesday during a march of hundreds of thousands in Caracas.

The United States said Friday it was ready to step up economic measures to drive Maduro from power, and most Latin American nations have joined Washington in supporting Guaido’s claim on the presidency.

Europe, however, had until now simply called for new elections in the troubled South American country.

However, the Venezuelan state and the military have so far remained loyal to Maduro despite a deep economic and political crisis that has sparked mass emigration, with inflation forecast to rise to 10 million percent this year.

■ New U.S. special envoy appointed for Venezuela

Also on Friday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Elliot Abrams as the newly appointed special envoy for Venezuela

during a press conference in Washington DC.

The 71-year-old Abrams, a known U.S. foreign policy hawk, has served as a top official for all Republican presidents since Ronald Reagan.

Pompeo said during the presser that the U.S. State Department was focused on “ensuring the protection of all those folks that are under our chief of mission authority there in Venezuela.”

The U.S. secretary of state is also to press UN Security Council members to recognize Guaido as acting president of Venezuela during an upcoming crisis meeting.

■ Maduro: U.S. training ‘gringo agent’ Guaido

During a televised speech in Caracas on Friday, Maduro accused the self-declared president of working on behalf of the United States. “I know who he [Juan Guaido] is. He is an agent of the ‘gringos’ in Venezuela. They trained him as an agent and they put him in politics. He is an agent of the government of the United States, he knows and will receive and will fulfill orders from them,” Maduro said.

The Venezuelan leader also welcomed Pompeo’s call for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to address the situation.

“I welcome it, it’s what we wanted. I was about to tell the chancellor, ‘Ask for a debate in the Security Council.’ Mike Pompeo beat me to it, he was faster than me. Thanks Mike. Thank you very much, Mr. Pompeo,” Maduro added. Maduro was sworn in for a second term earlier in January, after a vote marred by an opposition boycott and claims of vote-rigging. Oil-rich Venezuela is currently mired in economic turmoil, with people grappling with hyperinflation, power cuts and shortages of basic items.

Maduro and his supporters accuse the U.S. for being behind the country’s economic crisis, saying Washington is plotting to topple

the government.

The U.S. has a long record for “regime change” campaigns in Venezuela and other south American countries.

■ U.S. interventions in Latin America, a timeline compiled by the Associated Press (AP):

1846: The United States invades Mexico and captures Mexico City in 1847. A peace treaty the following year gives the U.S. more than half of Mexico’s territory — what is now most of the western United States.

1903: The U.S. engineers Panamanian independence from Colombia and gains sovereign rights over the zone where the Panama Canal would connect Atlantic and Pacific shipping routes.

1903: Cuba and the U.S. sign a treaty allowing near-total U.S. control of Cuban affairs. U.S. establishes a naval base at Guantanamo Bay. U.S. Marines repeatedly intervene in Central America and the Caribbean throughout the first quarter of the 20th century, often to protect U.S. business interests in moments of political instability.

1914: U.S. troops occupy the Mexican port of Veracruz for seven months in an attempt to sway developments in the Mexican Revolution.

1954: Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz is overthrown in a CIA-backed coup.

1961: The U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion fails to overthrow Soviet-backed Cuban leader Fidel Castro but Washington continues to launch attempts to assassinate Castro and dislodge his government.

1989: U.S. invades Panama to oust strongman Manuel Noriega. 1994: A U.S.-led invasion of Haiti is launched to remove the military regime installed by a 1991 coup that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The invasion restores Aristide.

2002: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is ousted for two days before retaking power. He and his allies accuse the U.S. of tacit support for the coup attempt.

2009: Honduran President Manuel Zelaya overthrown by military. U.S. accused of worsening situation by insufficient condemnation of the coup.

■ Russia fails to stop UN Security Council meeting on Venezuela

Russia failed on Saturday to stop a UN Security Council meeting on Venezuela that was requested by the United States after Washington recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as the South American nation’s head of state and urged President Nicolas Maduro to step down.

Only four of the 15 council members voted to stop the meeting, while nine voted to hold the meeting and two abstained. A minimum of nine votes was needed to win such a vote and China, Russia, the United States, Britain and France cannot wield their vetoes.

(Source: agencies)

Tunisia calls for Arab League to readmit Syria



Syria’s “natural place” is within the Arab League, Tunisia’s foreign minister said Saturday, ahead of the organization’s annual summit in Tunis in March.

“Syria is an Arab state, and its natural place is within the Arab League,” Khemaies Jhinaoui said during a news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who is on a tour of North African countries.

The Arab League suspended Syria’s membership in November 2011 as the death toll in the country’s civil war mounted.

“The question of Syria returning to the Arab League does not depend on Tunisia but on the Arab League,” Jhinaoui said.

“The foreign ministers [of member states] will decide on this subject,” he added. “What interests us is Syria’s stability and security.”

Persistent divisions between the Arab League’s member states have worked against Syria’s readmission.

The UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus in December, the same month as Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir made the first visit of any Arab leader to the Syrian capital since the start of the war. But Qatar earlier this month rejected normalizing ties with Assad.

Lavrov backed overtures to readmit Syria.

“As we have discussed in Algeria and Morocco over the past few days, we would like Tunis to also support Syria’s return to the Arab family, the Arab League,” Russia’s foreign minister said in Tunis, according to Interfax news agency.

Lavrov, who has also visited Morocco on his tour, also said Tunisia and Russia agreed to ramp up “anti-terror cooperation”.

Russia’s foreign minister is due to meet Tunisia’s president and prime minister on Saturday.

(Source: AFP)

Day and night, yellow vest protests keep pressure on Macron

France’s yellow vest protesters hit the streets again Saturday, keeping up pressure on President Emmanuel Macron even as internal divisions and frustration over protest violence cloud the movement’s future.

Multiple protests are being held around Paris and other cities, the 11th straight weekend of action prompted by Macron policies seen as favoring the rich.

Macron has sapped some support for the movement by taking an active role in recent days in a national debate in towns across France, launched to address the protesters’ concerns.

Some yellow vest leaders are trying to keep up momentum by holding protests after dark as well as during the day. A small crowd of protesters advanced peacefully Saturday morning down the Champs-Elysees, site of recent rioting. Two other groups plan evening events across town, at Place de la Republique in eastern Paris.

France deployed about 80,000 police Saturday against protest violence. About the same number of protesters took to the streets the last two weekends.

Participants at the Champs-Elysees march called Macron’s national debate a “smoke screen” to distract the French from his pro-business policies. They expressed views veering from the far left to a middle-ground, middle-class malaise. Many want Macron to restore France’s wealth tax and allow the public to propose national referendums on anything from pulling France out of the euro to rewriting the constitution.

“We are forgotten,” said protester Mervyn Ramsamy, a hospital employee from north of Paris lamenting recent closures of maternity wards and other medical services in already struggling areas. “We won’t give up.”

It’s unclear how long the movement can maintain its momentum. Macron scrapped the fuel tax hike that initially sparked the protests and offered widespread tax relief when the protest violence hit a peak in December.

A 52-year-old home care worker who identified herself only as Nicole says the measures aren’t enough, so she’s still protesting. “I have a salary of 1,200 euros. I don’t run out of money by the 15th of the month, I run out of money by the 6th of the month. I can no longer manage to survive. That’s why I’m here, because nothing is moving, nothing is changing,” she said on the Champs-Elysees.

One branch of the movement launched a bid this week for the European Parliament elections in May, but other protest leaders disagree with the idea.

In another challenge for the Yellow Vest movement, rival groups calling themselves the “red scarves” plan demonstrations Sunday to condemn violence unleashed by recent protests.

Police armed with guns firing non-lethal rubber balls — which have seriously injured several — are equipped with body cameras Saturday for the first time, in an experiment to record use of the weapons, providing context and eventual evidence if needed.

In between the Saturday protests, yellow-vested crowds occupy scattered roundabouts and tollbooths around France, disrupting traffic to express a sense of neglect by the central government. The movement began Nov. 17, named after the fluorescent garments French motorists must carry in case of emergency.

(Source: AP)

Protesters storm Turkish military camp in north Iraq, 10 wounded: Kurdish officials

At least 10 people were wounded when protesters stormed a Turkish military camp near Dohuk in Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish region Saturday, burning two tanks and other vehicles, residents and Kurdish officials said.

The crowd was demonstrating over a recent Turkish air raid that killed four civilians, a Kurdish official in the region of Dohuk said. Turkey’s Defense Ministry wrote on Twitter: “An attack has occurred on one of bases located in northern Iraq as a result of provocation by the PKK terrorist organization. There was partial damage to vehicles and equipment during the attack.”

Without naming the base, the ministry said “necessary precautions are being taken regarding the incident.”

Turkish officials could not be reached for further comment.

Turkey carries out regular air raids near the border against the PKK militant group which has bases in northern Iraq and has fought a decades-long insurgency in Turkey.

A second Kurdish official, who also did not give his name, said Turkish troops at the camp in Shiladze, east of Dohuk, had initially shot at the protesters and then left the camp.

Kurdish security forces are trying to control the situation, he said.

■ Turkey renews flights to Iraqi Kurd city after 16-month ban

Flights between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah resumed Saturday, according to aviation authorities, after a 16-month air blockade imposed by Ankara over an independence referendum.

Kurds in the administratively autonomous northern region overwhelmingly voted for independence in a non-binding referendum in September 2017 that infuriated Baghdad as well as Iraq’s neighbors, Turkey and Iran.

In retaliation, Baghdad and Ankara blocked international flights from the two main Iraqi Kurdish cities of Arbil and Sulaimaniyah.

Almost all those restrictions were lifted last year but Turkey — which fears its own Kurdish minority could be inspired to push for independence — had maintained its blockade on Sulaimaniyah until Saturday.

“Implementing the Turkish government’s decision to lift

the air blockade on international flights from Sulaimaniyah, the first Turkish Airlines flight landed early this morning and returned to Turkey,” said Sulaimaniyah airport chief Taher Abdallah.

He said the blockade cost the airport more than \$5 million in 2018.

Iraqi Airways would resume flights between Sulaimaniyah and Istanbul in the coming days, civil air authorities said.

That brings air traffic to and from the Iraqi Kurdish region back to its status before the 2017 referendum.

At the time, the federal government rejected the poll as “illegal,” imposed economic penalties and seized the disputed Kirkuk oil fields, halting exports.

But ties have improved markedly in recent months.

Authorities announced the resumption of oil exports from Kirkuk in November and last week, parliamentarians passed a 2019 budget guaranteeing Baghdad would pay the salaries of the Kurdish region’s public workers and peshmerga armed forces.

(Source: AFP)



who may fear concessions by the political leadership.

(Source: agencies)

Round of U.S.-Taliban talks ends with progress on draft peace deal: Taliban officials

Taliban negotiators and United States officials meeting in Qatar Saturday finalized clauses to be included in a draft agreement to end the 17-year-old Afghan war, according to Taliban sources.

Details provided by the sources to Reuters include apparent concessions from both sides, with foreign forces to be withdrawn from the country in 18 months from the future signing of the deal.

U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is heading to Kabul to brief President Ashraf Ghani after the end of the six-day talks, the sources and a diplomat said.

It is unclear whether a joint statement will be issued, or whether the provisions have

been fully accepted by the U.S. side. U.S. embassy officials in Kabul were not available to comment.

According to the Taliban sources, the hardline group offered assurances that Afghanistan will not be allowed to be used by Al-Qaeda and Daesh (ISIL) militants to attack the United States and its allies — a key early demand of Washington.

The Taliban says that they will finalize a timeline for a cease-fire in Afghanistan but will only open talks with Afghan representatives once the ceasefire is implemented.

Other clauses include a deal over the exchange and release of prisoners from the warring sides, the removal of an international

travel ban on several Taliban leaders by the United States and the prospect of an interim Afghan government after the cease-fire is struck, the Taliban sources said.

■ Taliban bring released top leader into talks with U.S.

A co-founder of the Taliban who was released from prison in Pakistan in October has been appointed head of the group’s political office in Qatar.

Abdel-Ghani Baradar, a senior Taliban military commander, was arrested in Pakistan in 2010. His release is believed to have been arranged by the United States as part of the negotiations, and his presence could reassure battlefield commanders

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	162478.9
IFX	1962.44

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,788 rials
GBP	55,435 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$61.59/b
WTI	\$53.69/b
OPEC Basket	\$60.22/b
Gold	\$1,303.95 /oz
Silver	\$15.79/oz
Platinum	\$823.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Above \$309m of facilities paid to farmers in 9 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Some 13 trillion rials (about \$309.5 million) of facilities have been paid to the farmers in the first nine months of the present Iranian year 1397 (March 21- December 21, 2018), the managing director of Iran Agriculture Investment Company announced in a news conference on Saturday. As Abdolkarim Razavi Ardakani said, from its establishment in 2005, his company has established 127 funds with the capital of 16 trillion rials (about \$380.9 million) to protect and improve agricultural activities in the country.



Tehran to host Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting in mid-June

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 25th meeting of Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee is to be held in Tehran on June 18, 2019, IRIB reported on Saturday. As reported, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian and his Russian counterpart Alexander Novak discussed some related issues to the upcoming even during a phone conversation on Friday. The two ministers, who lead the joint economic committee, underlined the significance of electrification of Garmsar–Incheboron railway as well as inauguration of four thermal power plants in Iranian southern city of Bandar Abbas, using accorded Russian loan. Calling for removal of present barriers on the way of expanding economic ties, the two senior officials also underlined the importance of continuing direct telephone contacts.

Iran not to merely rely on SPV to expand trade: TPO head

1 → According to the official, the country’s non-oil exports for the mentioned time span stood at \$33.4 billion, registering a 5.5 percent rise compared to the same period last year. He underlined petrochemical products and exports from the industry sector as well as agricultural products as the main drivers of the increase in the non-oil exports. **■ Surge in exports to neighboring countries** Elsewhere in his remarks, Modoudi pointed to the significant increase in the country’s non-oil exports to the neighboring countries, saying, “Exports to the 13 neighboring countries has increase by 27 percent in the first nine months of the current year.” “Except for Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, the increase in exports to the neighboring countries have been quite significant, with Iraq and Oman having the highest growth rates,” Modoudi said. “Followed by Turkey and China, Iran is currently the biggest exporter to Iraq”, he added. According to the official the neighboring countries account for over 57 percent of Iran’s total non-oil exports with Iraq, the UAE, Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan holding about 90- percent share of the total exports. Mentioning the great potential of Iran’s neighboring markets, the TPO head said, “Iran’s neighbors have a \$1 trillion import capacity annually, and considering the U.S. sanctions we should focus more on our neighboring markets.”

China confident of keeping 2019 growth within ‘appropriate range’

China is fully confident that it is capable of keeping its economic growth rate within an appropriate range in 2019 in spite of challenges, state news agency Xinhua reported Chinese Premier Li Keqiang as saying on Friday. “China’s economy has enough resilience, potential and ample room for growth, especially with a huge domestic market and rich human resources of nearly 1.4 billion people,” Li said at a discussion with some foreign experts working in China. “Therefore, we are fully confident and capable of keeping economic growth rate within an appropriate range in spite of multiple risks and challenges in 2019,” he said. The world’s second largest economy grew 6.6 percent in 2018, the slowest annual pace since 1990, amid pressure from faltering domestic demand and bruising U.S. tariffs.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran ranked world’s 10th largest steel producer in 2018: WSO

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran became the world’s tenth largest steel producer in 2018, Tasnim news agency reported referring to the data released by the World Steel Organization (WSO) on Saturday. Iran which stood at the 13th place in 2017 could lag behind three major steel producers in the world, namely Italy, Taiwan, and Ukraine to stand at the 10th place in 2018, despite the re-imposition of sanctions by the U.S. According to the WSO’s report, Iran produced 25 million tons of crude steel in 2018 which indicates 17.7 percent growth from 21.2 million tons in 2017. The world’s crude steel output stood at 1.808 billion tons in 2018 with 4.6 percent

rise from the figure of its preceding year. Producing 928 million tons and 106 million tons of the product, China and India stood at the first and second places in 2018, while Japan stood at the third place producing 104 million tons of crude steel. The U.S., South Korea, Russia, Germany, Turkey, and Brazil took the fourth to ninth places, respectively. **■ Taking 2nd place in sponge iron production** The WSO’s report also said that producing 25.54 million tons of sponge iron in 2018, Iran was ranked the second major producer of the product in that year. The country’s sponge iron output rose 31.6 percent year on year.



As reported, Iran produced over 30 percent of the world’s sponge iron in the past year. Sponge iron production in the world reached 84.12 million tons in 2018 which

indicates 11.6 percent growth compared to its previous year. Producing 30.36 million tons of the product, India stood at the first place in the past year.

Capacity of generating electricity from renewables hits 680 MW

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The capacity of generating electricity from renewable resources has reached 680 megawatts (MW) in Iran, the Energy Ministry announced, IRNA reported on Saturday. Power plants based on clean energy resources with the capacity of 445 MW are currently under construction in the country, the report confirmed. So far, renewables have created jobs for 43,680 persons in the country and private sector has made over 101 trillion rials (about \$2.4 billion) of investment in this sector. As previously reported, the capacity of generating electricity from renewable



resources in Iran is planned to reach 1100 MW by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019). Renewables, including hydropower,

account for just six percent of energy generation, versus natural gas’ 90 percent share. Overall, in the next five years, Iran is aiming for a 5,000 MW increase in renewable capacity to meet growing domestic demand and expand its presence in the regional electricity market. According to Iran’s Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (known as SATBA) the number of small scale solar power plants across the country which are used by households or small industries is being increased noticeably as Iranian households and small industries have embraced the new

technology with open arms and investors also seem eager for more contribution in this area. Meanwhile, an official from Iran Renewable Energy Association announced last month that some negotiations for exporting renewable electricity to six Asian countries have been conducted. “The proper ground for transferring and exporting renewable electricity to Iraq, Oman, Afghanistan, Turkey, Armenia, and Tajikistan has been prepared and several meetings have been held in this regard to discuss the issue with the named countries,” Mohammad Javad Mousavi said.

Global market liquidity could ‘freeze like the water in Davos,’ UBS’ Ermotti says

Assumptions about global liquidity are wrong and market activity could freeze up quickly, according to the chief executive of Swiss bank UBS. Last month, the Dow and S&P 500 equity indices recorded their worst December performance since 1931 - the era of the Great depression. It was also the biggest of any monthly loss since February 2009. Stocks got dumped amid concerns of an economic slowdown and fears the Federal Reserve might be tightening conditions to a point where liquidity in markets could dry

up. For investors, liquidity is the ability to sell an asset reasonably quickly and at a price close to where it last traded. Speaking Thursday, on a CNBC-moderated panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, UBS chief executive officer, Sergio Ermotti, said the December sell off was due to a convergence of macro and political fears as well as a growing understanding that the financial system may not let investors move capital as easily as before. “The implied assumption that we hear about liquidity being there, being able to step in and function the levelling

out tensions, is the wrong assumption,” he said before adding “liquidity can freeze very easily, like the water in Davos.” Ermotti said that among its US investor base at the end of the fourth quarter in 2018, there was an historic high of 24 percent cash asset allocation as investors pulled back from the market. “This is not liquidity that is there for reinvestment. This is there because people fear that things will go wrong,” he warned.

(Source: CNBC)

U.S. government shutdown gives banks rare public relations opportunity

The U.S. government shutdown has handed banks a rare opportunity to tout their nicer side as they prepare for rough treatment under a Democrat-controlled House of Representatives. Sparked by a standoff between Democrats and Republicans over President Donald Trump’s demand for a wall on the Mexico border, the partial shutdown is the longest ever, entering its 35th day on Friday. The president announced on Friday he would back a bill to reopen the government for three weeks as a temporary reprieve, but the financial repercussions from the shutdown could last weeks. With around 800,000 federal workers missing a second paycheck on Friday, lenders including Wells Fargo and Bank of America as well as their Washington lobby groups, have been quick to trumpet their efforts to waive fees, delay debt repayments and give a helping hand to federal workers. “It is a big opportunity,” said Brian Hart, founder of Flackable, a Philadelphia-based public relations and marketing agency for financial services companies. “But you need to be delicate and sensitive about how to approach it.” Still tainted by the 2007-09 financial crisis, the industry has been searching for ways to repair its image in Washington, where bank bashing is a competitive sport among liberal Democrats. That hostility is set to intensify with progressive firebrand Maxine Waters taking over as chair of the House Financial Services Committee and Wall Street critic Senator Elizabeth Warren exploring a bid for the 2020 presidential race. Warren and Waters have urged lenders to go easy on cash-strapped federal workers, but on this occasion the industry – spying a rare public relations opportunity – has been one step ahead of their Capitol Hill critics. Earlier this month, Bank of America launched a program to help affected customers and pledged \$10,000 to an emergency fund to provide assistance to furloughed workers. Wells Fargo, which is struggling to scrub its image following a series of scandals, has given \$250,000 in charitable assistance and so far waived around \$3 million in fees, according to Chief Executive Officer Tim Sloan, who condemned the government shutdown as “completely embarrassing” in comments to “CBS This Morning” on Friday. Not to be outdone, JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon on Friday said in a memo that the bank was donating \$1 million to charities providing assistance to federal workers. In Washington, industry groups such as the American Bankers Association (ABA) have been quick to create websites showcasing such efforts, which they have also enthusiastically flagged to lawmakers.

(Source: Reuters)

Second Announcement



IN THE NAME OF GOD

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 97-11/200

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Two-Stage Tender:
The Tender of Purchasing Equipment for Infrastructure, Storage, and Processing Communication of IRIB’s Data (Tehran IRIB Center) according to the tender documents

Deadline of Receiving Documents:
As of publishing second announcement of advertisement latest by the business hour dated on **Wednesday January 30, 2019.**

Place of Receiving Documents:
Secretariat of Tenders’ Commission, Technical Purchasing (KALA) Dept., Media Technology and Development Deputy Office, Bldg. No. 2, IRIB, Jam-e Jam St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participating in Tender:
The amount of **USD 87,423** which should be in the form of extendable bank guarantee

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted within one main envelope marked with tender number no later than **15 p.m.** on **Saturday March 02, 2019** and submitted to the Secretariat of Commission of Tenders.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes
The date of opening envelopes A&B is at **8:30 a.m.** on **Monday March 04, 2019** in the office of Vice President of IRIB Planning and Financial Resources and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.
It should be noted that bidders should hold license from the authorized bodies.
For more information, please contact the following phone numbers: 0098-21-22166313
It is obvious that cost of publishing two advertisements shall be borne by the winner of tender.

Public Relations Dept. of IRIB

Global gasoline margins plunge due to overproduction, tepid demand

Refining profits for gasoline are crashing around the world as consumption stalls amid a huge wave of new supplies, resulting in record inventories in Asia, America and Europe.

In the U.S. market, gasoline margins sank to \$5.70 per barrel on Thursday, the lowest seasonally since 2009, weighed down by weak demand for the fuel and excess supply.

The low margins, known in the industry as cracks, come as U.S. gasoline stockpiles rose to 259.6 million barrels last week, the highest level on record, according to figures released on Thursday by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The EIA began collecting such data in 1990.

U.S. investment bank Jefferies said in a note on Friday that the "gasoline glut keeps getting worse".

Light distillate stocks, including gasoline and naphtha, in key hubs (the United States, Singapore, Japan and Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp) are at their highest since at least 2005, and up by 21 million barrels year-on-year, consultancy FGE said.

Refiners in the United States have overproduced gasoline in recent months as they ran full-out to capture strong margins for other distillate fuels such as diesel, market participants said.

"Overproduction of gasoline ensued and now you're in a situation where in various parts of the world gasoline cracks are basically zero or negative," said Zachary Rogers, an oil markets analyst at consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

The overproduction of gasoline is also



down to the surge in American shale oil output, which has helped drive U.S. crude production to an unprecedented 11.9 million barrels per day.

U.S. shale oil tends to be light and sweet in its quality, resulting in a high yield of distillate fuels such as gasoline.

"The global oil slate has shifted from majority sour to lighter, sweeter barrels. U.S. shale has been the main driver of this," said Matt Stanley, a fuel broker with Starfuels in Dubai.

■ Slowdown

Adding to the overproduction by refiners

are concerns that fuel consumption will decline because of a global economic slowdown.

In New York Harbor, unusual amounts of tankers are being forced to idle in the region's anchorages until onshore storage opens up, according to three trading sources.

There were at least 12 fuel tankers idling around ports in New York Harbor on Thursday, Refinitiv ship-tracking data showed.

In Europe, gasoline margins dropped to seven-year lows of minus \$3.80 a barrel this week.

"It's hard to make the case for taking a bullish position on the paper market now,"

a European gasoline trader said.

Traders expect the glut in Europe to ease slightly as refinery maintenance season begins. Work starting on Friday at Europe's largest refinery, Royal Dutch Shell's Pernis, will involve shutting the plant's gasoline unit, among others.

But the restart next month of a huge gasoline-making unit at ADNOC's Ruwais refinery in the United Arab Emirates, idled due to a fire for more than two years, will add to the supply length in the market.

In Asia, gasoline margins in the Singapore trading hub are also negative, hitting minus \$2.12 per barrel on Thursday, the lowest level since 2011.

Singapore's onshore light distillates stocks, which comprise mostly gasoline and blending components, this month hit record highs of around 16 million barrels, data from Enterprise Singapore showed.

Beyond a slowdown in demand, Asia's gasoline glut is a result of surging exports from China, where refineries are producing more fuel than the country can absorb.

Gasoline markets could get some relief in the next few months as refiners perform their spring turnaround, reducing the amount of fuel produced, with some traders expecting slightly longer-than-needed outages as refiners pare stocks.

"I wouldn't be surprised if some maintenance outages last a little bit longer than usual so stocks can be used down a bit," a fuel trader in Singapore said.

(Source: Reuters)

France to double renewables capacity under 10-year energy plan



France plans to double its renewable energy capacity with a system of regular tenders under a draft 10-year energy strategy plan published on Friday.

The so-called PPE plan, which lays out capacity targets for various energy sectors over the 2019-2023 and 2024-28 periods, also confirmed that four to six nuclear reactors - including two in Fessenheim - will be closed by 2028, as announced late last year.

France aims to boost electrical renewable energy capacity - including hydropower - from 48.6 gigawatt (GW) end 2017 to 74 GW in 2023 and 113 GW in 2028, mainly by boosting wind and solar.

Through regular tenders, onshore wind installed capacity will be more than doubled from 13.5 GW at the end of 2017 to about 25 GW in 2023 and about 35 GW in 2028. Offshore wind capacity will rise from zero

today to 2.4 GW in 2023 and about 5 GW in 2028, while solar capacity is set to grow from 7.7 GW at the end of 2017 to 21 GW in 2023 and about 40 GW in 2028.

Hydro capacity will increase marginally from 25.3 GW end 2017 to about 26.6 in 2028.

In fixed-foundation offshore wind, the government plans tenders for 500 megawatt (MW) this year at a price of less than 70 euros per megawatt hour, 1,000 MW in 2020 at 65 MWh and 1,000 to 1,500 MW at 60 MWh in 2023-24.

It also wants to kick off floating offshore wind with a first tender for 250 MW at 120 euros per MWh in 2021, followed by 250 MW in 2022 and 250 to 500 MW in 2024. From 2025 onwards, it plans one 500 MW project per year, either fixed or floating.

(Source: CNBC)

ExxonMobil signs preliminary Wilhelmshaven LNG deal: Uniper



German utility Uniper on Friday said ExxonMobil had signed a preliminary deal to take a substantial share of the regasification capacity at a liquefied natural gas (LNG) floating terminal planned for Wilhelmshaven.

"The heads of agreement (a non-binding draft) is an important step towards the realization of the Wilhelmshaven floating storage and regasification (FSRU) project," said Keith Martin, Uniper's chief commercial officer.

LNG is seen helping the German government diversify away from pipeline gas arriving from Russia, Norway and the Netherlands.

The Wilhelmshaven FSRU is expected to have a send-out capacity of 10 billion cubic meters per year and will be Germany's first LNG terminal. It is expected to

begin operating in the second half of 2022.

Uniper and ExxonMobil will continue their discussions over the coming months to seek binding agreements, Uniper said.

In December, Uniper said it had entered into agreements with Japanese shipping group Mitsui OSK Lines to own, operate and fund the FSRU.

Uniper has always stressed its role will be a facilitator, handling the marketing of the volumes, developing the FSRU into a multi-user facility and finding more buyers keen on booking capacity.

Longer term, it could use the capacity partly to optimize sales of LNG volumes it will be drawing from Freeport in the United States from second half of this year, where it has separately started global marketing efforts.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia remains China's top crude oil supplier for third year in a row

Russia remained China's top crude oil supplier in 2018 by boosting shipments 20 percent year on year to 1.44 million bpd, while the US ended the year with a robust 60 percent growth in shipments to Asia's biggest oil consumer, despite trade tensions squeezing volumes towards the later part of the year.

Among the top 10 suppliers, while Brazil and Congo posted the sharpest year-on-year rises of 37 percent and 41.6 percent, respectively, Iran and Venezuela were the only two countries that posted negative growth, with falls of 6 percent and 23.6 percent, respectively, latest data released by China's General Administration of Customs showed.

Trade sources said that volumes from Iran would remain subdued in 2019 amid concerns on whether Washington would extend the waiver on purchases from Iran. In addition, Chinese importers are keeping a close watch on production prospects in Venezuela.

Russia boosted its market share to 15.5 percent in 2018, from 14.2 percent in 2017. It was the third continuous year for Russia to take the top spot since 2016, with supplies growing 19.6 percent year on year in 2018, 13.9 percent in 2017 and 23.7 percent in 2016, GAC data showed.

Imports from Russia are expected to remain robust in 2019, with term barrels flowing to PetroChina's refineries. The second Russia-China pipeline also started commercial operations in 2018. Meanwhile, spot buying from independent refineries are also showing a healthy trend.

The non-OPEC producer adopts a different pricing basis for the sale of various crude grades to the giant Asian consumer, keeping itself immune to international benchmark price volatility.

Urals mostly loads from the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk and is priced against Platts Dated Brent, while ESPO Blend, typically exported from the port of Kozmino in Far East Russia, is priced against Platts front-month Dubai crude assessments.

■ Iran shipments

China's crude imports from Iran rose to 506,000 bpd,



or 2.14 million mt, in December, up 29.9 percent on a barrels-per-day basis from November when U.S. re-imposed sanctions on the producer.

It was the second straight month of recovery in flows from multi-year-lows of 248,274 bpd in October. The arrivals brought Iran to the seventh position in 2018, with shipments of 29.27 million mt, or 587,881 bpd, for the entire year.

There has been a clear trend since October that an increasing proportion of shipments from Iran were flowing into storage tanks instead of going to refineries. But the trend is likely to end in January because of an anticipated slowdown in Iranian crude inflows.

About a three-fifth of the Iranian arrivals in December flowed into stocks, market sources said. Some of them went into Strategic Petroleum Reserve tanks in northeastern Jinzhou and southern Huizhou, they said.

Bonded storage in northeastern Dalian, where the Iranian state-owned NIOC leased storage tanks are located, also witnessed inflows in December, indicating that efforts were made to stockpile Iranian crude.

However, most of the Iranian barrels arriving in January are likely to go to Maoming, Ningbo, Qingdao and Tianjin,

where Sinopec's refineries are located, S&P Global Platts' trade tracker cFlow showed on Friday. Iranian shipments are likely to fall to as low as 6.6 million barrels, or 212,677 bpd, in January because of a slow down in stockpiling activity.

■ U.S., Saudi barrels

The U.S. ended the year with zero shipments in December to China -- the second month after October -- due to the ongoing China-U.S. trade tension. But despite drying up of supplies during the two months, total U.S. supplies to China in 2018 posted a sharp increase of 60.4 percent year on year to 247,624 bpd.

January is also unlikely to see any arrivals from the U.S. The first cargo of U.S. crude in 2019 is expected to be delivered in February, cFlow data showed.

Several refining sources from Sinopec, China's biggest refiner, said that they had not received any offers for U.S. crude yet.

"We expect Uniper would offer some U.S. crudes in February for May delivery," a Guangdong-based refining source with Sinopec said.

Platts' shipping fixtures showed that at least four vessels were fixed to China for loading in February from the U.S.

Saudi Arabia, which was the top supplier to China until 2015, lifted its sales by 8.7 percent year on year to 1.14 million bpd in 2018, which helped the country's market share to remain largely steady at 12.3 percent.

The leading OPEC producer sent 1.65 million bpd of crude to China in December, up 47.9 percent year on year, GAC data showed.

Market sources attributed the growth to Chinese buyers' attempt to fulfill their 2018 term contracts with Saudi Aramco. Aramco aims to supply 1.67 million bpd of crude oil to China in 2019 under term contracts with eight Chinese customers. The company said it expects those volumes to help the kingdom return as China's top crude supplier.

(Source: Platts)

Europe tops buyers for U.S. LNG with winter cargo influx

Energy companies are flooding Europe with U.S. natural gas, establishing a foothold in a market dominated by Russia and seen as a key battleground in Washington's efforts to curb Moscow's energy influence.

Europe is now the top buyer of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) after a near fivefold spike in U.S. LNG sales to the continent this winter, overtaking South Korea and Mexico, a Reuters analysis showed. Profit rather than politics is driving the increase, despite pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump for Europe to wean itself off Russian gas.

Energy companies have switched sales to Europe after prices in Asia fell sharply on lower-than-expected demand. Prices in Europe, traditionally seen as a market of last resort, have held firm.

"It's all about commercial reasons," said James Henderson, director of the natural gas research program at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. "U.S. LNG will go where there is the biggest margin."

"There is no political motive here."



U.S. LNG shipments to Europe totaled 3.23 million tons, or 48 cargoes, in October to January, compared to 0.7 million tons, or nine cargoes, a year ago. The United States is currently second only to Qatar, the world's largest LNG producer, as an LNG supplier to Europe, Refinitiv Eikon data showed. The figures have not previously been reported.

LNG is natural gas frozen to a liquid state so that it can be transported in tankers. The industry is burgeoning, buoyed by demand from China, where the government is pushing to cut carbon emissions, partly by swapping from coal-generated power to gas.

Traders had expected Chinese demand to soar again this winter but Beijing had bought cargoes well in advance and so far, a mild winter has kept stocks high. A 10 percent tariff imposed by Beijing on U.S. LNG imports during a trade war also hurt.

Awash in supply, sellers of U.S. LNG have pivoted to Europe, where pipeline gas from Russia dominates.

Gazprom pumps 190 billion cubic meters, or the equivalent of 145 million tons a year (mtpa) to Europe, four times the current capacity of all U.S. LNG export terminals. A new pipeline, Nord Stream 2, will allow Russia to export even more gas to Germany, the largest consumer, although Washington is trying to halt work on the project.

LNG offers countries an alternative to piped gas and forces Russia to compete on price.

In response, Russia has joined the European LNG market through the Arctic Yamal production plant led by Novatek and is poised to become the world's fifth largest LNG producer in 2019, according to consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

Since December, however, U.S. LNG has outgunned supply from Yamal into Europe, the Refinitiv Eikon data showed.

■ It's the price

Technological developments have enabled the United States to unlock cheap, abundant shale gas supplies and, after starting from scratch in 2016, it is expected to have enough capacity by the end of this year to make it the world's third largest LNG exporter behind Australia and Qatar.

Cheniere Energy, the top operator of U.S. terminals, added a fifth production line, or train, to its Louisiana Sabine Pass terminal in November, increasing capacity to 26 mtpa and commissioned a new 5.0 mtpa facility in Texas.

Dominion Energy's 5.8 mtpa Cove Point plant opened last March. Up to 14 new facilities are expected to start up this year at three new terminals and one existing one.

A flourishing export business helps Washington's goal of reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

Last year, Trump used trade negotiations to pressure the European Union to buy more U.S. gas. But with the exception of Poland and Lithuania, which have linked their purchases of LNG explicitly to national security, market forces are the biggest factor in sales.

In December and January, the Dutch gas price, which is used as a benchmark for LNG delivered to continental Europe, had been at the highest level since the winter of 2013-2014 at around \$7.7 per million British thermal units (MmBtu), compared to previous winter seasons. Rising coal and carbon prices as well as expectations of cold weather have driven them up.

In contrast, Asian spot prices for LNG dropped in December and January to their lowest level since the winter of 2015-16, averaging \$8.8 MmBtu as the anticipated surge in demand failed to materialize. That cut the premium on sales to Asia over Europe to just above \$1 MmBtu from close to \$4 MmBtu last winter, insufficient to cover shipping costs.

Europe may not remain the top market for U.S. LNG, particularly if gas consumption in Asia spikes over the summer due to demand for air conditioning.

In addition to Russia, Europe is also well supplied with gas from Norway, the Netherlands and Algeria and its use of coal, nuclear and wind to generate power means its demand for gas, used in some types of power stations, can be extremely flexible.

Still, many European utilities have long-term agreements with U.S. producers Cheniere, Dominion and Sempra Energy whose Cameron LNG plant is due to start this year.

Britain's Centrica will start taking LNG from Cheniere's Sabine Pass in September and the company confirmed to Reuters that it had been buying U.S. cargoes this winter.

Spain's Naturgy, Iberdrola and Endesa also have contracts with Cheniere starting this year.

"Much of the American LNG is looking for alternative markets aside from the Asian continent and, thanks to lower transport costs, Europe is the market that has benefited most," said Jose Simón, senior vice president of Global Gas at Iberdrola.

A spokesman for Endesa said U.S. gas had become more competitive. Naturgy, an early buyer from Cheniere, confirmed it has been selling U.S. cargoes into Europe this winter.

France's Total and EDF and Italy's ENI have U.S. contracts too. They did not respond to requests for comment.

And if Asian demand fails to materialize this summer, Europe is always an option.

"Because of the amount of available capacity into Europe and the fact that it's a price-sensitive, demand-elastic kind of market, if you can't find a better market ... into China, Korea, the assumption is you can always push it into Europe," said Jason Freer, Global Head of Business Intelligence at Poten & Partners, an energy and shipping consultancy.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi Arabia’s turbulent years: For how much longer can King Salman shield MBS?

By Madawi al-Rasheed

The euphoria that accompanied King Salman’s succession to the throne in January 2015 has been difficult to sustain over the ensuing four years.



As his son was promoted to the highest positions in the kingdom, becoming the new face of the country while his father almost disappeared from public view, the realm has looked increasingly difficult to defend.

Several crises have left their shadow in recent years; only a miracle could stem the tide of criticism rolling over the most controversial years in the kingdom’s history. Domestically, regionally and internationally, Saudi Arabia is at an impasse.

■ Zero tolerance

At home, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) mismanaged family affairs and shook the foundation of al-Saud rule when he unleashed his newfound power to exclude and humiliate several senior princes, detaining them with others inside the luxurious Ritz-Carlton hotel. They were released only after vast ransom money was paid, and now survive in the margins, unable to regain respect and recognition.

The fiercest blow, however, was reserved for dissidents, with MBS showing zero tolerance for peaceful dissent. He has sent hundreds of people of all political persuasions to notorious prisons in Riyadh and Jeddah, targeting professionals, Islamists and female activists. Some have fled the country in fear, taking refuge in Western countries such as Canada or the UK.

Saudi youth have been distracted by a series of entertainment programs, masking the brewing crisis among the unemployed, especially those who have returned with higher education, only to find no jobs (and without jobs, live entertainment becomes costly and out of reach).

The private sector is still struggling to expand, as wealth leaves the country for more reliable safe havens. The fact that Saudi officials had to call on the elite to keep their money in the kingdom revealed the magnitude of this crisis.

Many projects have been postponed, perhaps forever. The most notorious was the privatization of five percent of the national oil company Aramco. This plan was always far-fetched, and it took just a couple of years for the difficulties and obstacles to become clear. Now, the privatization is on hold, and no one knows whether it will ever happen.

■ The Khashoggi factor

Socially and economically, many promises have been made over these past four years, with a mixed outcome. The Saudi economy is still dependent on oil, but energy prices remain flat.

This will impact the ability of MBS to honor his many pledges, from the knowledge economy to the diversification program, as all of them need cash in the absence of serious foreign investment.

All this became even more difficult after the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the consulate in Istanbul on 2 October. Many foreign investors cancelled their participation in the glamorous “Davos in the Desert” conference. Only one option remained available: liquidating the sovereign fund and continuing to issue government bonds. Saudi Arabia has become a country that can only function by borrowing money from international markets. Regional policies are even more complicated. The war in Yemen is entering its fifth year, with no real victories. Late last year MBS succumbed to pressure to negotiate a peaceful solution and accommodate his enemies, the Houthis, but the end is not yet in sight. In the meantime, thousands of Yemenis have died from Saudi air strikes.

The Saudi-Qatar conflict is also at a stalemate. The Saudi-led blockade amounted to a declaration of war, but fortunately did not erupt into a fully fledged one. Reconciliation is not imminent, and the media war continues to rage.

Instead of toppling the regime in Doha, the Saudi-led sanctions have strengthened the small peninsula and its relations with Turkey and Iran - the opposite of what Saudi Arabia hoped to achieve. Qatar has also reigned supreme in the media battle.

■ Deteriorating relations

Regionally, Riyadh is now depicted as the lead Arab regime desperate to normalize relations with Israel. This may prove to be a fatal blow, whose ramifications are yet to surface.

MBS may ultimately learn that without Palestinians agreeing to a peace plan, his efforts will merely allow Israel to penetrate the Saudi market, while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to threaten peace throughout the region, from Amman to Beirut to Cairo.

At the same time, Saudi relations with old allies have been deteriorating, with conflicts arising between Riyadh and Canada, Germany and Sweden. The world watched as the Canadian ambassador was expelled from Riyadh simply because of a tweet by Canada’s foreign ministry critical of the detention of female activists. Canada has become the desired destination for Saudi asylum seekers.

While MBS remains on good terms with U.S. President Donald Trump, he does not seem to believe in diversifying his diplomatic relations. Both Trump and MBS are erratic and impulsive characters, whose relationship may not survive the eclectic nature of both personalities.

It may be difficult for King Salman or his son to reverse the tide of discontent that has swept Saudi Arabia with the latter’s domination over all aspects of government. The real test will come when MBS loses the cover his father has provided over the last four years. When he is alone in the palace, new opportunities may arise to rid Saudi Arabia of this menace.

(Source: Middle East Eye)

Qatar challenges Saudi influence in Lebanon

By Giorgio Cafiero

For years, Lebanon’s economic credentials have been sinking. The country with the world’s third highest public debt to gross domestic product ratio has paid an economic price for the decline in tourism from Persian Gulf Cooperation Council states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the backdrop of major financial burdens imposed by the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis.

Within this context, on Jan. 21 Qatar announced that it will bolster the ailing Lebanese economy by investing up to \$500 million in Lebanese government bonds. This cash infusion will provide the bond market with assurances following Lebanese officials’ hints at a debt restructuring later this month that spooked markets as Lebanese politicians rushed to convince investors that their money was secure in the country. Whether Qatar plans to purchase foreign-currency bonds or local-currency debt remains unclear.

■ “Brotherly relations”

Qatar’s decision came one day after the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit held in Lebanon, during which Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Mauritania’s President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz were the only Arab heads of state in attendance. As no other PGCC monarch attended, the Qatari emir’s decision to do so and to meet with Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun signaled Doha’s determination to stand by the Mediterranean country in a time of major economic and political challenges.

In the words of Qatar’s Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, his country made the decision to bolster Lebanon’s economy based on the “profound fraternal ties between the two brotherly countries.” He told Qatar News Agency, “We wish stability and prosperity for the Lebanese Republic and the Lebanese people, and that the Lebanese economy will recover. ... The region needs a strong and prosperous Lebanon.”

Doha’s diplomatic and economic offensive



Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani meets with Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun as he arrives to attend the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Beirut, Lebanon, Jan. 20, 2019.

There has been a vacuum created by a decline of Saudi influence in Lebanon that Qatar now seeks to fill.

in Lebanon aims to increase Doha’s influence in the country’s fractious political arena at a time when some of Riyadh’s recent foreign policy decisions vis-à-vis Beirut have hurt the Saudis’ standing in Lebanon. In 2016, Saudi Arabia suspended a \$3 billion aid package to Lebanon due to the kingdom’s grievances over Hezbollah’s role in the Lebanese political landscape. The following year, Riyadh lost some goodwill in the country following the Prime Minister Saad Hariri saga of November 2017.

■ A void for Qatar to fill

Consequently, there has been a vacuum created by a decline of Saudi influence in Lebanon that Qatar now seeks to fill. The leadership in Doha sees the time as opportune for presenting Qatar as a wealthy and benevolent Persian Gulf state that helps Lebanon

financially without attaching any strings to further a divisive sectarian agenda in the religiously diverse Arab country.

Qatari help for Lebanon must be understood within the historical context of Doha stepping in to assist Lebanon when previous nightmares left the country in ruins and political crisis. For example, after Israel destroyed much of the Lebanese infrastructure during the war of 2006, Doha (as well as Riyadh) financed major development projects to rebuild the war-torn country. In 2008, Qatari diplomats hosted Lebanon’s conflicting groups for talks with the objective of helping the Lebanese factions overcome a political stalemate. Due to the talks in Qatar, presidential elections went forward.

Building on goodwill that Qatar previously obtained in Lebanon and to capitalize

Trump’s shutdown was a cruel joke

It revealed the folly of the president’s approach to politics

What a debacle President Trump’s shutdown proved to be — what a toddler’s pageant of foot-stomping and incompetence, of vainglory and self-defeat. Trump tormented public servants and citizens and wounded the country, and, in conceding on Friday after holding the government hostage for 35 days, could claim to have achieved nothing.

He succeeded only in exposing the emptiness of his bully’s bravado, of his “I alone can fix it” posturing. Once upon a time, Trump promised that Mexico would pay for a wall. He instead made all Americans pay for a partisan fantasy.

Maybe you want a wall. Can you possibly argue that Trump’s shutdown strategy advanced your cause? He made the right decision on Friday — to sign a bill reopening the government through Feb. 15, giving lawmakers time to reach a permanent deal. But he could have had this same outcome without a shutdown. He ultimately agreed to the sort of bill that Democrats have been pitching for weeks — one that contains not one dollar in wall funding.

In his announcement, the president struggled to obscure his failure with yet another rambling infomercial about the glory of walls. “No matter where you go, they work,” he said (raising the question of how you can get there if, in fact, there’s a wall in your way). He had nothing of substance to offer beyond the usual specious claims that only his wall can end the border flood of drugs, crime and migrant women who have been duct-taped and stuffed into vans by human traffickers. To repeat: Fewer border-crossing apprehensions were made in 2017 than at any time since 1971; drugs are overwhelmingly smuggled through established points of entry; and the only crisis at the border is a humanitarian one, of people fleeing violence and seeking asylum — again, mostly at established points of entry — under international law.

There is nothing to celebrate about this sorry shutdown, though it’s perhaps understandable that congressional Democrats were reveling in Trump’s collapse. Members of Trump’s conservative fan base demonstrated that, even if the president continues to insist on alternative facts, they are capable of acknowledging that truth.

Within minutes of the announcement, the bomb-throwing pundit Ann Coulter — among those credited with having scolded Trump into rejecting the temporary funding bill passed by the Senate last month — tweeted her judgment:

“Good news for George Herbert Walker Bush: As of today,



Trump made threatening noises about declaring a national emergency if Congress cannot reach a compromise by the time this agreement expires. Maybe that danger will motivate congressional Republicans to hammer out a deal without him.

he is no longer the biggest wimp ever to serve as President of the United States.”

The president tried to stand tough for Coulter and her ilk. Even as federal workers lined up at food banks, sought unemployment benefits and took backup gigs driving for Uber, he insisted he would not give an inch. He stormed out of meetings with Democratic leaders. He indulged in a public spat with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi over his State of the Union address. He tweeted angrily. On Thursday, he was still vowing, “We will not cave!”

But on Friday he caved. With a growing number of over-worked, stressed-out air traffic controllers calling in sick,

staffing shortages at two airports on the East Coast began to snarl air travel. The spectacle of enraged travelers, canceled flights and imperiled safety turned up the heat on the White House and Congress.

Republican lawmakers were already in a foul mood. On Thursday, the Senate voted on, and failed to pass, two competing plans for reopening the government. Afterward, there were reports of sniping and finger-pointing within the Republican conference.

Along with their concerns about the human cost of the shutdown, Republicans were no doubt antsy about the negative impact the shutdown was having on their president’s public standing. Polls consistently showed that most Americans did not support the shutdown and that most blamed Trump for it. An ABC poll released this week put Trump’s approval rating at 37 percent and showed him to have the lowest two-year average approval of any president in the past seven decades. Perhaps he noticed that a poll released on Wednesday found that 59 percent of Americans thought he cared little about their problems. On top of all that, the Russia investigation hit the headlines again, when, in a pre-dawn raid on Friday, FBI agents — working without pay — arrested Roger Stone, a longtime adviser to Trump. Stone has been indicted on seven counts related to Russia’s meddling in the 2016 election, including witness tampering, obstruction and making false statements. It was, in short, shaping up to be a very bad day for the president, who really cannot be blamed for wanting to change the story line.

Of course, the new narrative — that Trump got owned by Pelosi — isn’t likely to sit well with him, either. And who knows what he’ll do next to try to save his ego, and salvage some political capital with the minority of Americans who still seem inclined to support him.

In his Friday remarks, Trump made threatening noises about declaring a national emergency if Congress cannot reach a compromise by the time this agreement expires. Polls suggest that such a move would be wildly unpopular, causing the president and his party even more grief. Maybe that danger will motivate congressional Republicans to hammer out a deal without him. Here’s hoping that this mess leaves Trump with a vital lesson — even if he doesn’t care about a functional government, the rest of America does.

(Source: The NYT)

A name change that changes Europe

Greece agrees that its neighbor can use the name Macedonia, ending a long dispute and adding to the peace growing in the Balkans.

In southeast Europe, a region that triggered major wars in the 20th century, every step that douses fiery nationalism is welcome. On Friday, the Greek Parliament approved a measure to end a 27-year dispute with its northern neighbor over the official name for that country. After the vote, the neighbor commonly known as Macedonia will be called the Republic of North Macedonia. And the northern region of Greece also called Macedonia will retain its ancient

name. If the dispute seems arcane to outsiders, that is not the case for ardent nationalists in each country. Both peoples lay claim to the legacy of Alexander the Great, who came from the border area. Fears of losing their respective cultural identity and of a possible territorial invasion run deep. In agreeing on a mutually acceptable name, each decided to put a higher ideal ahead of stubborn pride. That ideal is a more prosperous and integrated Europe. The Republic of North Macedonia, which voted last year for its new name, is expected to join NATO soon and eventually the European Union. For

years, Greece, which is already a part of both blocs, vetoed membership for its neighbor, adding to tensions in the Balkans.


“Today we write a new page for the Balkans,” Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras posted on social media. “The hatred of nationalism, dispute and conflict will be replaced by friendship, peace and co-operation.”

In 1991, the Balkans exploded in conflict after the collapse of the Soviet empire and the former Yugoslavia. Only with NATO’s intervention and the lure of EU membership has the region begun to end wars, settle borders, and

agree on names. Montenegro is now a NATO member. Bosnia recently held a peaceful election. And talks between Kosovo and Serbia appear hopeful.

If all goes as planned, Tsipras and his Macedonian counterpart, Zoran Zaev, could win the Nobel Peace Prize. Each had a long political struggle to redefine the identity of their nations. Such efforts are what help keep Europe at peace after decades of war. The bonds of affection are becoming greater on the Continent rather than the divisions of nationalism.


(Source: The CSM)



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	Last time for receiving	Last time for receiving (ended on the following seventh day thereof)
	Distribution place	Contracts department– part A – first floor – operational building – koyeemallat - Ahvaz- Iran- 061-34146525
	Submitting method	Submitting one original bank fund receipt in the amount of 990,000 Iranian rails under account number 4001114004020491 in name of "NIDC incomes centralized fund" issued by I.R. of Iran central bank. Submitting formal request for the purpose of receiving tender documents.
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Tender Envelopes Delivery Date	Delivery address	Hall no. 107,1st floor, tender committee, operation building, national Iranian drilling company, airport square, Ahvaz, Iran. Tel : +98-61-34148581 +98-61-34148569

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(Name of department)

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Engineers design device for Iranian traditional medicine

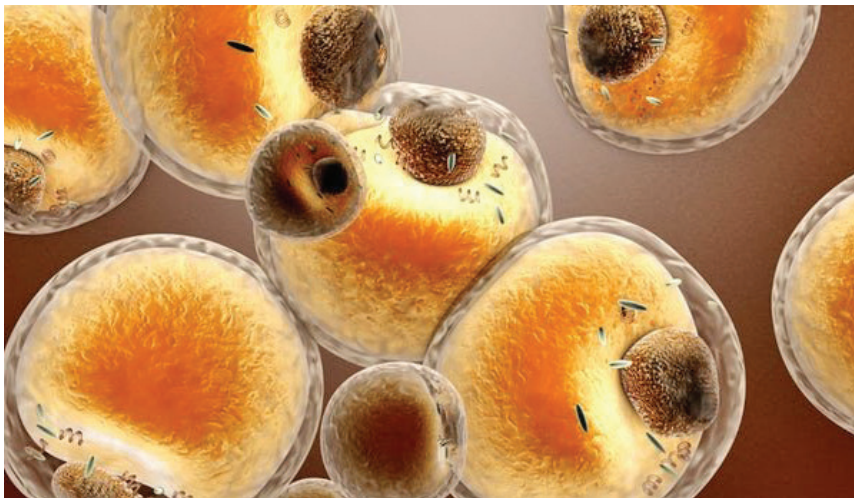
HEALTH TEHRAN — The desk engineering principles were used for the very first time in designing a device for Iranian traditional medicine.

The device helps traditional medicine experts to identify mechanical characterizations of soft tissue in order to diagnose and treat a variety of diseases, ISNA reported on Saturday.

Soft tissue, also known as Adipose tissue, or fat, is an anatomical term for loose connective tissue composed of adipocytes. Its main role is to store energy in the form of fat, although it also cushions and insulates the body.

The new device was designed by a cooperation between Dr. Behzad seyfi and Dr. Nasser Fatourae from Amirkabir University of Technology and Dr. Mehdi Alizadeh from Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

Dr. Behzad Seyfi explained that according to Iranian traditional medicine, the mechanical characteristics of Adipose tissue especially in some body parts where it affects Extracellular



fluid (ECF) can determine the quality of health or the existence of some disease; however, currently, most traditional medicine practitioners use their hands to examine such

characteristics.

“Obviously, examination of such characteristics with hands is not precise enough, but the new device will generate

some accurate, measurable data,” he said.

According to Seyfi, the data provided by the device can also be used in manufacturing of prosthesis and artificial organs.

“The production process include both hardware and software designs. In terms of hardware manufacturing, two samples of the device were produced for running laboratory and clinical tests and a permit was issued for registering them as patents. Furthermore, eight editions of the device were manufactured for running tests on animal samples,” Seyfi further explained.

He added that the required software has also been developed and 50 healthy people were examined for symptoms.

Finally, he said, the device must be tested on more people and at least 20 editions of it must be produced, before it can get into the market.

According to Seyfi, the new method would cut the treatment expenses, it is also a totally non-invasive technique and doesn't have any side effects.

Extensive vaccination against Polio in southeastern Iran

HEALTH TEHRAN — Some 8,000 children under age five will be vaccinated against polio in southeastern Iran, said the head of the communicable diseases department at the Ministry of Health.

The vaccination is on a house to house basis, Mohammad-Mehdi Gooya said, adding the first round of the plan was implemented from January 26 to 29 and the second round

is due from February 23 to 26, IRNA reported on Saturday.

According to Gooya, no incidence of polio has been reported in Iran over the past 18 years; however, due to Iran's geographical location, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan in the east, there are some concerns that the disease may find its way back into the country.

The polio vaccination will then be performed in northern

areas due to the commuting flows across the borders, he noted.

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.

How gum disease could lead to Alzheimer's

In a new study, researchers have found that a bacterium largely responsible for gum disease also contributes to the development of Alzheimer's disease.

A bacterium involved in gum disease boosts Alzheimer's toxicity.

According to data from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, 8.52 percent of adults between 20 and 64 years of age in the United States have periodontitis (gum disease).

Gum disease is a widespread problem that can lead to more negative outcomes,

from tooth loss to an increased risk of cancer.

Now, emerging evidence suggests that one of the bacteria involved in periodontitis could also contribute to the accumulation of toxic proteins in the brain, which scientists have associated with the development of Alzheimer's disease.

These findings have emerged from a new study in mice that researchers from Cortexyme, Inc., a pharmaceutical company that aims to develop new therapeutics for Alzheimer's disease, have conducted.

The results of the research — whose lead

author is Dr. Stephen Dominy, Cortexyme co-founder — appear in the journal Science Advances.

“Infectious agents have been implicated in the development and progression of Alzheimer's disease before, but the evidence of causation hasn't been convincing,” notes Dr. Dominy.

■ **The bacterium that boosts brain toxicity**

The researchers zeroed in on one bacterium — Porphyromonas gingivalis — which is a Gram-negative oral anaerobe that drives the development of gum disease.

P. gingivalis, the researchers note, also

appears in the brains of people who doctors have diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, which left the investigators intrigued.

When looking at a mouse model, the team found that infection with P. gingivalis led to greater production of beta-amyloid in the rodents' brains.

Beta-amyloid is a marker of Alzheimer's disease in the brain; in this neurodegenerative condition, the toxic protein accumulates in excess, forming into plaques that disrupt normal communication between brain cells.

(Source: medical news today)

Health products must have IRC as of February 20

HEALTH TEHRAN — All imported and exported health products must have Iran registration code (IRC) as of February 20, announced the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

IRICA also announced that by the beginning of the Iranian new year (March 21), all entities exporting and importing health products must hand in a custom declaration before the products enter or leaves Iran's customs territory, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

In late December, an official with Iranian Food and Drug Administration announced that food and beverages was the group with the most financial value among health contrabands, while contraband drugs was the group with the most diversity.

According to Shahriar Eslami, health products smuggled into the country in 2018 valued at 320 billion rials (\$76 million), 32 percent of which were drugs and medicine, 58 percent were food and beverages, 8 percent were cosmetic and sanitary items and 0.013 percent were medical equipment.



Body size may influence lifespan in women, not men

Here's a new study finding that's bound to make tall, thin women happy: Their body size and their gender make it more likely they will reach the milestone age of 90 than either men or shorter, heavier women.

If these women exercised an hour a day, the longevity benefits were even greater, the Dutch scientists reported. While exercise helped men live longer, their body size did not.

The increase in life expectancy has started to plateau in some developed countries, said lead researcher Lloyd Brandts, from the department of epidemiology at Maastricht University Medical Centre, in the Netherlands.

One theory that might explain this is the growing number of obese and sedentary people, he said. But the new study unearthed a surprise. “The findings indicate that both body size and physical activity are related to lifespan, but that these associations seem to differ between men and women,” Brandts said.

He cautioned, however, that this type of observational study can't prove body size and physical activity cause people to live longer.

Brandts said that, in women, an increasing chance of reaching 90 was seen with up to 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Chances of reaching old age did not increase further with more exercise.

(Source: WebMD)

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Officials propose closer Iranian, Spanish tourism ties

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran ambassador to Madrid has proposed Iranian travel marketers and tourism entrepreneurs to deepen ties with their Spanish counterparts, IRNA reported on Friday.



Speaking on the sidelines of the 39th FITUR tourism trade fair in Madrid, Hassan Qashqavi suggested to make the best use of Spain's rich experience in tourism and build strong and purposeful link with the Spanish tourism officials and activists. Meanwhile, Ali-Asghar Mounesan, chief of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, used the context of U.S.-led sanctions against Iran to discuss how the country is doing its best to lessen sanctions effects on its tourism industry. Mounesan said that the CHHTO and the Iranian Foreign Ministry have made efforts jointly to facilitate traveling to the Islamic Republic. "Leaving no stamps on passports and issuing e-visas are among the measures taken in that connection," said Mounesan, hoping the measures will serve as incentives for promotion of tourism and generating higher incomes, the report said. Live performances of regional music, craft workshops, public meetings, as well as exhibits of handicrafts, souvenirs and handmade clothing are among programs Iran's pavilion pursues at the 39th FITUR tourism trade fair, which comes to an end on January 27.

Bali plans tourist tax to tackle plastic pollution

Authorities in Bali are preparing to introduce a tourist tax to help tackle pollution and waste management on the island, which the Bali Environment Agency says produces 3,500 tones of rubbish a day. According to the Jakarta Post, a new bylaw has been drafted that includes a \$10 (£7.60) fee for overseas visitors to the Indonesian island. Governor of Bali, Wayan Koster, has said that revenue from the tax would go towards programs that help to preserve the environment and Balinese culture. The new tax is being proposed in light of the island's continuing battle against plastic waste, which pollutes beaches and surrounding waters. The popular tourist destination, which is roughly the same size as the county of Norfolk, saw nearly 5.7 million visitors in 2017 (mainly from China and Australia), and numbers will continue to rise, according to the national tourism ministry. Single-use plastics, including shopping bags, styrofoam and plastic straws were banned in December 2018. The ban was aimed at producers, distributors, suppliers and businesses, who have six months to replace items with alternative materials. Those that do not comply could lose their permits. Similar plans are being drafted for Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. Koster remains optimistic about visitor numbers, despite the tax. "Tourists will understand. They will be happy to pay it as it will be used to strengthen our environment and culture," he said. He also stated that the tax would only apply to international tourists and not domestic visitors. How the levy will be collected is still to be confirmed; it could be added to an airline ticket price or paid on arrival at the airport.

(Source: The Guardian)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Lorentz National Park

Lorentz National Park is located in Indonesia's Papua Province, along the 'Pegunungan Mandala' range, whose Puncak Cartenz is the highest peak in Southeast Asia. The property covers an area of 2.35 million hectares, making it the largest conservation area in Southeast Asia and stretches for over 150 km from Irian Jaya's central cordillera mountains in the north to the Arafura Sea in the south.



Designated as a National Park in 1997 under Decree of the Minister of Forestry the property contains an outstanding range of ecosystems, representative of the high level of biodiversity found across the region. It is one of only three tropical regions in the world that have glaciers and its mosaic of land systems ranges from snow-capped mountain peaks to extensive lowland wetlands and coastal areas. The property also contains fossil sites, a high level of endemism and the richest biodiversity in the region. Thirty-four vegetation types and 29 land systems have been identified within the property along with some 123 recorded mammal species, representing 80% of the total mammalian fauna of Irian Jaya. Mammals recorded include two of the world's three monotremes; the short-beaked echidna (Tachyglossus aculeatus), and the long-beaked echidna (Zaglossus bruijnii) a New Guinea endemic. In addition it is also home to a large number of restricted range (45) and endemic (9) bird species. The property has remarkable, cultural diversity, with seven ethnic groups, maintaining their traditional lifestyles. (Source: UNESCO)

Major exhibit to stage Iran's history, civilization in Spain

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran tourism chief said on Saturday that the country aims to introduce its ancient history and civilization to the people of Spain by throwing a major loan exhibit. "We intend to showcase Iranian history and civilization to the Spanish people by organizing an exhibition entitled 'Iran, Cradle of Civilization'," Mehr quoted Ali-Asghar Mounesan as saying. Mounesan, who also doubles as vice president, made the remarks while attending the 39th FITUR tourism trade fair in Madrid, saying "we held a constructive meeting with the officials of Archaeological Museum of Alicante and also local officials. With the coordination made in this regard, an exhibition of Iran's historical works will be held in this city magnificently."

Organized by the National Museum of Iran, "Iran, Cradle of Civilization" was previously on show at Drents Museum, Assen, the Netherlands, where it was well received by museumgoers from June to November 2018. "Over 400,000 people visited Iran's tourism fair in the Netherlands which was an unprecedented figure," the official noted, adding "We have [also] decided to introduce unique tourism attractions of the country to Spanish people in the best form possible." "Iran, Cradle of Civilization" will be running from March 14 to Sept. 1. It will put on show earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms.



A large banner for "Iran, Cradle of Civilization" adorns the exterior of Drents Museum in Assen, the Netherlands on June 17, 2018.

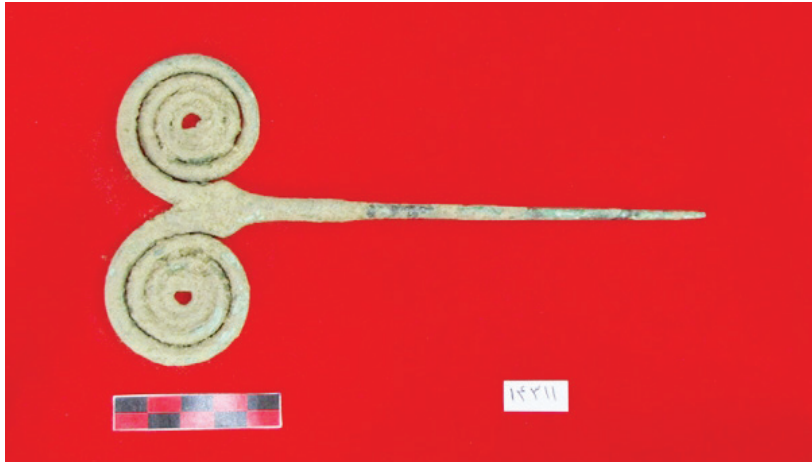
CHHTO, UNWTO ink agreement to foster cooperation

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization has signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations World Tourism Organization to develop ties for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. The agreement was signed in a meeting between CHHTO Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan and UNWTO Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili on the sidelines of the 39th FITUR tourism trade fair in Madrid, ISNA reported on Friday. Both sides agreed to step up ties to develop Iran's eco-tourism and rural tourism. The agreement also aims to create a "positive" image of Iran in the world market as a safe tourism destination. Accessible Tourism is another pillar of the memorandum,



based on which, both sides agreed to negotiate a pilot plan to encourage tourism. Last November, Pololikashvili paid a visit to Iran. He made a keynote speech at the 40th UNWTO Affiliate Members Plenary Session held in the city of Hamedan. Lots of visitors to Iran believe that Western media often portray Iran negatively, saying there is a widespread misunderstanding about the true nature and safety of the country, which is tainted by the reputation of some of its more politically unstable neighbors. The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, puts Iran among countries with "insignificant risk", a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are placed in.

50 ancient objects restored in Mazandaran



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A select of 50 historical objects have recently been restored by teams of cultural heritage experts and restorers in Iran's Mazandaran province, CHTN reported. "The objects are composed of magnificent bronze objects dating from Sassanid era (224 to 651), which were damaged over time," Seifollah Farzaneh, the provincial tourism chief, said.

Cleansing, desalination and the removal of surface sediments, and strengthening were practiced as the extent of damages were initially assessed, he said. The restored relics are now on show in a heritage museum in Sari, the capital of the northern province. The Sassanid era is of very high importance in the Iranian history, under which Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance.

Iran secures seat at WFTGA



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran has won a seat at the World Federation of Tourist Guides Association, securing the position for the second consecutive year, Mehr reported. The voting took place during the 18th WFTGA Convention, which is running in Tbilisi, Georgia from January 21 to 27. Iranian travel associate Arash Noor-

aghaei earned 26 votes in favor, out of 39. There were other international electees as well, the report said. WFTGA came into being as a result of proposals put forward at the first International Convention of Tourist Guides, in February 1985. The Federation was officially registered as a non-profit organization under Austrian law after a second Convention held in Vienna in 1987.

The 14 travel mistakes even experienced travelers make

By Ben Groundwater

Don't feel bad. We all make mistakes when we travel – even the most experienced among us. In fact, certain mistakes we keep making over and over again, despite knowing that there are very easy ways around them. Sometimes you just forget the lessons you've learned. Other times you decide it's just more fun to get things wrong regardless. Whatever the reason, these are the mistakes you'll probably continue to make your whole travelling life. **■ Not packing a power adapter** Every time! You get to your destination, go to plug in your phone or your laptop, and realize: I forgot the adapter. So it's off down to the shop for yet another one, which you can add to the mountain of adapters sitting around unused when you get back home. **■ Packing too much** I'm not a light packer. I don't even try. I don't want to re-wear my T-shirts three or four times. I don't want to wash my jocks in the hotel sink. Still, it would be nice to arrive home and know that I've actually worn everything that I packed, rather than pull out a whole lot of clothes I forgot I'd even taken. **■ Not budgeting enough money** You can follow the edict that you should tally up the amount of money you think you'll need for a trip and then double it – that's a good rule of thumb. But even then, somehow, you'll end up spending more. You always need far more money than you think you will. You'll always find a way to part with extra cash. The only thing to do is to save, and save, and save, before you go. **■ Not doing any research** It'll be right, you think. I'll go with any old hotel or hostel; the tour company doesn't really matter than much; that part of the city will be nice; this restaurant seems good enough; that will be a nice time of year to visit. And then, it all goes wrong. Lack of research is understandable, given it's usually a product of a lack of time – but still, it really does pay to do

your background work. **■ Leaving something behind** I've actually improved in this category. I used to lose things all the time. I'd leave single socks behind in hostels. I'd forget chargers. I once drove away from an Amsterdam campsite and left an entire load of washing on the clothes line. Now, I swing around and check every time I walk away from anywhere – from a restaurant table, a park bench, a hotel room – to see if I've left anything. It's a good system, but it's not foolproof. **■ Getting sick** Getting sick isn't always an error on your part; sometimes it's just bad luck. Sometimes, however, if you just followed the perceived wisdom and took certain precautions, you wouldn't get sick at all. This particularly goes for food. If you can't boil it, cook it or peel it, they say, then don't eat it. But that way you miss out on so much that's great about the world of food. It's worth the odd bout of stomach trouble to taste everything. **■ Taking a really heavy book** I have a Kindle and I never use it, because I like having real books, not just to read, but to keep as a record on my shelf for later. That does, however, mean I'm constantly going away on overseas trips lugging massive paperbacks that I inevitably don't get time to open. Sigh. **■ Not booking your seat** I object to the extra fee that some airlines charge to reserve a seat. It's not just budget carriers that do this either – even Qantas does it on certain fares. I hate it. So, I decide to chance it, to wait until online check-in opens to dive in there and secure my aisle or window. That has resulted in a few long-haul journeys stuck in the dreaded middle seat. **■ Winging it** Sometimes, you just take a chance. You turn up at the train station and hope you can get a ticket. You turn up at the restaurant and hope you can secure a table. You call into a bar because it looks interesting and it might be fun. Sometimes winging it works out well. Plenty of times, however,

you wish you'd just taken the time to book ahead. **■ Going out on the final night** I never learn. I always get excited on my last night in a city, I always want to go out and enjoy it to its fullest, to pack in as much joy and as many experiences as I possibly can, to bid goodbye to friends and have a blast. That results in the painful inevitability of a massive hangover as I try to get to the airport or train station the next morning. **■ Not checking the safe** I never use hotel safes, for several reasons. One, I'm convinced that if the hotel staff really wanted to get into it they could, and two, I'm highly likely to check out of the hotel and leave all of my valuables locked in there. Apparently some travelers leave a shoe on top of the safe so they can't walk out without emptying it. My solution is just to ignore it. **■ Taking no notice of the weather forecast** It's so hard, when you're in a hot climate, to picture what it will be like when it's cold, even if you've experienced it before. The same way it's so hard to think about what a hot, humid place will be like when you're shivering through the cold. That's why I tend to under-pack for cold climates and massively over-pack for the heat. You don't need two pairs of jeans in Thailand; you do need a coat in Britain. **■ Forgetting about tipping** Hey, this restaurant's prices are pretty reasonable, you think, as you peruse the options in the US. Then you get hit with the bill and realize that, first, you forgot about tax, and second, you forgot to add 20 percent for a tip. Suddenly you're in a really expensive place to eat. **■ Thinking you're more hardcore than you really are** Overnight bus trip? No problems. I can do that. Long-haul flight via half of China with seven-hour layovers? Worth it to save money. Scungy hostel that's \$10 cheaper than the nicer place up the road? I'll take it. Trouble is, these experiences always suck. You always regret not paying extra for a little more comfort. It's a mistake I make over and over again. (Source: traveller.com)

Team finds ghostly galaxies hint at dark matter breakthrough

Much as a ripple in a pond reveals a thrown stone, the existence of the mysterious stuff known as dark matter is inferred via its wider cosmic influence. Astronomers cannot see it directly, but its gravity sculpts the birth, shape and movement of galaxies. This makes a discovery from last year all the more unexpected: a weirdly diffuse galaxy that seemed to harbor no dark matter at all.

Even as some researchers hailed the finding, others aired their doubts, criticizing measurements of the galaxy's distance and motion. The stakes are high: If the galaxy does in fact lack dark matter that would paradoxically bolster the case for the material's existence.

Now the original team is back with additional evidence confirming their initial discovery, plus a newfound second galaxy that appears to show the same thing—or, rather, the lack thereof. Where once there was but one ultradiffuse galaxy seemingly free of dark matter, now, it seems, there are two.

Study says unicorns exist

"One object, you can always write off as a unicorn, but once you find two unicorns, you start thinking unicorns exist, maybe," says Michael Boylan-Kolchin, an astronomer at The University of Texas at Austin who was not involved in the research. "Then you have to start worrying about how they got there, what are their properties and how common are they?"



The two galaxies are very faint and far away from Earth: Photons from their smatterings of stars began traveling to Earth in the last days of the dinosaurs' reign, some 65 million years ago. The original galaxy, called NGC 1052-DF2, is the size of the Milky Way but contains just 1 percent of our galaxy's stars.

The new one, NGC 1052-DF4, is in the same patch of sky and has roughly the same size and mass. (The name "DF" comes from their discovery using the Dragonfly Telephoto Array, which specializes in detecting faint objects.)

Last March researchers led by Shany Danieli and Pieter van Dokkum of Yale University

published a study that sized up NGC 1052-DF2 by observing its starlight as well as the movements of star clusters that surround it. If DF2 contained as much dark matter as astronomers would normally expect for such a galaxy, the dark matter would boost the orbital speeds of those star clusters.

Dark matter

But they move sluggishly, which suggests dark matter is absent. Critics countered these star cluster speeds had not been calculated correctly — and, even if the calculations were correct, argued the sample size of just 10 star clusters was too modest for making reliable determinations of DF2's dark matter inventory.

Next, in October, Danieli set out to settle the question using a different technique. She used the Keck Cosmic Web Imager, a new instrument freshly installed behind the giant 10-meter primary mirror of the Keck 2 telescope in Hawaii.

The instrument can measure the light from very faint objects at extremely high resolution, making it an ideal instrument for scrutinizing ultradiffuse galaxies such as NGC 1052-DF2. The instrument was so good, in fact, that Danieli no longer needed to study the star cluster motions to infer the galaxy's mass. Instead, she could get at the mass more directly, using the galaxy's starlight.

(Source: [scientificamerican.com](#))

If DF2 contained as much dark matter as astronomers would normally expect for such a galaxy, the dark matter would boost the orbital speeds of those star clusters.

Major northeastern snowstorms expected to continue with climate change, researchers say

A new study finds that smaller snowstorms that drop a few inches will diminish greatly in number by late century. But the most damaging types of storms along the Eastern Seaboard, which strike every few years or so and cause widespread disruption, will remain about as frequent in a warming world.

"What this research finds is almost all of the decrease in snow occurs in weaker, more nuisance-type events," said atmospheric scientist Colin Zarzycki, the author of the study. The "really crippling storms that have major regional impacts on transportation, on the economy, on infrastructure are not significantly mitigated in a warming climate."

Zarzycki conducted the research as a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. He is now a professor at Pennsylvania State University in the Department of Meteorology and Atmospheric Science.

The new study is part of a growing body of research into the complex ways that a warmer atmosphere will influence weather patterns and extreme weather events.

Especially intense

Scientists have found that storms such as hurricanes and hailstorms are likely to become less frequent in the future — but pack an even more powerful punch in those instances when they're especially intense.

Previous scientific studies have indicated that total snowfall over the course of the winter is likely to decline in coming decades. The reason, for the most part, is straightforward: more precipitation will fall as rain because of the warming influence of greenhouse gases on the atmosphere.

Zarzycki wanted to take a closer look to see how warmer temperatures would affect individual nor'easters. These powerful storms can bring blizzard conditions and coastal flooding to densely populated areas, sometimes causing widespread disruption and economic damage stretching into the billions of dollars.

To do so, Zarzycki turned to an existing set of advanced computer simulations of climate conditions, which scientists had created using the NCAR-based Community



Earth System Model. The simulations used projections of society continuing a "business-as-usual" approach to emitting greenhouse gases, which would lead to pronounced warming this century.

The simulation data set also consists of multiple ensemble members, which are realizations of the same climate but with different weather patterns that reflect the natural variability of weather. This was crucial for Zarzycki to get statistics for very rare but crippling storms.

Future climate conditions

Zarzycki applied a specialized algorithm to the simulations to essentially cut out and count the number of snowstorms. This enabled him to effectively peer into future climate conditions and zero in on the impact on individual nor'easters.

The results show that moderate nor'easters, which currently occur every one to two years, will decline sharply over the next few decades and become almost twice as rare by late century. But the frequency of very powerful storms that occur about once a decade, or of the most extreme storms that strike a few times per century, will be largely unchanged.

The reasons have to do with a combination of factors that will occur in the future: a shorter snow season, the ability of the atmosphere to hold more water, the warming of ocean waters that fuel powerful storms, and the increased energy in the warmer atmosphere that can turbocharge storms when conditions are lined up. All of these can modify a storm's impacts in different ways.

(Source: [phys.org](#))

How sponges undermine coral reefs from within

Coral reefs are demolished from within, by bio-eroding sponges. Seeking refuge from predators, these sponges bore tunnels into the carbonate coral structures, thus weakening the reefs.

Scientists from the Royal NIOZ Netherlands Institute for Sea Research have uncovered how the sponges hollow out and take over reef skeletons. This finding, published in Scientific Reports on Thursday January 24th, helps to explain why sponges erode reefs faster as atmospheric CO2 levels rise.

With their three-dimensional structures, coral reefs provide ecosystem building blocks, hotspots for living organisms and natural coastal protection against waves.

Worldwide, coral reefs are under pressure of the consequences of climate change, such as ocean acidification. NIOZ-first author Alice Webb explains why and how sponges contribute to the collapse of coral reefs.

Complex of mining shafts

An affected coral reef may seem intact on the outside, while on the inside looking like a complex of mining shafts with galleries and cavities that are completely filled with sponge tissue.

Bio-eroding sponges bore into coral skeletons, not to feed on the calcium carbonate, but to protect their own tissue from predators by hiding in the hard coral structure.

To make the tunnels, they use a combination of chemical and mechanical demolition techniques. First the sponge pumps acidified fluid onto the coral to dissolve and chip off calcium carbonate pieces; then it removes the chips from the boring pit by contracting its tissue, resembling smooth muscle tissue.

Sponges filter huge amounts of water constantly for feeding and breathing. They suck in water, take all the food particles and then spit the filtered water out. Chips of coral reef are expelled by the same route through these filtering canals, and out of the sponge through the so-called osculum.

How does ocean acidification help sponges break down coral?

We knew from previous research that bio-erosion is facilitated by higher CO2



levels, but we didn't know why. Bio-eroding sponges alter the chemical composition of the water at the etching interface by pumping protons from the surrounding seawater into this interface. By doing so, they make the surface of the skeleton more acidic, which helps to dissolve the skeleton.

If more CO2 is dissolved in the seawater, the proton concentration rises and the sponge will simply have to spend less energy on lowering the pH at the sponge/coral interface.

Layers of coral skeleton

The sponge-coral interface is extremely hard to localize and observe as it is surrounded by layers of coral skeleton. Research on boring mechanisms of bio-eroding sponges really started in the 1970s, but the technology to look at differences in pH was not available.

In the last decade, researchers have tried to localize the etching site using microelectrodes (pH probes) but this approach did not succeed. We combined a number of 'tricks' to open up the sponge-carbonate boundary. We grew sponges on small pieces of calcite minerals that we could manipulate to observe the sponge-carbonate interface directly. The actual observation was done using fluorescence microscopy by visualizing pH (acid) and the way the pH was controlled by the sponge.

These sponges are abundant on reefs of the Caribbean such as Curacao, Saba bank or Florida keys, but also on the Great Barrier Reef. Taking ocean acidification into account, our sponge findings make it possible to make better predictions of future coral reef conditions.

(Source: [eurekalert.org](#))

Laser used to shoot audio signals directly into human ear from a distance

Researchers have successfully demonstrated a laser that can transmit audio to a person via the air without wearing any type of special equipment.

The technique is based on photoacoustic effect using the water vapor to absorb light and create sound. According to the researchers, it can transmit various tones, music, and recorded speech at a conversational volume to a person at the other end of the room without anyone else hearing.

The details of the research were published in the journal Optics Letters by a team of researchers from MIT's Lincoln Lab, a research facility of the U.S. Department of Defense.

The technique can be done in two ways. The first approach grew from a technique called dynamic photoacoustic spectroscopy (DPAS) that involves sweeping the laser across an area at the speed of sound. To be able to encode different frequencies or audible pitches, the researchers altered the length of the laser sweeps.

The researchers explained that the approach can only be heard at a certain distance from a transmitter. It can only be heard by the intended recipient and not everyone who happens to cross the beam of light. It can also be used to transmit a targeted message to multiple people.

The second method, the traditional photoacoustic method, does not use the sweeping motion and instead creates different audios by modulating the power of the laser beam.

"There are tradeoffs between the two techniques," explained Ryan M. Sullenberger, the first author of the study. The "traditional photoacoustics method provides sound with higher fidelity, whereas the laser sweeping provides sound with louder audio."

(Source: [techtimes.com](#))

How to escape a black hole: Simulations provide new clues about powerful plasma jets

New simulations have combined decades-old theories to provide new insight about the driving mechanisms in plasma jets that allows them to steal energy from black holes' powerful gravitational fields and propel it far from their gaping mouths.

This visualization of a general-relativistic collisionless plasma simulation shows the density of positrons near the event horizon of a rotating black hole. Plasma instabilities produce island-like structures in the region of intense electric current.

Less understood, though, is how black holes purge energy locked up in their rotation, jetting near-light-speed plasmas into space to opposite sides in one of the most powerful displays in the universe. These jets can extend outward for millions of light years.

New simulations led by researchers working at the Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (Berkeley Lab) and UC Berkeley have combined decades-old theories to provide new insight about the driving mechanisms in the plasma jets that allows them to steal energy from black holes' powerful gravitational fields and propel it far from their gaping mouths.

The simulations could provide a useful comparison for high-resolution observations from the Event Horizon Telescope, an array that is designed to provide the first direct images of the regions where the plasma jets form.

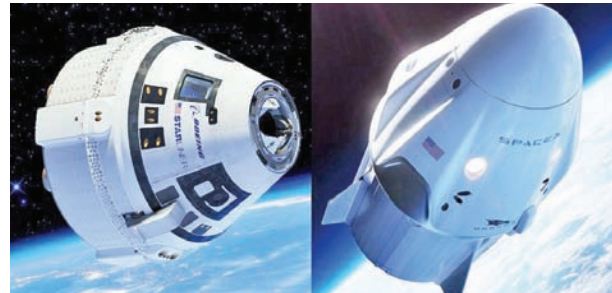
"How can the energy in a black hole's rotation be extracted to make jets?" said Kyle Parfrey, who led the work on the simulations while he was an Einstein Postdoctoral Fellow affiliated with the Nuclear Science Division at Berkeley Lab. "This has been a question for a long time."

The simulations, for the first time, unite a theory that explains how electric currents around a black hole twist magnetic fields into forming jets, with a separate theory explaining how particles crossing through a black hole's point of no return -- the event horizon -- can appear to a distant observer to carry in negative energy and lower the black hole's overall rotational energy.

(Source: [sciencedaily.com](#))

SpaceX plans crewed Dragon test flight for next month

It's been a long time coming, but NASA's Commercial Crew Program is close to its first launch. SpaceX says it is currently planning for the initial test flight of its crewed Dragon capsule next month. This comes after a series of setbacks as both SpaceX and Boeing trudged through the testing and review process that will eventually return manned spaceflight to the U.S.



SpaceX confirmed this past week that it completed a static fire test of the Falcon 9 rocket that will propel the Dragon II capsule into orbit. In a static fire test (see the video below), the rocket remains tethered to the launch tower so it can't go anywhere while the engines light up. Next month, the rocket will be free to shoot for the moon. Well, for the International Space Station (ISS).

The Dragon II capsule (see above) is a modified version of the Dragon that has been flying uncrewed cargo missions to the ISS over the last few years. However, NASA's testing and certification process is understandably much more stringent than the cargo contract. SpaceX has experienced a few launch failures, but the manned flights will include additional safety measures like a launch abort system. NASA was initially hesitant to allow astronauts aboard the spacecraft during fueling, which is SpaceX's preferred process. However, the agency relented after additional design reviews.

The February test will cover all parts of a typical mission to the ISS for ferrying crew back and forth. The mission, known as SpX-DM1, will begin with a launch from historic launch pad 39-A at Kennedy Space Center. The Falcon 9 booster will release the second stage before heading back down to Earth (it's unclear if SpaceX will attempt to land that booster).

The Dragon capsule will head into orbit and conduct automated docking with the ISS where it will remain for several weeks. Finally, it will re-enter the atmosphere and splash down in the ocean.

(Source: [extremetech.com](#))

How ants sniff out the right path



to paint trails on paper.

Different computer models

They set ants out on trails and recorded dozens of hours of ant movement. They analyzed the video and tried out different computer models of the ants' behavior.

What Ryan W. Draft and his adviser, Venkatesh N. Murthy, and other researchers found was that the ants had several strategies

for path-following. The scientists published their results in the Journal of Experimental Biology.

All the ants used their antennae to sweep the trail side to side. One strategy they used was probing. A probing ant moved slowly, keeping its antennae close together.

The researchers termed another strategy exploratory: Ants still moved slowly, but they

took winding paths moving away from and back to a trail.

When they were locked into a pheromone trail, they moved along more quickly, keeping their antennae on either side of the path. They kept one antenna closer to the path, but which antenna varied from ant to ant. In other words, some were lefties and others were righties.

Also, despite the reputation that ants have in fables as industrious, some ants were more persistent than others. The idea that ants are all hard-wired robots that do the same thing just didn't apply.

An understanding of their behavior could, however, be useful in building just such robots.

Dr. Murthy views the successes of this experiment as an indication that the researchers have found a good method for studying ant navigation in detail. "I think we were humbled by the ants and seeing just how sophisticated their behaviors are," he said. "Humbled, but not discouraged."

(Source: [NYT](#))

They may seem like automatons, but ants are surprisingly sophisticated in their navigational strategies.

Carpenter ants follow trails. Just watch them wandering about on your wooden porch until they strike a trail of pheromones (chemicals ants use for communication) that another ant has laid down.

Ants don't have noses, so they wave their antennae around to pick up the trail, then off they go on the road to ruin.

Scientists know plenty about ants, including their ability to follow scent trails, but researchers at Harvard wanted to get a more detailed understanding of how exactly ants sniff, or taste, the pheromone-marked path.

First, some basics: Ants use their antennae to pick up chemical cues left by other ants.

And the chemical sense of ants, call it smell or taste or chemo-reception, enables them to follow straight trails, curved trails, even zigzags.

To see how ants do it, the scientists mixed ink and ant pheromones and used the result

\$1.2m donated to provide the underprivileged with warm clothing

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Welfare Organization has managed to collect a contribution of 50 billion rials (nearly \$1.2 million) to provide the underprivileged with warm clothing, Tasnim news agency reported on Thursday. Within the framework of a campaign dubbed "kindness smile" from December 10, 2018 to January 9 some \$1.2 million was solicited from the public for procuring warm clothing for the financially struggling children in underprivileged areas, an official with the Organization has said.

Mohammad Ali Kozezgar explained that some 50,000 packages of warm clothing were obtained by the money and distributed among the children.

Some 1,000 clothing packages were distributed among quake-stricken children in the western province of Kermanshah, he said, adding that rest of the packages were mostly sent southern provinces.

The distribution of the packages will be completed by the end of the current week, he added.

A new campaign for the next Iranian calendar year (falling on March 21) will launch as well, he concluded.

Industry ministry asked to develop disability friendly transportation

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Welfare Organization has asked the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade to develop disability friendly transportation in the country, an official with the Organization has said.

People with disabilities should have access to public transportation, Mehr news agency quoted Ebrahim Kazemi Momensaraei as saying on Thursday.

In order to provide this group of people with accessible transportation and vehicles Welfare Organization has led talks with ministry of industry, he explained.

Increased accessibility in the cities for physically challenged people is of great importance for the country, Kazemi Momensaraei added.

Provinces of Qom, Qazvin, and South Khorasan rank first in making cities accessible for people with disabilities and provinces of Kermanshah, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, and Hamedan are at the bottom of the list, he highlighted.

Majlis [the Iranian parliament] approved both general outlines and details of a bill on rights of persons with disabilities on January 2018.

Free transportation, free education, job creation, housing loans, and less working hours are some of the articles of the law which are hoped to improve such groups' living conditions in the near future.

In July 2018 the then head of Welfare Organization Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey said that the Iranian government has allocated a total budget of 2 trillion rials (nearly \$47 million) for implementing the law on rights of persons with disabilities.

LEARN ENGLISH

Physics

Prof. Brown: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Physics 101. My name is Ed Brown, and I will be your professor for this semester. Since today is our first class, I wanted to give you an overview of what this course will look like, how you will be graded, and what we will cover this semester.

Matt: Will we be focusing more on theoretical physics or experimental physics, Professor?

Prof. Brown: This is an introductory course, and my aim is to give you a broad overview of the field of physics. The term "physics" encompasses many different areas of research and study, and I hope this course will provide you with **conceptual** understanding of physics, which will prove useful whether or not you choose to further your study in this field.

Prof. Brown: We will begin the course by looking at the fundamental concepts of physics, then by the middle of the semester we will begin exploring the more theoretical side of physics. It is essential that you first have a firm **grasp** of the fundamentals, so that you can better understand the theoretical concepts when we get to them.

Matt: Will we learn about **black holes**, wormholes, and string theory?

Prof. Brown: We will learn about the general theory of relativity, including black holes. We will also explore developing theories in **quantum mechanics**, such as string theory. We will discuss some **hypothetical** features of space-time, like wormholes.

Prof. Brown: We will also explore some of the more influential developments in the fields of **thermodynamics**, **electromagnetism**, and **nuclear physics**, all of which have had significant impacts on modern life. Now, I am going to have the TAs pass out the syllabus for this class, so you can see how this course will be graded.

Matt: Oh man, looks like this isn't going to be the easy as I thought it'd be!

■ **Key vocabulary**

encompass: to include something as a part

conceptual: based on or relating to ideas or concepts

grasp: an understanding of something

black hole: an invisible area in outer space

quantum mechanics: the branch of physics that deals with energy and matter on an atomic level

hypothetical: involving or based on a suggested idea or theory

thermodynamics: a science that deals with the action of heat

electromagnetism: a magnetic field that is produced by a current of electricity

nuclear physics: the area of physics which deals with nuclei

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**

academia: the various interests of a university and those who teach there

applicable: something that can be used in real-life situations

gravity: the force of attraction between two objects

ivory tower: refers to those who live in intellectual isolation, often without contact or applicability to the outside world

relevant: knowledge that can be applied to everyday situations

DOE builds underpass to avoid Asiatic cheetah road crash death

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — In an attempt to provide a safe place for the few surviving Asiatic cheetahs, the Department of Environment (DOE) has constructed an underground passage stretching to 8 kilometers along Abbasabad road in central province of Semnan, Rajab Ali Karegar, the Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah (CACP) project deputy director has said.

Since past 60 years, Iran is home to the last known population of Asiatic cheetah, which once roamed across vast ranges of west and south Asian countries, from the Middle East to India. Listed as critically endangered by the IUCN, the Asiatic cheetah is among the rarest cats in the world at subspecies level, with fewer than 50 believed to remain in Iran.

In 1370s (1997-2000), according to field studies conducted by both domestic and international experts, a cheetah named Marita, was the only evidence of the cheetahs' existence for nearly ten years, Karegar stated, adding, the CACP project was launched back in 2001, in cooperation with United Nations Development Program and a number of concerned national and international NGOs to reverse the endangered specie's drastic decline.

The project has been comprised of three phases aiming at research, protection and training courses for integration of local communities as active partners in protected areas, the first phase was co-funded by the Global Environment Facility and was implemented since 2001 to 2008, while the second phase went into effect in 2010.

The project was implemented on some 5 regions in 6 provinces of the country, through which some 47 cheetahs have been identified since past three years, he added.

Referring to 6 million hectares of Asiatic cheetahs' habitat in the country, he noted that 60 percent of the cheetahs are inhabiting out of the areas defined to determine the cheetah's population, so that in the third



phase of the project we will not only focus on protected areas supervised by DOE, but also cheetah's migration corridors will be observed more closely.

He went on to say that through the third phase of the CACP, all the solutions are classified in three fields of strengthening managing methods and optimization, participation of local communities and calling on stakeholders to conserve the precious species.

Given the DOE envisioned building underpasses so that cheetahs can cross beneath highways and avoid road accidents, an eight-kilometer long underground passage has been constructed along Abbasabad road, thanks to various donors, he concluded.

Better conservation plans for Asiatic cheetah conservation, and its prey by training the rangers, increasing the quality of captive breeding, raising public awareness, drawing up plans for alternative jobs for

sustainable agriculture, livestock breeding and eco-tourism by soliciting public participation, and decreasing human-wildlife conflict are among the objectives of the third phase of the project.

An environmentalist, Mehdi Nabian said that in order to prevent the species' extinction, in addition to the DOE, the participation of other related bodies along with national determination is essential.

The cheetah's habitat is so vast, as many rangers have never seen a cheetah, so it is not easy to capture them alive with the standard conditions and veterinarian present in the area, he lamented.

The DOE's efforts have come efficient over the past 50 years, and the CACP is the most successful project ever undertaken by the organization, he stated, adding, thanks to the NGOs, even the remote villages in the country are aware of the endangered species and the protection methods through

Flood resilience improved in 1.5m ha of watersheds

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization has enhanced the country's watershed capacity to resist floods, 1.5 million hectares of which have so far undergone flood resilience measures, the Organization's director for watershed management has announced.

Flood damages have declined by 50-70 percent and in some cases by 100 percent in the wetlands and lake basins being flood resilient, ISNA quoted Abolqasem Hosseinpour as saying on Saturday.

Referring to watershed management system being adopted in the country over the past 60 years, he noted that given the country's climatic characteristic, being flood prone and being haunted by recurrent droughts, flood protection measures have become more important gradually.



"Some 37 stations have been set up to harvest rain water and in 330 cases floodwater have been stored

and pumped into wetlands or farms," he highlighted, adding, assessments show that each hectare can store 1,000 cubic meters of water in aquifers.

By the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2019), over 1.1 million hectares of lands will be covered by the Organization's flood resilience plans, he concluded.

In September 2018, Naser Heidaripouri deputy director for watershed management at Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization said that a total budget of \$200 million from National Development Fund (NDF) is earmarked for implementation of aquifers and watershed management projects throughout the country.

Provinces of Khorasan Razavi, Kerman, Fars, Isfahan and Sistan-Baluchestan are of high priority to be provided with the budget due to severity of the issues they are facing, he added.

CO2 levels expected to rise rapidly in 2019, Met Office scientists warn

This year will see one of the biggest CO2 surges in more than six decades of measurements, according to the Met Office.

Rising emissions due to the world's continued appetite for fossil fuels will combine with reduced absorption of greenhouse gas by withering grasslands and forests.

Describing the prediction as "worrying and compelling", scientists said it was an urgent reminder that the time to cut out carbon is now.

CO2 levels will be at a record high once again after emissions reached unprecedented levels last year, dashing hopes the world had

finally hit "peak carbon".

Besides fossil fuels pumping out the harmful gas, natural weather fluctuations will exacerbate the problem as they hamper the ability of carbon sinks to store it.

In 2019 an upward swing in tropical Pacific Ocean temperature will make many regions warmer and drier. As drought sets in and plants dry out, they will be less capable of sucking CO2 from the atmosphere, and massive deforestation in places like the Amazon is making this problem even worse.

The new predictions were based on monitoring at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii,

which has registered a 30 per cent increase in the concentration of CO2 since 1958.

"Carbon sinks have saved us from what has already happened – the future rise would have been about double if it wasn't for the sinks. So we are lucky they exist, to be honest," Professor Richard Betts of the Met Office Hadley Centre told The Independent.

"But the sinks themselves are affected by the climate, and that's an important thing because it shows that as climate change continues in the future it may affect their strength."

If emissions continue to rise, a major concern is that the carbon sinks currently

storing carbon will cease to function, potentially leading to uncontrollable warming and a scenario dubbed "hothouse Earth".

Forecast CO2 concentrations at the Mauna Loa station for 2019 (orange), along with previous forecast concentrations and the real observed data (Met Office)

Last year Mauna Loa observatory recorded concentrations of over 410ppm in April, marking the highest level that had been reached in at least 800,000 years.

This year CO2 levels in the atmosphere are likely to hit 411 parts per million (ppm).

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

‘Climate change main cause of recurrent droughts in Iran’

Climatic change along with changes in precipitation patterns are the main reasons behind recurrent droughts haunting different parts of the country, head of National Disaster Management Organization has said.

Esmaeil Najjar, made the remarks on a meeting held on Monday to address the impacts of drought and climate change in order to provide tackling solutions, with the representatives of responsible bodies and governor officials of the drought ridden provinces, in attendance and under the chairmanship of the minister of interior.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“for-”

- **Meaning:** extremely
- **For example:** If we really want to love, we must learn how to *for*give.

PHRASAL VERB

Mix up

- **Meaning:** to confuse
- **For example:** I always mix those two sisters up because they look so like each other.

IDIOM

Cook somebody's goose

- **Explanation:** to spoil someone's chances of success
- **For example:** When the burglar saw the police car arriving, he knew his goose was cooked!

تغییرات اقلیمی گسترده موجب خشکسالی های وسیع شده است

معاون وزیر کشور و رئیس سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور گفت: تغییرات اقلیمی گسترده و کاهش و تغییر الگوی بارش، موجب وقوع خشکسالی های وسیع در مناطق مختلف کشور شده است.

به گزارش دوشنبه شب ایرنا، اسماعیل نجار افزود: امروز با حضور دستگاه های متولی به همراه ۱۰ تن از استانداران استان های تحت تاثیر، جلسه بررسی اثرات خشکسالی و تغییر اقلیم به منظور ارائه راهکار های اجرایی به ریاست وزیر کشور برگزار شد.

13 Syrian civilians killed in U.S.-led operation in Dayr al-Zawr

More than a dozen civilians have lost their lives when the United States-led coalition purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group carried out an operation in Syria's troubled eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said on Saturday that the U.S.-led forces shelled farming land between al-Baghuz Fawqani and al-Marashidah towns in Abu Kamal district in the province late last night, killing 13 people and injuring many more.

The London-based monitor group added that there were seven children among the fallen civilians.

The group noted that the death toll was expected to rise as some of the wounded victims were in a critical condition.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes and operations against what are said to be ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus or a United Nations 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.

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, in two separate letters addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the rotating president of the Security Council, Francisco Antonio Cortoreal, on January 19, censured last week's U.S.-led coalition strikes against al-Baghuz al-Tahtani village in Dayr al-Zawr province, saying the U.S.-led warplanes had targeted dozens of families, who were fleeing from areas controlled by ISIL.

Local sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA on January 18 that 20 people were killed when the U.S.-led warplanes bombed residential buildings in the village. "This new crime is in line with the criminal



acts that the U.S.-led coalition is perpetrating systematically and on a daily basis against Syrian people, and in flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said the letters.

"The activities of this alliance are illegal as it has been formed outside the UN framework. Such acts have only contributed to the expansion of extremist terrorist organizations, especially ISIL. Cooperation and coordination between these terrorist groups and this alliance has been documented in numerous letters that [the] Syrian Arab Republic has sent to the Security Council," added the letters.

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

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

Syrian civilians and infrastructure.

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

■ U.S. plans to keep troops in Syria's al-Tanf base

Meantime, the U.S. is reportedly planning to keep some of its forces in a military base in southeastern Syria despite a total withdrawal ordered by Trump.

Informed sources told Washington-based Foreign Policy magazine on Friday that given the strategic importance of the al-Tanf garrison, situated in Syria's Homs Province near the Iraqi border, the U.S. government mulls keeping at least some troops there.

The first source said the only "logical purpose" al-Tanf serves is to let Washington "monitor and disrupt" the alleged flow of Iranian military advisers. "Honestly, you could not contrive a different military mission."

The other source said the move allows American soldiers claim self-defense in striking Iranian military advisers, among

others in the area.

Keeping troops in al-Tanf goes against Trump's pullout order. It could also raise legal issues for the Trump administration as the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force permits the use of force against non-state militant groups, not nation states.

Iranian military advisers are in Syria at the request of the country's legitimate government but the U.S. has deployed troops to the country without an authorization from Damascus or a UN mandate.

While Tehran has been key to defeating terrorists and helping keep Syria in one piece, Washington's record has been sketchy, marked by a bid to prop up anti-government and separatist forces.

Trump announced the plan to withdraw all 2,000 American forces from Syria in December 2018 amid preparations by Turkey to launch an operation against the U.S.-backed Kurdish militants in northern Syria.

His abrupt move sparked concern among officials in Washington, prompting Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to step down in protest.

The planned pullout also raised worries among Kurdish militants operating in northern Syria and left them feeling abandoned by Washington.

The vast majority of US troops are operating in northeastern Syria while only over 200 of them are concentrated in al-Tanf.

Earlier on Friday, a video released by the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, purportedly showed the entry of about 250 U.S. trucks loaded with weapons and logistical equipment to American bases in Syria.

Last week, the founder of Blackwater - now called Academi - said American troops in Syria could be replaced with mercenaries.

Erik Prince, who founded the infamous private military company, told Fox Business that using private contractors would allow Trump to end "forever wars" and protect the U.S. allies against what he called Iranian military advisers and Syrian army soldiers.

(Source: Press TV)

Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah: Tunnels not needed to invade Galilee

Hezbollah chief: Rumors about my health are lies

TEHRAN — In a long-awaited interview on al-Mayadeen TV late on Saturday, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah refuted as "lies" all rumors about his health condition.

"All the things being said about my health condition are lies and I don't suffer from any disease or problem," the Hezbollah leader asserted.

Nasrallah also confirmed that there have been tunnels at the border between Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories.

He said the delay in discovering tunnels proves the failure of Israeli intelligence.

Last month Israel targeted the cross-border tunnels dug by Hezbollah. Israel called the attack on the tunnels "Northern Shield" Operation.

Nasrallah said the Hezbollah leadership decided not to comment on the operation at the time.

The Hezbollah chief also told Israelis that they should not believe Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the issue of tunnels is closed, asking: "Do you believe Netanyahu that the issue of tunnels is over?"

He said Netanyahu claimed that the tunnels operation was aimed at preparing to confront Hezbollah's plan to invade Galilee.

However in his interview with al-Mayadeen, the Nasrallah said, "Hezbollah doesn't need tunnels to invade Galilee."

In fact, through his remarks on tunnels Netanyahu "served Hezbollah since he caused fear among Israelis," the Hezbollah leader noted.

However, Nasrallah said, "In any future (war) we are capable of getting into Galilee."

He added, "Following the Syria war it has been easier for Hezbollah to get into Galilee; we have found solutions to deal with the Israelis walls."

The Hezbollah leader went on to say that "it's our right to take all required measures in order to defend our country."

Trump invokes Israeli apartheid wall to justify Mexico border barrier

The United States President Donald Trump has invoked an Israeli-made separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories to defend his proposed security barrier on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Israel built a wall, 99.9 percent successful. Won't be any different for us," Trump said on Friday, referring to the so-called Israeli "apartheid wall" that separates al-Quds (Jerusalem) from the West Bank.

The president made the remarks during a speech in the White House Rose Garden, after signing into law a bipartisan legislation that ended a month-long government shut-

down over the funding of his controversial border wall.

Trump has time and again touted his wall strategy as the only "real" border security option to stem the flow of illegal immigration and drug trafficking from the south of the border.

Israel began building the 712-kilometer barrier of towering concrete walls, barbed-wire fences, trenches and closed military roads inside the occupied West Bank back in 2002.

Just like Trump, Israeli officials have claimed that the wall addresses the regime's security concerns and provides safety for

thousands of Israeli settlers who live behind it.

This is while the International Court of Justice said in 2004 that the apartheid wall violated international law and urged Israel to remove it.

Regardless, however, Israel has also set up a barbed tape fence 5-8 meters high along the 230-km frontier with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula for similar purposes.

The regime recently unveiled the so-called "apartheid road," a relatively long stretch of highway just outside al-Quds which featured an eight-meter-high wall that put Palestinian drivers on the western side and Israeli

settlers on the eastern side.

Trump made the wall one of the key promises of his 2016 presidential campaign. His attempts to deliver on that promise, however, have fallen short amid a dispute with congressional Democrats over the \$5.7 billion he has requested to construct the wall.

The row led to a partial government shut-down on December 22, a 36-day closure that damaged the country's economy and caused financial problems for hundreds of thousands of federal workers who missed their first paycheck of 2019 as a result.

(Source: agencies)

Funeral held in Gaza, West Bank for Palestinians killed by Israeli fire

Mourners have attended funeral processions for three Palestinians shot dead by Israeli forces in the besieged Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank.

Scores of Palestinians gathered on Saturday in Rafah, located 30 kilometers south of Gaza City, to bid farewell to 25-year-old Ehab Atallah Hussein Abed, who was shot dead during weekly anti-occupation protests at the Israeli fence separating Gaza from the occupied territories a day earlier.

In the West Bank, mourners attended the funeral of Ahmed Hamed, 16, who was killed by Israeli forces in Ramallah on Friday for allegedly hurling stones at soldiers.

Another Palestinian Hamdan Tawfiq al-Arda, 60, whose body was handed over to his family after being withheld for more than 40 days, was laid to rest in the village of Arraba near the northern West Bank city of Jenin.

Arda was shot and killed by Israeli forces more than one month ago for allegedly carrying out a ramming attack against Israeli soldiers in the city of al-Bireh.

■ Israeli forces kill Palestinian man over alleged car-ramming attack in al-Quds

Meantime, Israeli military forces have shot dead a young Palestinian man in al-Quds (Jerusalem) as tensions continue in the occupied territories following the United States President Donald Trump's decision last year to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and relocate the U.S. embassy to the occupied city.

The Israeli military said in a statement that the Pales-

tinian driver was "neutralized" near the Damascus Gate in al-Quds (Jerusalem) early on Saturday when police officers opened fire at his car.

The statement further claimed that the Palestinian man had "endangered the lives of the officers, who opened fire at the car and killed him during the ensued chase."

Palestinian security sources identified the Palestinian victim as Riyad Muhammad Hamad Shamasneh, a local resident of the central West Bank town of Qatanna, located 12 kilometers northwest of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

The dramatic shift in Washington's policy vis-à-vis al-Quds (Jerusalem) on December 6, 2017 triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

On December 21, 2017, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution that calls on the US to withdraw its controversial recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israeli "capital."

In an attempt to prevent the passing of the resolution, Trump threatened reprisals against countries that backed the measure, which had earlier faced a U.S. veto at the UN Security Council.

On June 13 last year, the UNGA adopted a resolution, sponsored by Turkey and Algeria, condemning Israel for Palestinian civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip.

The resolution, which had been put forward on behalf of Arab and Muslim countries, garnered a strong majority



of 120 votes in the 193-member assembly, with eight votes against and 45 abstentions.

The resolution called on UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to make proposals within 60 days "on ways and means for ensuring the safety, protection, and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation," including "recommendations regarding an international protection mechanism."

It also called for "immediate steps towards ending the closure and the restrictions imposed by Israel on movement and access into and out of the Gaza Strip."

(Source: Press TV)

Saudi Arabia blacklisted for posing threat to EU

➔ The bloc has recently taken a new methodology, under which jurisdictions may also be blacklisted if they fail to provide sufficient information on ownership of companies or if they have lax rules on reporting suspicious transactions or monitoring financial customers.



The EU's decision to include Saudi Arabia in its blacklist needs an endorsement by the bloc's 28 member states before being formally adopted next week.

The updated list is still confidential, according to the two sources.

Saudi Arabia is under mounting pressure over the assassination of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at Riyadh's Istanbul consulate in October 2018. The killing is widely believed to have been ordered by the kingdom's U.S.-backed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Riyadh has sought to distance bin Salman from the case despite the conclusion by U.S. senators and the CIA that he was behind the murder.

The possible blacklist would further complicate Saudi Arabia's financial ties as the EU's banks are required to carry out additional checks on payments involving entities from listed jurisdictions.

■ Capital Economics halves Saudi growth forecast for 2019

Separately on Friday, a report from London-based research firm Capital Economics found that key economies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are expected to be hard hit this year as oil output drops and governments rein in spending.

Saudi Arabia, the report said, will see its growth almost cut in half to 1.3 percent in 2019, down from 2.5 percent last year.

It further predicted the kingdom's return to austerity in the latter half of the year, saying the planned generous spending announced in the Saudi budget is likely based on dodgy assumptions.

"The budget seemed to be based on an optimistic forecast for oil to average \$80 [per barrel]," the report added.

This is while Saudi Arabia is struggling with the high cost of its protracted war on Yemen.

It has signed multi-billion-dollar contracts to purchase weapons and military equipment from several western countries amid stiff resistance from the Yemenis.

During Trump's visit to Riyadh in May 2017, Saudi Arabia agreed to buy \$110 billion worth of U.S. weapons and signed other "investment" deals worth \$350 billions.

In September, Trump called on Saudi Arabia to increase its military spending, with an eye on more weapons sales to the "rich" kingdom.

(Source: Press TV)

Hundreds missing in Brazil after Vale tailings dam breaks

A Brazil fire brigade said it was searching for about 200 people still unaccounted for after a tailings dam burst Friday at an iron ore mine owned by Brazilian miner Vale SA in southwestern Minas Gerais state.

A statement from the fire brigade issued in Belo Horizonte city said scores of people were trapped in areas by the river of sludge released by the dam failure.

Vale said there were employees in the administrative buildings of the dam that were covered by the surge of mud and water and there could be casualties in that area.

There was no immediate word of fatalities.

The mud hit parts of the local community Vila Forteco, near the town of Brumadinho, where families were told to evacuate their home sin low-lying areas, authorities said.

Helicopters plucked people covered in mud from the disaster area, including a woman with a fractured hip who was among eight injured people taken to hospital, officials said.

Television reports showed people running away as the dam broke, and nearby fields with bean crops destroyed by packed mud.

The region is still recovering from collapse of a larger dam in 2015 that killed 19 people. In that incident, a dam owned jointly by the Samarco Mineracao SA venture between Vale and BHP Billiton broke in the same region of Minas Gerais state, burying local homes in Brazil's worst environmental disaster.

Brazil's environmental protection agency Ibama said the dam that burst on Friday held 1 million cubic meters of tailings, much less than the 50 million cubic meters in the 2015 disaster.

Operations at Samarco remain halted over legal disputes relating to damages the rupture caused even after the companies settled a \$5.28 billion civil lawsuit last year.

U.S.-listed shares of Vale were down 7 percent in mid-afternoon trading.

Photos on G1 and other local news websites, some credited to the fire department, showed a vast area covered in sludge with people walking in ankle deep mud. Images showed firemen rescuing at least three people from the mud.

A representative of the civil defense agency in the nearby town of Brumadinho located about 10 km from the dam said they were evacuating homes in the lower district by the river, but the mud had not arrived there.

The Inhotim Institute, an outdoor contemporary art museum in a park three miles from Brumadinho, evacuated visitors and closed its doors out of safety precautions.

Brazil's new right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro dispatched three ministers to the disaster area to see the damage and will visit himself on Saturday, his chief spokesman said. Former environmental minister and presidential candidate Marina Silva said Brazilian authorities and private miners had not learned anything from the 2015 disaster and called it unacceptable. "Three years after the serious environmental crime in Mariana, with investigations still ongoing and no-one punished, history repeats itself as tragedy in Brumadinho," she said in a Twitter post.

(Source: AFP)

Arsenal make Perisic approach

Arsenal have made an approach to sign Inter Milan winger Ivan Perisic.

The Gunners want to seal a loan move for the 29-year-old for the rest of the season, with an option to buy him in the summer for £35m. Croatia international Perisic signed a new five-year contract in September 2017 to extend his stay with the Italian club until 2022. However, it is understood he is open to leaving the San Siro after joining from Wolfsburg in 2015.

Perisic has scored 34 goals in 142 appearances for Inter, finding the net three times in 25 games this term. He previously played for Borussia Dortmund and Club Brugge.

Arsenal's original plan for the January transfer window was to secure loan deals for a versatile midfielder and a winger.

For the midfield role, they remain keen on Barcelona's Denis Suarez and Christopher Nkunku of Paris St-Germain.

They see Perisic as a leading option to add width to Unai Emery's squad. It is unclear whether injuries to Rob Holding, Hector Bellerin, Laurent Koscielny and Sokratis Papadopoulos will see them attempt to bring in defensive reinforcements.

However, the problem that forced Sokratis off the field in Friday's FA Cup defeat by Manchester United in not thought to be serious.

(Source: BBC)

FIFA rules Modeste had no right to quit Tianjin for Cologne

FIFA has thrown Anthony Modeste's transfer to Cologne in doubt by declaring his decision to walk out on Chinese side Tianjin Quanjian was not justified by unpaid salary.

The 30-year-old French striker walked out on the Chinese club last year, citing a lack of pay, and signed a new contract until 2023 with ex-club Cologne, for whom he scored 25 goals in 34 league games in 2016/17.

Tianjin Quanjian, or Tianjin Tianhai as they have since been renamed, face an uncertain future and reportedly need to sell players to survive due to excessive spending.

After two seasons in China, Modeste quit the Chinese Super League in mid-2018 and, after training with Cologne in the winter break, was due to make his first appearance in the second Bundesliga on Thursday at Union Berlin.

However, FIFA has ruled Modeste's switch is invalid after the matter was brought before their Dispute Resolution Chamber.

The chamber "rules that Tianjin Quanjian FC is required to pay the outstanding compensation to the player, but it has been determined that they (Modeste) terminated their employment with Tianjin Quanjian FC without good reason," said FIFA in a statement.

Cologne currently sit second in the second Bundesliga and are chasing promotion back to the top flight.

On Friday, Cologne announced FIFA had suspended their registration for Modeste.

(Source: AFP)

Arsenal's defensive woes mount after double injury blow

Arsenal face an injury crisis after a suspected broken jaw for captain Laurent Koscielny and ankle problem for Sokratis in Friday's FA Cup fourth-round defeat by Manchester United left them with only one fit recognised central defender.

Manager Unai Emery was already struggling for options at the back before Friday's 3-1 loss after cruciate knee ligament injuries ruled out two of his other defenders, Rob Holding in December and Hector Bellerin on Sunday, for the season.

Asked how bad the injuries were, Emery said: "I think this is not a big injury to Sokratis, it is his ankle, and Laurent Koscielny is going to the hospital to do the analysis."

"Maybe he has broken here," Emery added pointing to his jaw, "I hope not, but we have to wait."

Emery also said the injury problems contributed to the defeat against a United side who have now won all eight matches under new manager and former player Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

The visitors took a two-goal lead through former Arsenal forward Alexis Sanchez and Jesse Lingard before Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang pulled a goal back ahead of the break.

"At 1-2 I think we were in this moment with the possibility to draw or to take the possibility to win today," said Emery, "but I think these injuries, above all the second injury with Koscielny, didn't help us."

"Two injuries change a lot our possibilities." United substitute Anthony Martial wrapped up the victory with a late goal on the counter-attack at The Emirates.

(Source: Reuters)

Kvitova feels a winner, despite Australian Open pain

Comeback queen Petra Kvitova said she was hurting but still felt like a winner after going down guns blazing against Japan's Naomi Osaka Saturday in an epic clash for the Australian Open crown.

The Czech two-time Wimbledon champion overcame incredible odds to even play tennis again after a knife attack damaged her racquet hand in late 2016.

Doctors had given her only a 10 percent chance of returning to the sport and Kvitova said reaching the final of the season-opening Grand Slam was an achievement in itself.

"It's hurting a lot today, I wanted to win and have the trophy," the 28-year-old said after the 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-4 defeat.

"But I think I already won two years ago. So for me, it's crazy. I can hardly believe that I just played in a Grand Slam final again. "I've been through many, many things, not really great ones."

The Czech said she had her chances against Osaka and the 2hr 27min final hinged on a few key moments.

She was unable to convert five break points in the first set but forced a tie-break, only for Osaka to run away with it.

Kvitova then summoned her renowned fighting spirit to survive three championship points as she trailed 3-5 in the second, forcing a decider.

(Source: France 24)

Osaka beats Kvitova to win Australian Open and become new world number one

Japan's Naomi Osaka battled past Czech eighth seed Petra Kvitova 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-4 to win her first Australian Open crown Saturday and become the new world number one.

The fourth seed and US Open champion made it two Grand Slam titles in a row after a see-sawing 2hr 27min match.

The hard-fought victory made Osaka the first Asian, male or female, to hold the world's top ranking, taking over from Romania's Simona Halep.

A rattled Osaka almost blew her title hopes with one hand on the trophy when she failed to convert three championship points when up 5-3 in the second set.

The never-say-die Kvitova won four straight games to force a deciding set before Osaka finally edged ahead with a decisive break early in the third.

The Japanese youngster fell to one knee in celebration, head bowed, after her epic win as Melbourne Park erupted in thunderous cheers.

It was a marked contrast to her maiden Slam win last year, when Osaka cried as boos rang around Flushing Meadows following losing finalist Serena Williams' tirade at the umpire.

This time, Osaka wept tears of joy and smiled as she became the youngest woman to win back-to-back majors since Martina Hingis in 1998 and the youngest number one since Caroline Wozniacki in 2010.

Her performance confirms her status as



the leading light of tennis' new generation.

Predictions of a slugfest between two of the game's biggest hitters proved accurate as Kvitova hit 16 winners to Osaka's 14 in the first set.

The pair had never met before and Osaka initially struggled to unlock the lanky left-hander's serve, while Kvitova at times could not handle her opponent's powerful returns.

The Czech mixed up her game with drop shots and changes of pace but blew three break chances in a crunch sixth game.

Serving to stay in the set, Kvitova saved two

set points to force a tie-break, which Osaka ran away with 7-2 after finally appearing to get a read on Kvitova's serve.

It was the first set the Czech had conceded in the entire tournament.

Kvitova regrouped and kept her hopes alive with the first break of the match to go up 2-0 in the second after going after Osaka's second serve.

Osaka was frustrated but did not panic, earning three break-back points in the next game, the decisive one off a Kvitova double fault, which she conceded with a poorly hit drop shot to put the set back

on level terms.

Osaka, who went into the match with a record of winning 59 straight matches after taking the first set, broke again to take control as Kvitova's error rate climbed.

Osaka then brought up three championship points off Kvitova's serve but the Czech saved all of them, forcing Osaka to serve for the title.

Nerves took hold as Osaka conceded a break to make it 5-5, smashing a ball into the ground and putting her hands over her ears.

She was rattled further after losing a challenge in the next, bringing up break point with a cross-court backhand but was unable to stop Kvitova holding.

The Czech then broke again to seize momentum with her fourth straight game, claiming the set as Osaka left the court with a towel draped over her head.

She regained her cool and came out firing in the third, backing herself and clipping a clean backhand winner after another Kvitova double fault brought up break point in the third game.

She still had to see off a Kvitova break opportunity in the next but held comfortably, her mental demons put to bed.

Kvitova would not surrender, saving three break points before again forcing Osaka to serve it out. Osaka managed it on the second attempt for a famous victory.

(Source: AFP)

Two-time skating champ Gold tells of crushing battle with depression



Two-time US figure skating champion Gracie Gold said in a New York Times interview published Friday that she battled suicidal thoughts as she struggled with depression that has disrupted her life and career.

"I was suicidal for months," Gold told the Times, describing dark days when she was living in Detroit three years after a sparkling 2014 season brought her to the attention of the skating world.

"If I had just continued the way I was in Detroit, I'd probably be dead," said Gold, who was shutting out her family and gorging on food after years of limiting her calories.

Gold, 23, appeared to have a bright future on ice when she won a 2014 Olympic team bronze medal and finished fourth in the individual women's event.

But her bid to make the 2018 Games evaporated amid her mental health troubles, and her attempt to return to the sport last November saw her finish 10th in the short program before withdrawing from the free skate at a Grand Prix event in Russia.

She is not competing this week in the 2019 US championships in Detroit.

Gold recalled developing concerns about

her weight before the 2014 Olympics that prompted her to drastically cut her calorie intake.

"The more weight I lost, the quicker and faster I felt on the ice," said Gold, who shrugged off her mother's concerns that she was too thin.

After earning a second national title, she was devastated to finish out of the medals at the 2016 World Championships and at a US team training camp that year teammate Ashley Wagner realized Gold was struggling.

It would be another year before Gold "snapped" at another training camp and was finally persuaded to enter an in-patient treatment program for eating disorders, with US Figure Skating covering the cost.

Now, Gold told the Times, she is training again, and getting into shape with a healthier diet and a new coach.

She said her return to the sport feels like a new beginning, describing the sense of accomplishment she felt when she completed a clean triple Lutz.

"You forget how magical those moments are," Gold said.

(Source: Eurosport)

Football agent who booked Emiliano Sala flight reveals text messages



Football agent Willie McKay says he arranged the flight that missing Cardiff City striker Emiliano Sala took from Nantes, but was not involved in selecting the plane or pilot. The search for Argentine Sala, 28, and 59-year-old pilot David Ibbotson was called off on Thursday.

Their plane disappeared from radar as they flew over the English Channel on their way to Cardiff on Monday night.

McKay has revealed text messages with Sala discussing flight arrangements.

One of McKay's sons, Mark, was the agent acting for Nantes in the £15m transfer that made Sala Cardiff's record signing earlier in January.

In the text exchange released to the BBC by McKay, his other son, Jack - who is a Cardiff player - offers to arrange the private flight for free so Sala could return to Nantes to pick up his belongings and say goodbye to former team-mates at the Ligue 1 club.

McKay said both Mark and Jack had a conversation with Sala about the difficulties of flying to the French city by commercial airline.

He also says a Cardiff player liaison

official knew of the arrangements that were made. The BBC has approached the Premier League club for comment.

McKay said: "With regards to the booking of the flight we contacted Mr David Henderson, who has flown us and many of our players all over Europe on countless occasions.

"We had no involvement in selecting a plane or a pilot and we also wish to make clear again we do not own the plane that Emiliano flew on."

The agent also said he has met Sala's friends and family to "give them an understanding of how Emiliano came to be on that plane".

He added: "The tragic events that have unfolded have shocked us all."

The Air Accidents Investigation Branch has started an investigation which will look at "all operational aspects," including licensing and flight plans.

Cardiff have started an internal inquiry to try to establish the events leading up to the flight, but a senior source has denied reports the club is considering a multi-million pound negligence lawsuit over the incident.

(Source: BBC)

'The matches you live for': Greatest rivals Djokovic, Nadal square off

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal will renew the "greatest rivalry" in modern tennis when they collide in a mouth-watering 107th Australian Open final on Sunday.

The top two players in the world have 31 Grand Slam titles between them and each can claim another slice of history with victory.

Djokovic, 31, will lift a record seventh Norman Brookes Trophy with a win while Nadal, 32, will become the first man in the Open Era to win all four Grand Slams twice if he adds to his 2009 Melbourne Park crown.

Nadal's 18th Grand Slam title would see him close the gap on Federer's 20 at the top of the all-time list and Djokovic's 15th would give him sole ownership of third place ahead of Pete Sampras.

"These are the kind of matches that you live for: finals of Slams, playing the greatest rivals at their best," said Djokovic after dismantling Lucas Pouille 6-0, 6-2, 6-2 in a lopsided 83 minutes in Friday's semi-final.

■ **'What more can you ask for?'**

"What more can you ask for? This is where you want to be." It will be the 53rd meeting two giants of the games and their eighth in the final of a Grand Slam.

Djokovic is a whisker ahead with 27 victories to Nadal's 25. But the Spaniard has the edge in Grand Slam finals 4-3 and has won the last three.

In all Grand Slam meetings, Nadal has a clear advantage with a 9-5 win-loss record.

No two men have met more often in the Open Era, and



no pair have pushed one another harder or further.

Their only previous final in Australia, in 2012, developed into a record-breaking 5hr 53min slugfest.

It stands as the longest final in Grand Slam history -- some say the greatest -- and it left the pair barely able to stand at the trophy ceremony after an exhausted Djokovic staggered over the line 7-5 in the final set.

■ **'The greatest rival'**

"Nadal has historically throughout my life and career been the greatest rival that I ever played against, on all the surfaces," Djokovic said.

"I had some disappointing moments where I lost to him. I think I've lost to him nine times so far in the Grand Slams. I lost some tough matches. I won also some great matches.

"Those kind of encounters have also made me the player I am today."

Both are back in the final after injury-plagued seasons in 2018.

Djokovic was hampered by an elbow that needed surgery after being bundled out of Melbourne in the last 16.

Nadal retired injured in both Australian and US Opens and had an operation on his ankle in November.

The Spaniard, who had not played a competitive match since the US Open before arriving in Melbourne, has rampaged through the draw without losing a game on his remodelled serve. He has not dropped a set.

■ **I just have to think my way'**

Nadal said his final preparation would focus on his own game, which so far in Australia has been untouchable

"I just have to think my way. I have to keep doing the things that I am doing," he said after swatting aside Stefanos Tsitsipas, one of the game's brightest prospects, 6-2, 6-4, 6-0 in 106 minutes of destruction in the last four on Thursday.

"That's my feeling, just keep playing the way that I am playing and, let's see, expect to have one of those special days."

Djokovic was only competitive during the second half of 2018, winning Wimbledon and the US Open on the way to reclaiming the number one ranking.

He will retain top spot whatever Sunday's result but knows how much is riding on the final.

(Source: AFP)



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team striker Karim Ansarifard lauded Team Melli for impressive run in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup but said that the best is yet to come.

Team Melli have secured a place in the Asian Cup semi-finals after defeating China 3-0 on Thursday.

Nottingham Forest forward Ansarifard came off the bench to score in stoppage time.

“First, I have to say Team Melli have character, personality and good team spirit. We defeated China 3-0, a team who have style and have improved a lot in the recent years. They worked under guidance a great coach like Marcello Lippi for a couple of years,” Ansarifard said.

“Iran players did their best against China and we dedicate this victory to our people. We will do our best to make them proud of us, that’s why we are here,” he added.

“Team Melli have two more finals ahead and I hope we can win them. The Iranian players are going to make the people happy in each match. I am very happy to play a small role in these wins,” the former Persepolis striker went on to say.

Team Melli will meet Japan at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain on Monday.

“Iran will do their best performance against Japan. It’s our most important match in the competition but our best is yet to come. Team Melli have not won the trophy for 43 years and it will give the players extra motivation to bring an end to our title drought,” Ansarifard added.

The best is yet to come: Karim Ansarifard



Australian ref Chris Beath appointed for Iran vs Japan match



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Australian referee Christopher James Beath will referee Iran’s clash with Japan in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup semi-finals, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Referees Committee confirmed.

Iran and Japan match will be Beath’s third contests in the UAE as the 34-year-old referee has officiated Bahrain vs Thailand and Lebanon vs North Korea matches so far.

Team Melli will meet Japan at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain on Monday.

Beath was added to the FIFA International Referees List in 2011, serving as a referee for matches including the Kirin

Challenge Cup contest between Japan and Iceland.

In 2015, Beath was involved in an exchange program where he refereed in the J-League.

On 4 April 2017, Chris Beath was appointed as one of the inaugural Video assistant referee (VAR’s) in the Hyundai A-League, the first top-tier football league in the world to implement the technology.

Beath also officiated the opening match of the 2018 AFC U23 Championship held in China.

Also, César Arturo Ramos Palazuelos has been chosen to officiate the match between the UAE and Qatar in another semifinals.

Sardar Azmoun among Asian Cup quarterfinals top five



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team forward Sardar Azmoun has been picked among the five best performers from the quarterfinals of AFC Asian Cup 2019.

With four teams remaining in the competition, it is Iran who continues to look the favorite to win the Asian Cup following its comprehensive 3-0 victory over China.

And, with a player of Sardar Azmoun’s ilk leading the line, it is not difficult to see why Team Melli has been doing so well, Fox Sports Asia wrote.

He scored a goal for Iran national football team in 3-0 win over China on

Thursday. He also set up Mehdi Taremi for the Team Melli’s first goal.

Sardar Azmoun has scored four goals for Iran so far.

He was on target in the match against Yemen in Iran’s opener, where Team Melli won the match 5-0.

He also scored twice against Vietnam, however failed to score against Iraq and Oman.

Japan’s Ritsu Doan, Nguyen Cong Phuong from Vietnam, Boualem Khoukhi from Qatar and Emirati Fares Juma are four other players who have been picked as the competition’s best performers.

Jahanbakhsh determined to create history with Iran

Alireza Jahanbakhsh has set his sights on creating history after the Brighton & Hove Albion winger helped Iran advance to the semifinals of the AFC Asian Cup for the first time in a generation.

The Iranians will take on Japan in their first semi-final appearance since 2004 as Team Melli continue their quest to secure a first AFC Asian Cup title since the last of the country’s three consecutive crowns was won back in 1976.

Goals from Mehdi Taremi, Sardar Azmoun and Karim Ansarifard saw off China PR in the quarter-finals on Thursday evening in Abu Dhabi, and Jahanbakhsh is confident he and his teammates can continue their impressive run.

“It’s a great feeling for us,” said Jahanbakhsh, who missed his team’s first two games due to injury. “It’s a dream for us to make it as far as possible in the Asian Cup.”

“We know we have got a very good team and we’ve got the support of all the Iranian people back home and all Iranians around the world and that give us even more strength to have a good performance.”

“On one side we always know that the expectation is always high for us because we have good quality players and a mix of experienced and young players and that gives us an even better team.

“As our coach always says, we do everything as a team.



We don’t have stars. These are the reasons we have a better team and hopefully we can go further. Japan are a very good side, we have to get ready for the next game but hopefully we can make history.”

China presented little resistance in the countries’ last eight meeting, with Iran racing into a two-goal lead by the 31st minute before Ansarifard added the third late in the game for Carlos Queiroz’s side, who have yet to concede in their five games at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

are yet to concede a goal, are the key reason for the side’s success.

“It’s a great feeling but it’s thanks to the boys’ efforts,” he said. “They did not concede a single goal so I’ve got to score up front in order for them to feel comfortable at the back.”

The exploits of Ali and his teammates have the nation on the verge of a first major international final at senior level, but - with Qatar’s 2018 AFC U-23 Championship semi-final defeat perhaps fresh in his mind - the forward’s confidence is tempered by a sense of readiness.

“We are one of the best four teams in Asia at this very second, (but) we respect



all teams and will be ready.”

(Source: the-afc)

Esmael Goncalves joins Esteghlal FC

MNA — Bissau-Guinean striker Esmael Goncalves has signed a 1.5-year contract with Tehran-based Esteghlal football club.

According to Amirhossein Fathi, the caretaker of the Iranian club, Goncalves has departed for Turkey and will join the team in Tehran on Monday.



No detail about the fee of the contract has been published yet.

Also called ‘Isma’, the 27-year-old winger and striker has played for various teams during his senior career, including Nice, Apoel, Veria, Al-Ettifaq, and Pakhtakor Tashkent.

In his international career Isma has represented Portugal in U17 level but made his debut for the senior team of Guinea-Bissau in March 2018.

Esteghlal rank fifth at Iran Professional League with 25 points, six points behind leaders Sepahan.

The team are also drawn along Al-Duhail, Al-Hilal, and Al-Ain in the 2019 AFC Champions League in the competition’s ‘group of death’.

Esteghlal have lacked a ‘killer’ striker in the previous season and fans hope that Isma could be a good replacement for the well-liked Mame Baba Thiam, who left the club in 2018 after an amazing half-season in which he scored 12 goals in 13 appearances.

Colombia waits for Carlos Queiroz, FCF President says

PLDC — Ramón Jesurun Franco, president of the Colombian Football Federation (FCF), publicly confirmed that they have negotiated with Iran current coach Carlos Queiroz.

On the sidelines of the CONMEBOL Copa America 2019 draw ceremony which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Jesurun Franco said they are waiting for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup ends to hire the Portuguese coach.

Colombia have been drawn in Group B of the competition along with Argentina, Paraguay and Qatar.

“We have been negotiating for the job with Carlos Queiroz. But at the moment, he leads Iran national football team in the Asian Cup and they have qualified for the semi-finals. We will wait for a couple of days to make decision about our new head coach,” Jesurun Franco said.

“We are looking forward for a four-year plan and will chooses our new head coach in February,” he added.

Japan’s tactic base on opponent: Hajime Moriyasu

Japanese national football team’s coach Hajime Moriyasu says their tactic will be based on their opponents.

The Samurai Blue defeated Vietnam 1-0 to book a place in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup semi-final.

Japan will meet Iran at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain on Monday. “The approach will be based on our opponents, but we have learnt so much in the Asian Cup,” Moriyasu said.

“We have had to defend, as was the case against Saudi Arabia (in the Round of 16) and sometimes, we dominated but couldn’t find a way through. These experiences will be used to prepare the team for the semi-final match against Iran,” he added.

“As a team, we earned another solid experience against Vietnam, and hopefully, it will be the same for the next match against Iran. As we have players with little international experience, it is important that they are exposed to tough matches on a big stage like the Asian Cup,” Moriyasu stated.

“Playing tough matches and winning in the knockout stage boosts confidence and also leads to the development of the players and team,” the Japan coach noted.

(Source: the-afc)

Rangers to retire Beltre’s No. 29

The Texas Rangers will retire the number of former third baseman Adrian Beltre with a ceremony planned in June, the team announced Friday.

Beltre, 39, announced his retirement in November following his 21st season in the majors, the last eight of which were spent with Texas.

He’ll become the fourth Ranger to have his number retired, joining pitcher Nolan Ryan (No. 34) in 1996, former manager Johnny Oates (26) in 2005, and catcher Ivan “Pudge” Rodriguez (7) in 2017. Ryan and Rodriguez are both Hall of Famers — Rodriguez was inducted the same day Beltre notched his 3,000th career hit, on July 30, 2017 — and Beltre figures to join them before long.

Beltre finished his career with 3,166 hits in 2,933 games, along with 477 homers, 1,707 RBIs (most ever among third basemen) and a .286 batting average. He earned four All-Star nods, including three in his first four years with the Rangers, and went to his only World Series with Texas in 2011.

Beltre ranks third all-time among players at his position in home runs and Wins Above Replacement (95.7). In the WAR metric, Beltre is 38th all-time, and he also won five Gold Gloves.

He signed with the Rangers in 2011 after one season with the Boston Red Sox. Beltre spent the first seven years of his career with the Dodgers before five years with the Mariners.

“This franchise and its fans have the privilege of witnessing the last eight years of Adrian Beltre’s Hall of Fame career on a daily basis,” co-chairman and managing partner Ray Davis said in a statement. “With 2019 being our final year at Globe Life Park in Arlington, we felt it was appropriate to retire Adrian’s number in the park where he excelled for so long.”

(Source: Reuters)

Almoez Ali: We want to keep going

Red-hot striker Almoez Ali wants Qatar to continue to reach new heights, after they stormed into the AFC Asian Cup semi-finals for the first time in history with a 1-0 win against Korea Republic on Friday.

A searing 78th-minute strike from Abdelaziz Hatim ultimately secured the win for Felix Sanchez’s side, to eliminate the 2015 runners-up and make it five consecutive wins in the competition.

Ali, a breakout star in the UAE with seven goals in five matches, revealed his delight at the achievement, and said he wants his side to make further history in the competition, starting with Tuesday’s semi-final against

host nation United Arab Emirates.

“We are proud of this,” said the Al Duhail forward. “We’ve got to thank the players for implementing all of the coach’s instructions.

“We hope not to stop at the semi-finals and continue beyond that.”

Seven goals in the group stage, including a stunning haul of four in Qatar’s 6-0 win against DPR Korea, means the 22-year-old is just one short of Ali Daei’s tournament record tally of eight, set when the UAE last hosted the AFC Asian Cup in 1996.

As a result, Ali’s matches have become keenly anticipated, but he says the exemplary performances of Qatar’s defensive unit, who

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Forsaking a need is easier than requesting it
from unworthy persons.

Imam Ali (AS)

Books from Western literature
published in Persian

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Three books from Western literature have recently been published in Persian in Iran.

German writer Patrick Suskind's play "The Double Bass", French author Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's novel "Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran" have both been rendered into Persian by Hossein Mansuri, while Mahin Tari is the translator of Italian writer and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's poem collection, "The Ashes of Gramsci".



Front covers of the Persian versions of "The Double Bass" (L), "Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran" (C) and "The Ashes of Gramsci".

"The Double Bass" is an extended monologue delivered by a double bass player, who speaks to the audience in his small sound-proofed apartment while drinking beer.

"Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran", which was adapted for the screen in 2003, is about an old Muslim man who gives paternal love to a Jewish boy, receiving love and respect in return.

All three books have been published by Hekmat-e Kalameh Publications in Tehran.

Fajr Film Festival to open
at Tehran Theater Complex
on Tuesday

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 37th Fajr Film Festival will open at the Tehran Theater Complex on Tuesday, the organizers announced on Saturday.

A poster for the 37th Fajr Film Festival.

The 37th Fajr Film Festival will take place in Tehran and several other Iranian cities from January 30 to February 11.

Iranian children's art
biennial to open today

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 7th National Biennial of Visual Arts, which is a showcase for artworks by Iranian children between 7 and 18, will open at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) in Tehran today.

The biennial will put on view paintings, calligraphy works, handicrafts, photos, dolls and pottery works by 300 children. "Life and Kindness" is the theme of the exhibition.

The artworks will be reviewed during the workshops that will be held by a number renowned artists and art experts on the sidelines of the exhibition.

The biennial will be running until February 11.

"Kupal" named best at
Arthouse Asia film festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Kazem Mollai's acclaimed drama "Kupal" has been selected as best fiction feature at Arthouse Asia, an annual festival of independent filmmakers in Kolkata, India.

Starring Levon Haftvan, the movie tells about a hunter and a taxidermist called "Dr. Ahmad Kupal". On the last day of the year, just moments before the arrival of the New Year, he faces an unexpected challenge.

The award for best fiction short went to "Naina" by Anushka Parashar from India, the organizers announced last Wednesday.

Italian filmmaker Giovanni Pellegrini's "Aquagranda in Crescendo" won the award for best documentary feature while "The Southern Right Whale" Kevin Zaouali from Argentina was picked as best documentary short.

"Mermaids and Rhinos" by Viktoria Traub from Hungary received the best animation short award, and the best video art award was presented to the co-production between Canada and India "Bhairava" by Marlene Millar.

"The Letting Go" by Tyler McElrath from the U.S. was named best music video and "Filamu" by Maud Clavier from France won the award for best virtual reality.

"Home" by Aleksander L. Nordsaas from Norway received the Golden Wood Award.

"Balance" by Iranian director Barzan Rostami was also screened in the short animation category.



Levon Haftvan acts in a scene from "Kupal" by Kazem Mollai.

Connection between ego, power, politics in spotlight at Tehran exhibit

A R T **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian and foreign artists is showcasing their latest works in Tehran in an exhibition that aims to put a spotlight on the relationship between ego, power and politics.

Asieh Salimian from Tehran and Katharina Maria Raab from Berlin are the curators of the exhibition "Power Struggle" underway at Mah-e Mehr Gallery, the gallery announced in a press release published on Saturday.

Negar Alemzadeh Gorji, Mostafa Chubtarash, Rima Eslamaslak, Mina Talai, Ali and Ramyar are the Iranian members of the group.

The exhibition also showcases works by Ahmed Kamel from Egypt, Mahi Binebine from Morocco, Elisabeth Masé from Switzerland, David Krippendorff from Germany

and Andrea Salvino from Italy.

Salimian said that the interaction between ego, power and politics is the concern of many artists in the world.

Maria Raab also pointed to Iran's rich art and history and said that contemporary art is flourishing in Iran but it is little known to the Western countries.

Raab also added that she wants to get to know more about the contemporary art of Iran and meet the artists in person.

The exhibition is being organized in collaboration with the Factory TT Berlin/Tehran and Aria Residency Zuker E.V.

The exhibit will be running until January 28 at the gallery located at 7 Nilufar Alley, off Africa Ave.



Curator Asieh Salimian (L) speaks to visitors the exhibition "Power Struggle" at Tehran's Mah-e Mehr Gallery on January 11, 2019. (Honaronline/Mojtaba Arabzadeh)

Abu Ghraib
prison abuse scandal
comes into focus at
Tehran theater

A R T **TEHRAN** — U.S. Army's Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal will be reviewed again in a play an Iranian troupe plans to perform at Tehran's Sarv Theater tonight.

Amanda Azad will direct the play "Mach, Abu Ghraib Prison" written by Hamed Eslami, the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense Theater Community announced in a press release published on Saturday.

Omid Khakdan, Mohammad-Javad Nateqi and Azad herself are the members of the cast of the play that will be on stage for 10 nights.

Located 20 miles west of Baghdad, Abu Ghraib prison was a U.S. Army detention center for captured Iraqis from 2003 to 2006. An investigation into the treatment of detainees at the prison was prompted by the discovery of graphic photos depicting guards abusing detainees in 2003.

Eleven U.S soldiers were convicted of crimes relating to the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Plastic finds second
life in Portuguese
street artist's work

PARIS (Reuters) — A lemur made of damaged car bumpers and bin lids. An owl made from plastic junk. Colorful animals have popped up in Paris as part of a new exhibition by Portuguese street artist Bordalo II, who aims to highlight the effect of waste on the environment.

The artist, whose real name is Artur Bordalo, is bringing his work to the French capital in the exhibit entitled "Accord de Paris" (Paris Agreement), a reference to the 2016 Paris Climate Change Agreement.

On display are brightly colored sculptures and art works depicting animals made with plastic waste Bordalo II finds in recycling centers, rubbish dumps and on the street.

"The idea is not to make something beautiful out of trash, it's to make people stop and look and understand what's behind it," he told Reuters.

He represents nature with sculptures of animals rather than plants, "because they are more similar (to) humans".

"We are destroying the world with our habits," he said.

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