



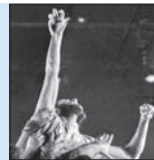
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## Shipping line established between Chabahar Port, 3 Indian ports

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — A shipping line was established between Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar and three Indian ports of Mumbai, Mundra, and Kandla, an official in Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) announced.

Behrouz Aghaei, the director general of Sistan-Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Department, said the line was set up by

the arrival of the first container ship to Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar on Sunday, IRNA reported.

The official said the ship will unload its 3,700 TEU cargo at Shahid Beheshti Port.

Having the loading and unloading capacity of 8.5 million tons of commodities per year, Shahid Beheshti Port can berth the ocean liners with the capacity of up to 100,000 tons, Aghaei noted.

## ‘If Israel starts a war it will lead to recapture of occupied lands’

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The deputy head of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps has said any fresh malign move by Israel against Iran will be responded by the recapture of the occupied lands from the Zionist regime.

“We announce that if Israel takes any action to wage a war against us, that war will definitely be the one to bring about its

elimination and the freeing of the occupied (Palestinian) territories,” Brigadier General Hossein Salami said on Monday, Fars reported.

“Our strategy is the elimination of Israel from the world's political geography. And it seems Israel is doing these malign acts to bring itself closer to that reality,” he added.

## Bahrain’s Supreme Court upholds Sheikh Ali Salman’s life sentence

Bahrain's highest court has upheld life sentences against three opposition leaders, including top cleric Sheikh Ali Salman, on charges of spying for Qatar, a judicial source said Monday.

Al-Wefaq secretary-general Salman and two senior al-Wefaq leaders Sheikh Hassan Sultan and Ali Alaswad were sentenced to life imprisonment in November. The verdicts issued Monday are final and

cannot be appealed.

The 53-year-old Salman was convicted in November of “communicating with Qatari officials... to overthrow constitutional order,” a ruling rights groups have denounced as a travesty of justice.

The London-based human rights group Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said the verdict marked the end of a “long, flawed trial.” ➔13



### PERSPECTIVE

**Heshmatollah Rahnama**  
Latin American expert

## U.S. tyranny moves against Venezuela’s elected government

The gravity of the declaration of the coup d'etat against Maduro is sobering. The coup strategy integrates different variables: international pressure for recognition of the parallel government and chaos and death inside the country.

The current chain of events seems to have been planned out step-by-step: the attempted theft of weapons by a group of members of the Bolivarian National Guard on the morning of January 21, followed by incidents of violence concentrated in the west of Caracas; U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence's video supporting Juan Guaidó and calling for demonstrations on January 23; the swearing-in of Guaidó; U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Guaidó a few minutes later; ongoing incidents of violence; the convening of a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) to seek recognition of the parallel government; the U.S. \$20 million announced by Pence for “humanitarian aid”; and yet more programmed violence.

Not everything went as planned. Regarding the international front, the attempt to get the OAS to recognise Guaidó as president failed, with only 16 votes out of 34. This is not a new failure: the Lima Group (formed in 2017 by right-wing Latin American governments), now weakened by the Mexican government's anti-interventionist stance, emerged out of a similar situation.

At the extraordinary session of the Security Council, which was requested by the United States, U.S. delegates, their allies in the Lima Group and part of the European Union (EU) did not achieve their goals at the Security Council, while most other countries demanded respect for the sovereignty of Venezuela. Nineteen of the 35 countries rejected Venezuelan foreign intervention.

Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said at the UN Security Council: “They cannot lead us to a civil war in Venezuela.”

He further wondered why the U.S. was not judged by members of the UN Security Council, and added that the U.S. attempt to carry out the coup d'etat in Venezuela is obvious and this should be condemned by this organization. ➔7

## Europe’s vague future

By Hanif Ghaffari

**TEHRAN** — The EU does not have a quiet time! The activity of the nationalist and extremist groups and movements in Europe has created a lot of concerns among the leaders of the European Union. In such a situation, people like the French President and German Chancellor are worried about the future of the eurozone and the European Union. This concern increases over time. The occurrence of a variety of security, political, economic and social crises has created many challenges in the European Union and the eurozone.

The emergence of these challenges has led to a sharp decline in the popularity of traditional parties in Europe. In such a way, nationalist parties have been able to increase their popularity

with the public. Which side are the European Union and the eurozone really heading to? Will the future of Europe finally be clear these are the questions that concern the mentally ill, such as Merkel and Macron?

Chancellor of Germany is still thinking of building a new Europe! Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron both speak of a Europe which can withstand nationalism and far right movements. But the realization of this common dream seems not so easy! Today extremism have spread all over the European countries, and their power is increasing day by day.

Emmanuel Macron has recently emphasized the need for building a stronger Europe! The French president insisted that his “historic

reconstruction of Europe and the Eurozone”, designed to reconcile the EU with disgruntled citizens after a decade of financial and immigration problems, is urgent, not least to stem rising far-right parties. But he cannot move without Germany's agreement.

However, we should not forget that the French President and German Chancellor have little opportunity to face the internal crises of Europe! It should not be forgotten that the popularity of the French president has drastically fallen in recent days, following the increase in public discontent France. And in Germany, Angela Merkel's coalition government is not well placed, and its popularity had a remarkable decrease during the recent months. ➔13

## UN envoy says truce holding after 184 Saudi-led violations

Yemen has accused Saudi Arabia and its allies of repeatedly violating a ceasefire in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, reached in the Swedish capital Stockholm last month.

Yemen's armed forces spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Sare'e said Monday that Saudi-led forces had violated the ceasefire 184 times over a period of 48 hours.

He accused Saudi mercenary forces of committing further crimes against the people of Yemen in clear violation of their obligations under the Stockholm agreement.

Sare'e told Saba news agency that the forces had carried out 119 artillery attacks, fired four missiles and conducted 44 operations against residential neighborhoods, farms and army sites.

Saudi warplanes, he said, had staged 36 airstrikes across Yemen, spanning the Sa'ada province in north to Hajjah province in the northwest.

The Yemeni military official said the United Nations should hold the Riyadh regime and its mercenaries fully responsible for their failure to abide by the ceasefire.

Earlier this month, UN special envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths met Mohammed Ali al-Houthi who pledged that the Supreme Revolutionary Committee under his order will fully observe the ceasefire.

■ **Yemen mounts retaliatory attacks**  
In response to the Saudi escalation, Sare'e confirmed that the Yemeni army and the popular

committees had carried out separate operations against mercenary sites in different battlegrounds, killing and injuring dozens of them.

Griffith denies ceasefire broken

In an interview published by Asharq Al-Awsat on Monday, Griffith insisted that the ceasefire was still in place.

“Our assessment is that the ceasefire in Hudaydah is generally holding, despite any security incidents that have been taking place,” he told the Saudi-owned newspaper via email.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched the Hudaydah offensive in June 2018 but have been facing strong resistance from Yemeni armed forces — led by the Houthis — as well as the city's residents. ➔13



© Tehran Times/Majid Haghdoust

## Ceremony held to honor volunteer physicians

A ceremony to pay homage to volunteer physicians was held in Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran on Monday.

Hadi Ayyazi, deputy health minister, said during the ceremony that 243 groups of volunteer physicians are offering services nationwide.

Volunteer physicians played a significant role during the 8-year Iran-Iraq war in 1980s and even after war in tragic incidents such as Kermanshah earthquake (November 12, 2017), he highlighted.



### ARTICLE

**Martin Love**  
Political analyst from North Carolina

## Trump may get his personal donnybrook, but in Venezuela

It appears that Trump (and now especially with his appointments of some of the worst of the Zionist Neocons who planned decades ago the march to destroy polities that did not exactly kowtow to U.S. demands and submit to the “Empire of Chaos”) has been searching for a signature interference and possibly a war to assert U.S. hegemony.

Perhaps Trump and minions have found their primary target now, which is the lowest hanging and geographically nearest fruit — resource rich Venezuela — given the political and economic problems faced by Nicolas Maduro, which in fact are largely the result of U.S. economic and other sanctions on the proponents of the so-called “Bolivarian Revolution”.

What would be Trump's signature war many have asked? All his predecessors in the White House had at least one, the most damaging of which to date was the Iraq War, with Libya and Syria not far behind. Might it be North Korea? Nah, probably because the Norks had developed a nuclear deterrence and the means to deliver nuclear bombs, at least in East Asia if not farther out to Hawaii and California, and anyway Kim Jong Un has an arresting and even jovial personality that Trump seemed to like, and Kim has proven to be rather smart in seeking détente or better relations with the other half of the Korean peninsula in the south.

Might it be a ramp up of U.S. hostilities towards Syria? Nah, because with the help of the Russians and Iran and also Hezbollah, and the bravery of the Syrian army, popular Assad managed to drive out or kill most of the mercenary terrorists funded by the U.S. and the Saudis.

But what about Iran? The jury is still out on a U.S. or Israeli military strike on Iran outside of Syria. The U.S. has, however, attacked Iran with the cancellation of U.S. participation in the JCPOA and harsh economic sanctions aiming to turn Iranians against the Islamic Republic and its leaders. ➔7



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Top judge: The Islamic Republic introduced a new model of democracy

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Islamic Republic has introduced a new model of democracy to the world, Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani has said, days before the anniversary of the 40th victory of the Islamic Revolution.

“The resistance gained from a revolutionary faith and divine values has opened the path toward perfection for our people,” said Amoli Larijani, addressing top Judiciary officials.

He also said the victory of the Islamic Revolution is a symbol of the Iranian nation's resistance against oppression and hegemony, ISNA reported.

“Wherever the people believed in themselves, they managed to reach the zenith of progress and honor,” he emphasized.



Syrian PM welcomes Jahangiri

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri arrived in Damascus on Monday afternoon. He was welcomed by Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis.

The two top executive officials were scheduled to discuss reconstruction efforts in Syria among other things.

During his two-day visit, Jahangiri is going to hold talks with President Bashar al-Assad and other senior Syrian officials.

Jahangiri and the Syrian officials are set to explore more avenues for widening cooperation in various fields of politics, economy and culture.

He plans to attend Iran-Syria joint cooperation commission and participate at Iran-Syria trade forum.



IRGC rejects Netanyahu's claims of targeting Iranian bases in Syria

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on Monday rejected the Israeli prime minister's claims of attacking Iranian bases in Syria as completely “baseless” and “false”.

Quoting a Syrian opposition group, the Jerusalem Post reported on January 22 that 12 IRGC soldiers were killed in an Israeli airstrikes on Damascus's international airport.

“If the Guards had had 12 casualties, there should have been funerals in Iran for them over the past 20 days,” IRGC spokesman Ramazan Sharif said, Mehr reported.

Earlier this month, Netanyahu claimed Israeli forces had attacked Iranian weapons warehouses in Syria.

“We worked with impressive success to block Iran's military entrenchment in Syria,” he said, claiming that the Israeli military had struck Iranian and Hezbollah targets “hundreds of times”.



Rouhani picks Saeed Namaki as new health minister

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — In a letter submitted to the parliament on Monday, President Hassan Rouhani named Saeed Namaki as the new health minister, ISNA reported on Monday.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said the MPs should study the biography and plans of Namaki, before he appears in the parliament for vote of confidence next week.

Based on parliamentary regulations, the lawmakers will have one week to study the new candidate's qualifications.

Rouhani appointed Namaki as acting health minister early in January, after he accepted the resignation of Health Minister Hassan Ghazizadeh.



Network disrupting plastic market destroyed

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Intelligence forces have disbanded an organized network that has been disrupting the plastic industry market in the country over the past three years, Tasnim reported on Monday.

Forces with the Intelligence Ministry in the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan managed to identify and disband the network after a series of complicated intelligence operations.

By forming cooperative companies, members of the network used to sell the raw material allotment of factories to dealers, forcing the manufacturers to purchase the basic materials for their production from the black market at an exorbitant cost.



Iran, Turkmenistan hold 14th consular meeting

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iran and Turkmenistan held their 14th consular meeting to facilitate border cooperation.

The meeting was co-chaired by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Panahi Azar and his Turkmen counterpart Vafa Hajiov. According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry's public relations office, the meeting was held on Sunday.

Both sides emphasized implementation of previous agreements, facilitation of visa issuance, prisoners' rights, judicial documents, police cooperation as well as border and customs issues.

Iranian and Turkmen diplomats also signed a memorandum of understanding on joint consular meeting.

# Tehran: U.S. after dividing Iran and Europe through Warsaw summit

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Foreign Ministry said on Monday that the U.S. aims to create division between Iran and some European countries by holding an anti-Iran summit in Warsaw, Poland, next month.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi made the remarks during his bi-weekly press conference.

“This is an American measure with specific aims,” he said, adding that Poland's deputy foreign minister visited Tehran to discuss the issue, and that Tehran will monitor the summit with “pessimism”.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said earlier this month that the meeting would “focus on Middle East stability and peace and freedom and security here in this region, and that includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence.”

On the UK foreign secretary's plan to attend the summit, Qassemi said Iran does not meddle in what summits the British diplomat attends, but will watch the Warsaw summit closely because it



attaches importance to the conduct of other countries in the summit.

Answering a question about the prospects of the European Union's ex-

## Iran has isolated U.S., Zarif says

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that the 2015 nuclear deal, internationally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has isolated the U.S. and put it in a “complicated situation”.

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the JCPOA has been severely criticized even by Washington's closes allies in Europe. Only Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE welcomed Trump's exit from the international agreement.

“Given the national interests, we believe that the best decision has been taken. This decision has put the U.S. in a complicated situation in which it is making every effort to get out of isolation,” Zarif told an open session of the parliament.

The United States violated international law by pulling out from the nuclear agreement which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Zarif noted that the Trump administration respects no international law.

Zarif also criticized remarks by MP Ali Adyani from the Qa'emshahr constituency who compared the JCPOA to the Treaty of Turkmenchay.

The Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed by Iran and Russia in 1828 based on which Iran conceded large



swathes of territory to Russia.

“Why do not you realize that it is Trump who should call the JCPOA [the Treaty of] Turkmenchay and not you? Do not sell the country's achievements short. These are not achievements of diplomacy, rather achievements of the people's resistance. The people who have brought Trump to knees many times,” Zarif remarked.

Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 2015 nuclear deal in May and ordered sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on

August 6 and the second round, which targets Iran's oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

The Trump administration has threatened to sanction any country that do business with Iran.

In an interview with the European Council on Foreign Relations published on January 11, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said that the United States cannot impose its policies on the 28-nation bloc's legitimate trade relations with Iran.

The EU was expected to unveil its special payment mechanism, known as the SPV, for trade with Iran on Monday.

■ ‘UAE has adopted unacceptable approach toward Iran’

Foreign Minister Zarif also said that officials in Abu Dhabi have adopted an “unacceptable approach” toward Iranian businesses in the United Arab Emirates.

However, Zarif said, Iran is seeking to find “alternative methods and countries” for economic relations.

“A number of Iranian businessmen and money exchange agents faced many problems and many of them have relocated to other countries that have better relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and we supported them,” he said.

Reportedly, UAE-based Iranian businesses have moved to Qatar and Oman in recent years.

## Iran to consider offensive tactics against threats: military advisor

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military aide to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Monday that Iran will consider “offensive” approach if enemies pose threats against the country.

He told IRNA that the armed forces are flexing their muscles how to respond to military threats both in terms of defense and attack.

Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, the Armed Forces chief of staff,



also said on Sunday that Iran may adopt an offensive approach to protect its national interests.

“To protect national interests, territorial integrity and independence, our major strategies are based on defense; however, this does not mean that we simply act defensively and passively in tactical and operational approaches,” he said on the sidelines of a ceremony.

The senior general reiterated Iran's

long-held position that Tehran does not seek to attack any country, yet it will not hesitate to respond strongly if the country's security is put at risk.

“We do not intend any aggression against other countries, however, we may adopt offensive approach to protect our national interests. Iran would not sit idly by if anyone seeks to take aggression against us and endanger the country's security,” Baqeri asserted.

## Iraq must move away from economic reliance on Iran: British official

Iraq must wean itself off economic reliance on Iran and become more energy self-sufficient, Britain's foreign office minister for the Middle East said on Sunday.

Alistair Burt visited Iraq after a flurry of high-profile diplomacy in Baghdad this month that followed U.S. President Donald Trump's surprise announcement he was pulling American troops out of Syria.

U.S. allies claim the withdrawal, even if it proceeds more slowly than initially planned, will embolden Iran, whose influence has grown in Iraq and Syria in recent years.

Washington hopes to counter Iranian influence through renewed sanctions, and has pressured Iraq to halt imports of Iranian gas.

“To expect Iran to have no influence in Iraq is fanciful,” Burt said in an interview with Reuters at the British Embassy in Baghdad.

“What is important is that Iraq finds the opportunity to follow its own future in terms of foreign relations and that its economy is strong, and isn't reliant on Iran.”



Burt said Iraq must convert oil resources to become more self-sufficient. “The sooner all its oil wealth can come on stream and can capture all the energy that is sometimes not used as effectively as possible ... the

better,” he said.

Iraq's oil export capacity is nearly 5 million barrels per day, although it is pumping below capacity in line with an OPEC agreement to reduce production to stabilize prices. Washington hopes it can reduce its gas flaring to satisfy domestic energy needs and rely less on Iranian power imports.

Burt said there were ideas for more power projects in Iraq, without elaborating.

He doubted that a military escalation between the United States and Iran in Iraq or Syria was imminent, but warned of “confrontation which might occur should there be a miscalculation.”

Tension has ramped up between Washington's chief regional ally Israel, and Iran and its allies in Syria and Iraq in recent weeks. Israel struck what it claimed were Iranian targets near Damascus on Monday. Ramazan Sharif, an official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, however, on Monday denied that the alleged targets belonged to Iran.

## Araqchi meets Amano in Vienna

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi met with International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano in Vienna on Monday.

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, the two discussed Iran's cooperation with the IAEA under the 2015 nuclear accord, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Araqchi was on his first leg of a European tour, with Austria, Slovakia, and Bulgaria on agenda.

According to the IRIB, Araqchi was slated to meet with his counterparts, foreign

ministers, and other officials during his trip to these countries.

Earlier the day, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi dismissed speculation that Araqchi's trip had anything to do with a European financial mechanism that is aimed at bypassing U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Called the special purpose vehicle (SPV), the system was set to be registered on Monday.

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

The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6, and the second round, which targets Iran's oil exports and banks, were imposed on November 4.





# Daesh in Syria confined to four square kilometers

## Arab League calls for Syrian integrity, peaceful solution to crisis

By staff & agencies

The once-sprawling "caliphate" of Daesh (ISIL) has been reduced to a four-square-kilometer pocket of territory in eastern Syria, a senior Kurdish commander said Monday.

With support from a U.S.-led military coalition, the Syrian Democratic Forces are in the final stages of an assault launched more than four months ago against the militants' last bastion.

A dwindling number of Daesh militants are now defending only a handful of hamlets in the Euphrates Valley, SDF commander Heval Roni said.

"Geographically speaking, there are only four square kilometers left under Daesh control, stretching from Baghouz to the Iraqi border," he told AFP in the Baghouz area.

"There are some high-ranking Daesh leaders among them... but we don't know who exactly," said Roni, who heads SDF operations in the area.

The commander said he had no information about Daesh supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who is believed to still be alive and is the world's most wanted man.

In an interview to AFP last week, the top commander of the SDF said that the battle was winding up but that his forces would need about a month to assert full control over the area and declare victory.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 1,200 militants



and around half as many SDF fighters have been killed since the start of the offensive on September 10.

The Britain-based activist group says more than 400 civilians have also perished, many of them killed by coalition airstrikes.

### Arab League calls for Syrian integrity

Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit has stressed the need for maintaining Syria's territorial integrity against foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorist groups, and a peaceful settlement to the conflict there.

During a meeting with the United Nations' new envoy to Syria, Geir Pedersen, in the Egyptian capital city of Cairo on Sunday, Aboul Gheit said the solution to the conflict in Syria must meet the aspirations of all Syrians while preserving unity in the country and region.

He went on to say that his 22-member regional organization's stance vis-à-vis the crisis is in line with the related UN Security Council resolutions, saying the conflict "is considered first and foremost an Arab issue."

The high-ranking Arab diplomat then

underlined the need for measures to stop regional and international meddling in Syria, saying such interventions have had negative repercussions on the course of the conflict settlement.

Aboul Gheit also called for the complete elimination of terrorism from the Syrian soil.

Pedersen, for his part, briefed the Arab League chief on the most important results of his initial contacts with the parties concerned with the crisis in Syria ever since he took office earlier this year.

On Saturday, Tunisian Foreign Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui called on the Arab League to restore Syria's membership, saying the "natural place" of the country is within the 22-member regional organization.

"Syria is an Arab state, and its natural place is within the Arab League," Jhinaoui said during a news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Tunis.

"The question of Syria returning to the Arab League does not depend on Tunisia but on the Arab League," he noted, adding, "The foreign ministers (of member states) will decide on this subject."

Tunisia is scheduled to host the 30th annual summit of the Arab League in March.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011, citing alleged crackdown by Damascus on opposition protests. Syria denounced the move as "illegal and a violation of the organization's charter."

## Venezuela's Guaido calls for new protests



Juan Guaido, the Venezuelan opposition leader and self-proclaimed president, on Monday called for new street demonstrations as pressure intensified on President Nicolas Maduro and the crisis-stricken OPEC nation.

Countries around the world have recognized Guaido as Venezuela's rightful leader, and the United States vowed to starve Maduro's administration of oil revenue after he was sworn in Jan. 10 for a second term that was widely dubbed illegitimate.

Maduro says the United States is promoting a coup against him and promised to stay in office, backed by Russia and China, which have bankrolled his government and fought off efforts to have his government disavowed by the United Nations.

Guaido said opposition sympathizers should take to the streets Wednesday to pass out copies of a pamphlet proposing amnesty that would give some legal protection to members of the military in hopes they will turn against Maduro.

"We must remain united as active agents of change in every corner of the country," Guaido tweeted on Monday. "We're doing well, very well, Venezuela!"

On Sunday, Israel and Australia joined countries backing the 35-year-old Guaido,

and U.S. President Donald Trump said his government had accepted Venezuelan opposition figure Carlos Alfredo Vecchio as a diplomatic representative to the United States.

Guaido took advantage of a major street demonstration on Jan. 23 to swear himself in as the country's rightful leader, accusing Maduro of usurping power following a disputed 2018 re-election that countries around the world described as a fraud.

Guaido is asking for help in getting control of the Venezuelan government's offshore assets.

In recent days, he urged British Prime Minister Theresa May and Bank of England Governor Mark Carney to block Maduro's government from collecting more than \$1 billion in gold held by the Bank of England.

Venezuela's once-buoyant socialist economic system has imploded from corruption and mismanagement since the collapse of world oil prices in 2014, pushing inflation to almost 2 million percent and driving millions of Venezuelans to neighboring countries.

Maduro says his government is the victim of an "economic war" led by his political adversaries with the help of Washington, which has levied several rounds of sanctions against the country since 2017.

(Source: Reuters)

## 'Red scarves' march in Paris against yellow-vest violence



A group calling itself the red scarves has held a march in Paris to counter weeks of anti-government protests by the yellow-vest movement.

The "foulards rouges" are demanding an end to the violence witnessed at yellow-vest (gilets jaunes) rallies.

The gilets jaunes movement grew out of fuel tax protests in November.

It now embraces wider discontent with President Emmanuel Macron and has seen some of the most serious street violence in Paris since 1968.

But the weeks of TV footage showing clashes with riot police and damage to public monuments have triggered a counter-movement. The red scarves now have about 21,000 followers on Facebook.

More than 10,000 people took part in Sunday's march, Le Figaro reported.

"People are tired of the roadblocks. They are bad for business, and children are prevented from getting to school on time," red scarves spokesman Alex Brun told French broadcaster RFI.

Ahead of Sunday's rally in Paris, the red scarves put out a joint statement with similar-minded groups.

"We denounce the insurrectional climate

installed by the yellow vests. We also reject the threats and constant verbal abuse (aimed at non-yellow vests)," they announced in a joint manifesto.

However, according to French media, a split has already emerged among the red scarves over whether or not to show support for President Macron.

One of the organisers of Sunday's march, Laurent Soulié, has rallied supporters on Facebook to back the president, RFI reported.

Brun, on the other hand, said the "foulards rouges" were "an apolitical citizens' movement". He said the best way to resolve problems caused by the yellow vests was to take part in Macron's "Grand Debate" rather than confronting protesters on the street.

Some red-scarf leaders had urged members not to attend Sunday's rally.

The Grand Debate involves town-hall meetings nationwide to address protesters' concerns.

Across France, about 69,000 people took part in the 11th consecutive weekend of yellow-vest protests the interior ministry said. That is about 15,000 fewer than last weekend.

(Source: BBC)

## Afghan president calls for 'serious talks' with Taliban

### All foreign forces will leave Afghanistan: Ghani



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said Monday the Taliban should "enter serious talks" with his government, after the insurgents and Washington both touted progress during unprecedented negotiations in Qatar last week.

The Taliban have long refused to negotiate with the Afghan government, branding them "puppets".

But a months-long diplomatic push by the United States to broker talks culminated in six days of meetings between Washington and the insurgents in Doha, igniting hopes of a breakthrough more than 17 years after the U.S. invasion.

Both the Taliban and the United States touted "progress" over the weekend, and the New York Times cited Washington's special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad on Monday as saying they have formed "a draft of a framework", though he warned details need to be fleshed out and major sticking points remain.

The points of contention include a ceasefire, a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops, and the Taliban's ongoing refusal to speak to Kabul.

Afghan authorities have previously complained of being excluded from the talks, and warned that any deal between the U.S. and the Taliban would require Kabul's endorsement.

"I call on the Taliban to ... show their Afghan will, and accept Afghans' demand for peace, and enter serious talks with the Afghan government," Ghani said in a nationally televised address from the presidential palace in Kabul.

U.S. President Donald Trump's clear eagerness to end America's longest war has also weighed heavy on the discussions, and Ghani warned against rushing into a deal, citing violence in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

"We want peace, we want it fast but we want it with a plan," he continued.

"We should not forget that the victims of this war are Afghans ... No Afghan wants foreign troops to remain in their country indefinitely. No Afghan wants to face suicide attacks in hospitals, schools, the mosques, and parks."

Civilians continue to pay a terrible price for the Taliban insurgency, with some estimates showing the Afghan conflict overtook Syria to become the deadliest in the world in 2018.

Khalilzad - who has been leading the negotiations - arrived in Afghanistan late Sunday to update officials including Ghani on the progress made.

He reassured the Afghans the talks in Qatar remain geared towards bringing the insurgents to the table with Kabul, according to a statement released by Ghani's office.

"My role is to facilitate," Khalilzad was quoted as saying in the statement.

The palace said Khalilzad also confirmed that no agreement had been made on a withdrawal, adding that any such decision would be coordinated with Kabul.

On Saturday, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said that until a withdrawal timetable is decided progress on other issues is "impossible".

Khalilzad also confirmed there had been no agreement on the issue of a new ceasefire, according to the palace statement.

There was headway on one topic, Khalilzad told the New York Times. The Taliban have "committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or individuals," he was quoted as saying.

(Source: Reuters)

## Armed gang snatches jailed criminal outside French courthouse

Three heavily armed men attacked a van carrying a jailed criminal on his way to court Monday, firing shots outside the courthouse and striking a guard before making their getaway in the southern French town of Tarascon, officials said.

The spectacular escape took place at around 8:30 a.m. as the prisoner was being transferred from a prison to be presented before a judge.

The guards "had left the van to ring the doorbell to the courthouse when the armed men fell upon them," said Nicolas Burtz, a local prison guard union representative.

The gang shot out the van's tires and knocked a female guard, who had refused to let the prisoner go, to the ground, according to the Justice Ministry and the local prosecutor.

The guards, who had escorted the prisoner from a jail in Beziers, 150 kilometers away, did not fire their weapons.

"It was very violent. It's been a long time since we've seen a van attacked with automatic weapons. It was really shocking for the guards, who reacted well," an official in France's prison administration agency said.

The 27-year-old prisoner, who was not immediately identified, had been jailed since September 2017 awaiting trial for armed robbery and criminal gang activity, prison officials said.

"The prisoner had already attempted to escape while previously in jail," according to Karim Terki, another prison guard union representative.

Authorities "are really naive; he played nice for several months in order to try to escape again," Terki added.

(Source: AFP)

## Trump OK with second shutdown over border spat

Donald Trump is prepared to shut down the government again or declare a national emergency if Congress won't give him the border wall money he wants, the White House said. The president's standoff with Democrats on Capitol Hill is far from over and the clock is ticking - the spending bill Trump signed Friday funds the state agencies that had been shut down only until Feb. 15.

White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney told CBS' "Face the Nation" that Trump's goal was to work with Congress. "What he wants to do is fix this the way that things are supposed to get fixed with our government, which is through legislation," Mulvaney said. He added the president didn't want another shutdown, but he would do it if necessary.

"Keep in mind he's willing to do whatever it takes to secure the border," he said.

The record 35-day federal shutdown ended when Trump gave in to mounting pressure, retreating from his demand that Congress commit \$5.7 billion for a U.S.-Mexico border wall before federal agencies resume work. The bill

he signed did not provide the money Trump wanted for a barrier, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has called "immoral" and has insisted Congress will not finance.

On Fox News Sunday, Mulvaney wouldn't directly answer whether Trump would take less than \$5.7 billion, but said the president was willing to negotiate. "The president has already gone to the Democrats and said, look, it's not a 2,000-mile [3,200 kilometer] sea-to-shining-sea wall."

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, a member of the Democratic leadership in the House, said a long wall would be ineffective and a waste of taxpayers' dollars. He said Democrats were willing to invest in additional infrastructure, especially at legal ports of entry where the majority of drugs come into the country. "We're willing to invest in personnel. We're willing to invest in additional technology. ... In the past, we have supported enhanced fencing and I think that's something that's reasonable that should be on the table." Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said he thought a compromise was possible, adding that

Trump had changed his demands on border security as he'd learned more about the problem. "The president went from talking about a wall along the entire southern border at one point during the campaign ... to let's have barriers where they work and let's have something else where barriers wouldn't work as well," Blunt said.

Mulvaney told "Fox News Sunday" that Trump agreed to temporarily end the shutdown because some Democrats had stepped forward, publicly and privately, to say they agreed with Trump's plan to better secure the border. Mulvaney said they told Trump they couldn't split with Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and work with the White House if the government remained closed.

The White House has identified 17 priorities for building barriers to discourage illegal crossings. "It's about 243 miles," he said. "It's the wall, where we need it the most and where we need it the quickest. At the end of the day, the president is going to secure the border one way or another."

(Source: AP)



STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	159818.2
IFX	1909.11

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES	
USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,981 rials
GBP	55,456 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$60.12/b
WTI	\$51.99/b
OPEC Basket	\$60.22/b
Gold	\$1,303.05 /oz
Silver	\$15.74/oz
Platinum	\$814.65/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### ‘Talks with 8 countries over using cryptocurrency going on’

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — “Starting a new chapter in its international monetary transactions to circumvent U.S.-led sanctions, Iran is in negotiating the use of cryptocurrency in its financial transactions with eight countries,” the acting head of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) told Tasnim news agency on Monday. “Representatives from Switzerland, South Africa, France, England, Russia, Austria, Germany and Bosnia have visited Iran to hold related talks about the issue,” Mohammad-Reza Modoudi said expressing hope that Iran can lure foreign investors into the country.

## Saudi government to spend 100b riyals on industry plan

The Saudi Arabian government will spend 100 billion riyals (\$27 billion) in 2019 and 2020 as part of its industrial development program, Aabed Abdullah al-Saadoun, deputy minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources said on Monday.

The program is offering investment opportunities in mining, industry, logistics and energy sectors inside the kingdom, according to a document distributed to participants at an investment conference the deputy minister was addressing in Riyadh.

The program is offering investors the opportunity to invest in projects such as plants that manufacture rubber, catalysts and vehicles, it said.

Saudi Arabia’s 2019 budget allocated SAR 33 billion for the energy, industry, mining and logistics sectors, Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said in a tweet in December.

That is more than three times the amount allocated in the previous budget, he said, in a sign the kingdom is keen to boost diversification in these key sectors to create jobs for Saudis and wean economy off oil.

(Source: Reuters)

## \$1.5 trillion U.S. tax cut has no major impact on business capex plans: survey

The Trump administration’s \$1.5 trillion cut tax package appeared to have no major impact on businesses’ capital investment or hiring plans, according to a survey released a year after the biggest overhaul of the U.S. tax code in more than 30 years.

The National Association of Business Economics’ (NABE) quarterly business conditions poll published on Monday found that while some companies reported accelerating investments because of lower corporate taxes, 84 percent of respondents said they had not changed plans. That compares to 81 percent in the previous survey published in October.

The White House had predicted that the massive fiscal stimulus package, marked by the reduction in the corporate tax rate to 21 percent from 35 percent, would boost business spending and job growth. The tax cuts came into effect in January 2018.

“A large majority of respondents, 84 percent, indicate that one year after its passage, the corporate tax reform has not caused their firms to change hiring or investment plans,” said NABE President Kevin Swift.

The lower tax rates, however, had an impact in the goods producing sector, with 50 percent of respondents from that sector reporting increased investments at their companies, and 20 percent saying they redirected hiring and investments to the United States from abroad.

The NABE survey also suggested a further slowdown in business spending after moderating sharply in the third quarter of 2018. The survey’s measure of capital spending fell in January to its lowest level since July 2017. Expectations for capital spending for the next three months also weakened.

“Fewer firms increased capital spending compared to the October survey responses, but the cutback appeared to be concentrated more in structures than in information and communication technology investments,” said Swift, who is also chief economist at the American Chemistry Council.

According to the survey, employment growth improved modestly in the fourth quarter of 2018 compared to the third quarter. Just over a third of respondents reported rising employment at their firms over the past three months, up from 31 percent in the October survey. The survey’s forward-looking measure of employment slipped to 25 in January from 29 in October.

(Source: Reuters)

# 4th round of offering oil at IRENEX on Feb. 4

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will offer one million barrels of light crude oil at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) for the fourth time on February 4, Shana reported on Monday.

The set price for this round of oil sale is \$56.24 per barrel, and the least amount of sale will be 35,000 barrels like the previous round of offering.

NIOC offered one million barrels of light crude oil at IRENEX for the third time on January 21. The set price for that round of oil sale was \$52.42 per barrel.

The third round witnessed some advantages compared to the first and second rounds to

facilitate purchase process for the applicants.

One of the changes in the third round was that the purchasers could pay both in Iranian rial and in foreign currencies, the rate of which was estimated at the Central Bank of Iran (CBI)’s online Sana system (accessible at sanarate.ir, a website that records daily forex trade from across the domestic exchange bureaus).

On November 11, NIOC offered 700,000 barrels of light crude oil at the price of \$76.29 per barrel at IRENEX for the second time.

The first round of offering occurred on October 28, just few days before new U.S. sanctions on Iran’s petroleum sector took effect (November 4). In the first round, NIOC could sell some 280,000 barrels of crude oil at \$74.85

## Iran starts constructing a petro-refinery complex on Oman Gulf coast

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s National Petrochemical Company (NPC) kicked off the construction of a petro-refinery complex in Jask Island on the shores of the Gulf of Oman in southern Iran, IRNA reported on Sunday quoting an official with NPC.

According to NPC Project Director Alimohammad Bosazqadeh, the complex is aimed to supply part of the country’s energy needs and also to increase non-oil exports from the region.

“Considering the ample crude oil feedstock at place, the complex will be able to produce gasoline, gas oil, fuel oil, sulfur, and other byproducts like butadiene, polyethylene and propylene polymer products, as well as mono-ethylene glycol and several other petrochemical products”, he explained.

The official further noted that the complex will be constructed in collaboration with renowned companies and the



construction of this important complex will lead to the transformation of this important and strategic region.

Being closer to South Asian countries has made this strategic region significant for Iran’s future export plans.

Jask oil terminal is considered the country’s second largest oil export terminal after Kharg terminal.

Located 1,690 kilometers (1,050 mi) south of Tehran, Jask is a port town situated on the Gulf of Oman.

## Japan’s Cosmo Oil loads 1st Iran crude cargo after U.S. sanctions waiver

Cosmo Oil has started loading its first Iranian crude oil cargo, the latest Japanese refiner to resume import of Iranian oil more than two months after the U.S. sanctions waiver was granted, a source with direct knowledge of the matter told S&P Global Platts Monday.

The VLCC Jin-Ei commenced loading 850,000 barrels of Iranian crude -- 200,000 barrels of Iranian Light and 650,000 barrels of Iranian Heavy -- at Iran’s Kharg Island at around 03:48 am local time Monday, the source said.

The VLCC will arrive in Japan at the end of February after loading crude oil cargoes at

Mina Al Ahmadi in Kuwait and Das Island in Abu Dhabi, following its expected departure from Kharg Island at around 2 am local time Tuesday, the source added.

A spokesman at parent Cosmo Energy Holdings declined to comment Monday.

Platts’ trade flow software cFlow also shows that the VLCC Jin-Ei entered Kharg Island on Sunday.

Cosmo Oil’s commencement of Iranian crude oil loading comes after Japanese refiners Fuji Oil and Showa Shell -- Japan’s main buyers of Iranian crude -- fully loaded two VLCCs with Iranian crude recently.



per barrel. With the daily supply amount of one million barrels per day, the market wrapped up by selling eight 35,000-barrel-cargos of oil on the day.

Establishment of IRENEX, which is considered as a turning point in Iran’s

strategic oil industry and capital market and also a platform for producers and consumers to be in touch and pay lower trade costs in a transparent business environment, can be translated into creation of a new energy stock market that results in economic development.

## Gas condensate production, storage begins in South Pars phase 13 refinery

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Production and storage of gas condensate began in the refinery of South Pars gas field’s phase 13 of development, Sasan Arabi, who is in charge of offshore operation of the phase, announced.

Putting all four platforms of phase 13 into operation, the refinery of this phase will produce about 75,000 barrels of gas condensate per day, Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of implementing development phases of South Pars, published on its website on Monday.

Gas produced in platform 13B was injected to the offshore refinery of phase 13 in mid-January.

Phase 13 is aimed at production of 56 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas, 75,000 barrels of gas condensate and 400 tons of sulfur per day in addition to one million tons of ethane and one million tons of propane and butane per annum.

South Pars is divided into 24 standard

phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

In a press conference last month, POGC Managing Director Mohammad Meshkinfam announced that all development phases of the gas field, except for phase 11, will be completed by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020).

The huge offshore field, shared with Qatar, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran’s territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar’s territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world’s reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.



in November. The country last recorded zero Iranian oil imports in July 2012 during the last international sanctions against Tehran.

(Source: S&P Global Platts)

## China can no longer rely on real estate for growth

Chinese authorities face an ever-growing list of challenges — be it an ongoing trade fight with the U.S. or headwinds in domestic demand — and it appears they don’t have many tools left to spur the economy amid a slowdown.

The real estate market in China has traditionally played a major role in its economic development, household wealth and public sentiment. Real estate has been used by Beijing to stimulate growth during previous downturns, including one just three years ago.

But along with a Chinese penchant for investing in houses, persistent expectations of government support sent prices and the household debt burden soaring.

That’s created a delicate situation, one which analysts expect Beijing will not touch this time around, except to keep prices steady.

**■ Household debt growth outpacing disposable income**

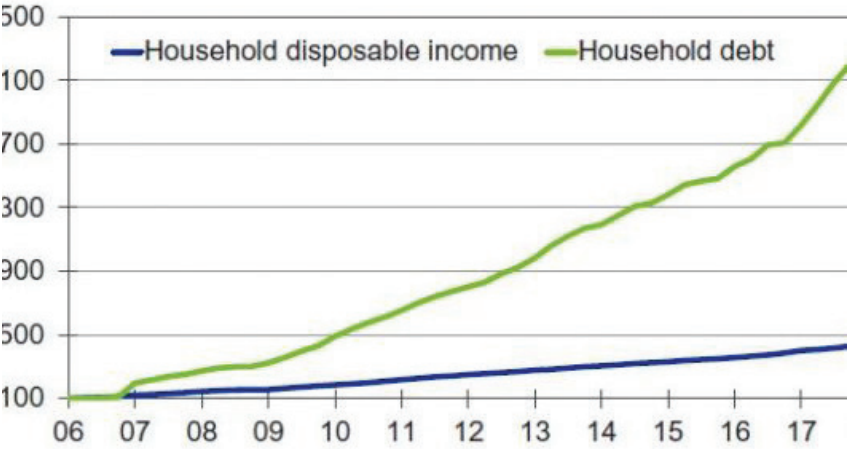
Junheng Li, founder of China-focused equity research firm JL Warren Capital, estimates 61 percent of Chinese urban households live in homes less than 10 years old. She also notes there are many older units that are still in good condition.

Some “simple math shows that continuously building new homes to stimulate investments and meanwhile create the false impression of wealth effect coming with home price appreciation is about to hit the wall,” she said in a January report. “Chinese policy makers are fully aware and highly alert not to send the wrong signal to the home buyers that home prices will continue to hike.”

**■ High housing debt**

As Beijing tries to shift its economy to one that’s driven by consumption, the worry is that consumers will not have the means, or the enthusiasm, to spend. Already, retail sales growth has slowed significantly amid uncertainty about U.S.-China trade tensions and the impact on economic growth.

Economists at Moody’s Analytics pointed out in December that Chinese disposable income has grown at an average annual rate of 10 percent for the last six years, while household debt — of which the majority is tied to housing — has grown at an average rate of



20 percent a year. In the past year, the average rate of household debt growth climbed to 26 percent, the report said.

It’s unlikely that the housing market will lead China out of the latest economic slump. In the last few years, government intervention has cooled the market, and real estate’s contribution to growth has fallen slightly to about a third or a quarter, according to Dan Wang, analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

In fact, several China watchers have said the property market poses the greatest risks for China in the year ahead.

On Tuesday, Lynda Zhou, Fidelity International’s chief investment officer of equities in China, said an unexpected sharp drop in housing prices would be a “black swan” event. A black swan event is an unforeseen occurrence that usually has dire consequences, which Chinese President Xi Jinping warned of earlier this week when he was talking about challenges to China’s economy.

**■ Infrastructure spending is key**

China’s rapid ascent to becoming the world’s second largest economy has brought with it a slew of problems.

The Communist Party-controlled government has so far managed to keep a handle on growth. But it’s an ongoing challenge

that faces repeated tests. To prevent a sharp economic slowdown this time, analysts said Beijing has only one primary option for spending: infrastructure.

“This round of economic decline is due, to a large degree, to a downturn in individual and private sector confidence,” Qian Wang, managing director and chief economist, Asia-Pacific, at Vanguard Investment Strategy Group, said in Mandarin during a press event in Shanghai earlier this month. “In this situation, we are concerned that stimulative economic policy may be slowly losing its effectiveness, and may not work as quickly.”

Wang expects the government’s announcements on tax and fee cuts to have a positive effect in the long term, but in the short term, authorities will need to stimulate through infrastructure spending.

Here, the Chinese government has moved swiftly after pausing many plans for railway development because of concerns about debt buildup. Some have criticized Beijing’s crackdown on leverage in the last two years as overly harsh, contributing to the slowest pace of gross domestic product growth in 28 years in 2018.

The National Development and Reform Commission suspended approvals of urban transit projects in August 2017. But in

the second half of last year — primarily in December — the Commission gave seven major Chinese cities the green light for such projects, Nomura’s chief China economist Ting Lu and his team pointed out in a Jan. 18 report. As of publication, total investments into such projects reached 714.2 billion yuan (\$105 billion), the report noted.

“The acceleration in the pace of these project approvals suggests that Beijing has become more concerned with the economic slowdown and is keen to pick up urban transit investment (a key portion of infrastructure investment) to increase demand and stabilise economic growth,” Lu said in the report.

**■ Alternative funding methods**

The hope is that developing projects such as high-speed rail will bring temporary jobs, economic growth and investment to lesser known areas. Amid concerns about high-debt levels, analysts said China is trying some alternative financing methods such as private partnerships and project-based debt issuance.

Infrastructure spending can also come in the form of investment in technologies such as 5G and the internet, Vanguard’s Wang said.

With its “Made in China 2025” plan, Beijing aims to turn the country into a global technology leader. In a Jan. 22 report, the Economist Intelligence Unit found that cities which have aligned themselves with the central policy generally have better growth prospects.

However, it’s unclear how quickly and to what extent increased spending on such infrastructure projects will help economic growth. China has already built an extensive high-speed railway network, especially in the most prosperous regions. And in another major issue for authorities, the private sector which creates most new jobs is struggling in a financing and operating environment that still favors state-owned enterprises.

“The debt-driven model, China cannot totally abandon it,” the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Wang said. “When consumption cannot drive growth, debt-driven infrastructure spending is necessary.”

(Source: CNBC)



# Oil falls on increased U.S. rig count, China industrial slowdown

Oil prices fell 1 percent on Monday after U.S. companies added rigs for the first time this year, a signal that crude output may rise further, and as China, the world's second-largest oil user, reported additional signs of an economic slowdown.

International Brent crude oil futures were at \$60.74 a barrel at 0804 GMT, down 90 cents, or 1.46 percent.

U.S. crude oil futures were at \$52.84 per barrel, down 85 cents, or 1.58 percent, from their last settlement.

High U.S. crude oil production, which rose to a record 11.9 million barrels per day (bpd) late last year, has been weighing on oil markets, traders said.

In a sign output could rise further, U.S. energy firms last week raised the number of rigs looking for new oil for the first time in 2019 to 862, an addition of 10 rigs, Baker Hughes energy services firm said in its weekly report on Friday.

Beyond oil supply, a key question for this year will be the magnitude of demand growth.

Oil consumption has been increasing steadily, and it will likely average above 100 million bpd for the first time ever in 2019, driven largely by a boom in China.



A global economic slowdown, however, amid a trade dispute between Washington and Beijing is weighing on fuel demand-growth expectations.

Earnings at China's industrial firms shrank for a second straight month in December on sluggish factory activity,

piling more pressure on the world's second-largest economy, which reported its slowest pace of growth for last year since 1990.

"Persistent weakness seen in Chinese economic data has raised downside risks ... of lower crude oil imports by Beijing in 2019," said Benjamin Lu of Singapore-

based brokerage Phillip Futures.

China is trying to stem the slowdown with aggressive fiscal stimulus measures.

But there are concerns that these measures may not have the desired effect as China's economy is already laden with massive debt and some of the bigger government spending measures may be of little real use.

The increased U.S. supply - the United States is now the world's largest oil producer - and the economic slowdown are weighing on the oil price outlook.

"We expect U.S. crude oil prices to range between \$50-\$60 per barrel in 2019 and about \$10 more per barrel for Brent," Tortoise Capital Advisors said in its 2019 oil market outlook.

Tortoise added, though, that oil prices would be supported above \$50 per barrel as it was "very clear that Saudi Arabia will no longer be willing to accept these lower oil prices."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), de-facto led by Saudi Arabia, started supply cuts late last year to tighten markets and buoy prices.

(Source: Reuters)

## Iraq to sign MOU to supply Jordan with oil

Iraqi Oil Minister Tamir al-Ghadhban Sunday said that Iraq will supply neighboring Jordan with oil in accordance with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to be signed after the approval of both governments.

Al-Ghadhban's comment came during his meeting with Jordanian Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Hala Zawati during her visit to Baghdad.

The two officials discussed bilateral cooperation in the fields of oil, gas and electricity, according to a statement issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Oil.

"We have discussed the supply of Iraqi oil to Jordan according to an MOU that will be signed later after obtaining the approval of the governments of the two countries," the statement quoted al-Ghadhban as saying.

The two ministers also discussed extending an oil export pipeline between Rumaila, in Iraq's southern province of Basra, and Aqaba, Jordanian port, in addition to the project of electric connection between the two countries, the statement said.

For her part, Zawati said "the visit came within the framework of strengthening bilateral relations to discuss topics of common interests in the fields of energy, oil and gas,"



according to the statement.

In mid-1990s, Iraq began supplying Jordan with crude oil at preferential prices, in addition to giving it a free share of oil in exchange for goods as part of an economic agreement that renews annually between the two countries.

In 2013, the two countries signed an agreement to build a pipeline to transport Iraqi crude oil from Basra in the south of the country to export terminals at the Jordanian port of Aqaba at a total cost of about 18 billion U.S. dollars and a capacity of 1 million barrels per day.

The project was discussed by the two sides during the visit of King Abdullah II of Jordan to Baghdad on Jan. 14.

(Source: Xinhua)

## Unipet's 2018 losses due to 'inappropriate' hedging, says Sinopec

China's state-owned Sinopec said Friday that the refiner's trading arm, Unipet, suffered losses of Yuan 4.65 billion (\$687.4 million) in 2018 as a result of "inappropriate" techniques applied to hedge positions at a time when crude oil prices were relatively lower.

"Further investigations have indicated that the misjudgment about global crude oil price trend and inappropriate hedging techniques applied for certain parts of hedging positions resulted in a loss...", a Sinopec statement said.

However, the statement added that Unipet had also saved Yuan 6.4 billion in crude import costs for its refineries in 2018 due to relatively lower oil prices.

Despite the losses, Sinopec and Unipet were maintaining normal production and operation, the statement said.

"The shareholders of the company and potential investors should exercise caution when investing in or dealing in the securities of the company," the statement added.

Sinopec in December had said in a circular that it had suspended Chen Bo, who was then president of Unipet, from



his duties due to unspecified reasons, S&P Global Platts previously reported. Sinopec had also suspended Zhan Qi, the secretary of Chinese Communist Party Committee of Unipet.

Following the suspensions, Unipet's deputy general manager Chen Gang had taken responsibility of administrative work, according to the December circular.

Sinopec processed about 246 million mt of crude oil in 2018, 85 percent of which was imported crude oil, a separate press statement said. Total costs for the imports were more than Yuan 600 billion.

Sinopec's net profit was estimated at Yuan 62.4 billion in 2018, rising 22 percent year on year.

(Source: Platts)

## Adnoc awards equity stakes to European oil majors

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company has awarded equity stakes in its refining subsidiary to European oil majors Eni and OMV as the Persian Gulf emirate continues to open up its hydrocarbons sector with one of the world's largest refinery transactions.

Adnoc will receive an estimated total of \$5.8bn for Eni's 20 percent share and OMV's 15 percent stake in Adnoc Refining, in a part-privatization that values the company at \$19.3bn. Adnoc, which operates the fourth-largest single site refinery in the world, will retain the remaining 65 percent.

The partners will also form a new global trading venture, set to export about 70 percent of the products refined by Adnoc from the first quarter of next year.

Abu Dhabi, which has long welcomed global partnerships in its upstream oil sector, has embarked on an ambitious modernization program across its energy infrastructure as the emirate seeks to boost profitability and prepare for a post-oil future.

Adnoc, which produces about 3m barrels of oil and 10.5bn

cubic feet of gas a day, has since 2016 brought in a broader mix of international partners and launched an initial public offering for its retail arm.

"We have said we will be managing assets in a very proactive manner, centering what we do on commerciality and financial discipline," said Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber, Adnoc's group chief executive.

Jaber, who is also a minister of state in the United Arab Emirates, said the deal had followed a rigorous competition process spanning 20 interested parties that were whittled down according to technical ability and the commercial value of their bids.

Adnoc Refining, which has a capacity of 922,000 barrels a day across three refineries in the emirate, has already earmarked \$5bn of investment to reach 1.1m barrels a day by 2022. The next stage would be to raise capacity to 1.6m barrels a day, via synergies and building a new refinery.

The refining deal marks another expansion for Eni into the oil-rich Persian Gulf as the Italian firm builds on its

strong position in Africa.

"The Middle East is the best option for the quality of reserves and the businesses are mature," said Claudio Descalzi, Eni's chief executive, who added that the company would bring technical expertise gained in the competitive landscape of European refining.

Earlier this month, a consortium led by Eni won rights to two offshore exploration blocks in Abu Dhabi. The Italian company also acquired three concessions to explore for oil and gas in Sharjah, the UAE's third-largest emirate.

Last November, Eni was awarded a concession for a 25 percent stake in Adnoc's offshore gas project in Abu Dhabi's Al Dhafra region.

This latest deal represents a 35 percent increase in Eni's global refining capacity, allowing the Italian firm to diversify its geographical base.

"Why Abu Dhabi?" said Descalzi. "First of all quality, big potential?..?..?and a big transformation."

(Source: Financial Times)

## Crude awakening: Chinese oil demand rebounds as independent refiners restock

Chinese demand for crude oil is rebounding as independent refiners push to buy before prices climb further from low levels hit late last year, restocking with supplies that will arrive in March and April, trade sources said.

That appetite from such refiners, often known as 'teapots', has driven up spot premiums for oil from Africa, Europe, Russia and Oman, the sources said, with prices for some grades hitting multi-month highs.

That comes after teapots slowed crude purchases for delivery in the first two months of 2019 as demand for the fuel they churn out typically fades over the Lunar New Year holidays, which this year fall in early February.

"It's as if someone lit a match and the market's caught fire," said one of the sources. All sources declined to be named as they were not authorized to speak to media.

Global benchmark Brent oil prices had fallen more than 30 percent to just above \$50 a barrel by the end of 2018, but prompt May crude futures have rebounded to above \$60 a barrel this month.

Teapots tend to time their crude purchases based on oil price movements, and often when one buys others will follow, the sources said.



Spot premiums for crude grades popular with Chinese buyers are between 50 cents and more than \$1 a barrel higher than price quotes seen at the start of the month, they said.

For example, Oman's spot premium almost doubled last week to \$1 a barrel from the

start of the month, while offers of Russian ESPO crude for delivery to China in March have risen by 50 cents to about \$3.20 a barrel to May ICE Brent futures, according to the sources and Reuters data.

However, demand is expected to cool by the end of this week as would-be buyers leave

the office for the week-long Lunar New Year break, the sources said.

China's refined product consumption could only see 0.5-percent growth in 2019 from last year as gasoline demand slows with an expected 5-percent drop in passenger vehicle sales, while diesel use will continue to contract on weaker industrial output, Lin Chen, Nomura's head of greater China energy global markets research, said in a note.

Still, the world's biggest oil importer could see crude imports rising to 9.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2019, up more than 4 percent from the previous year, Chen said.

China's refining throughput is set to hit another all-time high of 12.7 million bpd in 2019, about 600,000 bpd more than last year, driven by new refineries Hengli Petrochemical and Zhejiang Petrochemical, he added.

Competition from these new plants means that other independent refiners are unlikely to increase their throughput this year, Chen said.

Also, oil imports in the key refining region of Shandong in the east of the country are unlikely to rise until Dongjiakou city completes a port expansion by year-end, he said.

(Source: Reuters)

## Chinese solar giant: "the party is definitely over"

Just like in most things energy related, including crude oil imports, natural gas and LNG imports, coal usage and even nuclear power, China's massive population and its economic heft also extends far and wide into global solar markets. China is the largest solar-market in the world, home to almost a third of the world's cumulative installed solar capacity of around 130 GW, far greater than the U.S. at around 60 GW, and Japan's roughly 46 GW.

However, last summer the Chinese government pulled state support for solar power companies. Beijing indicated at the time the curtailment was aimed at "promoting the solar energy sector's sustainable development, enhancing its development quality and speeding up reduction of subsidies." The move caught many by surprise, but may best be explained, at least in part, as Beijing's response to a 30 percent tariff put in place last year on Chinese solar equipment by President Trump. The president's decision was a response to several American solar companies claim that China's solar subsidies were allowing its solar companies to undercut U.S. solar manufacturers.



### Speeding up reform

By September, even as trade relations between the U.S. and China worsened, Beijing sought to speed up its efforts to ensure its wind and solar power sectors could compete without subsidies and achieve what new energy regulatory draft guidelines called "grid price parity" with traditional energy sources like coal. All the while, China needs a strong solar sector as Beijing tries to diversify its energy mix away from dirty burning coal used for power generation to renewables as well as natural gas and LNG, the cleanest burning fossil fuel.

State support for solar on such a massive scale not only brought concern from foreign solar manufacturers but was also a large burden on state coffers that ran in to the billions of dollars annually. Just by mid-2018, China owned some \$17.46 billion in subsidies to solar companies. Beijing's withdrawal of support caused global solar panel prices to fall around 30 percent last year - a boon for companies that needed to invest in solar infrastructure but caused headwinds for manufacturers, especially some smaller manufacturers in China that almost went bankrupt.

Following Beijing's solar subsidy withdrawal plans in a controversial move in September, the European Commission decided to end EU anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures on solar PV cells and modules from China. The subsidies came into force in December 2013 for a period of three years and were extended further than the original deadline. China's Commerce Ministry said at the time that the move restored EU-China trade of photovoltaics to a normal market condition and provided a more stable and predictable business environment for cooperation between the two sides.

### The party is over

Now, a major Chinese solar player, Eric Luo, president of China's GCL System Integration Technology Co, a top-10 maker of solar panels, said yesterday at the World Economic Forum in Davos that the global solar power industry is about to lose a major competitive windfall as prices for Chinese solar panels are poised to recover from a price plunge last year.

"The party if definitely over," he said.

Luo added that solar panel prices were already stabilizing and that he expected them to rebound by 10 to 15 percent as the Chinese industry consolidates over the next year or two. A Reuters report said given that panels represent close to half of a solar farm's installation costs, that threatens to eat into the returns of investors.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## IRENA: China could gain global influence due to 'energy transformation'

The rapid growth of the renewable energy industry and subsequent decline of fossil fuel energy production will potentially induce an enormous change in global politics and boost China's influential power, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) claims.

According to "A New World: The Geopolitics of the Energy Transformation"—a report published by IRENA prior to its ninth assembly in Saudi Arabia earlier this month—conflict risks and global power politics generally will evolve along with the relocation of resources.

If China continues to grow, the report states, U.S. influence in the Middle East will likely wane, and small and medium economy countries in Africa that rely on other states for energy may start to become "energy independent."

It asserts that "China's concerted efforts to research, develop and invest in renewable energy and clean transport offer its industry the opportunity to overtake U.S. and European companies, which have been dominant in sectors such as cars and energy machinery."

Elsewhere however, the energy transformation could have adverse effects on economic growth and national budgets. Fossil fuels exports account for more than a quarter of the GDP in countries in the Middle East and the Commonwealth of Independent States. These countries will have to adapt to change, the report states.

Renewable energies like solar and wind power count for a fifth of today's global energy resources, and the sector continue to grow rapidly.

The report says due to a decrease in technology development costs, the energy transformation is happening rapidly. The competitive abilities of renewable energy is squeezing out fossil fuel energy production.

Since 2009, the cost of generating solar energy has decreased by 75 percent. The cost of wind turbines has also decreased by half over the past 10 years.

IRENA Director-General Adnan Amin said the price of commercial renewable energy technology in 2020 may be equivalent to or even lower than that used for fossil fuels. This will, however, adversely affect countries for which fossil fuels are a huge part of their export economy, he added.

Renewables will be a powerful vehicle of democratization because they make it possible to decentralize the energy supply, empowering citizens, local communities, and cities, Amin says.

(Source: taiwannews.com.tw)



## U.S. – Persian Gulf tensions mount over restrictions on Syria reconstruction

By Giorgio Cafiero

Since December 2018, Syria has achieved major diplomatic victories in terms of Damascus' reintegration into the Arab world's diplomatic fold. Regional states, which, to various extents, supported the Syrian rebels fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad's government earlier in the conflict, have mostly come around to accepting the inevitable and started normalizing their relations with Syria. Yet the United States shuns Syria's re-entry into the mainstream diplomatic arena of Arab states, believing that regional regimes should later leverage the opening of ties with Damascus as a bargaining chip to extract greater concessions from Assad.

By opposing the legitimacy of Assad's government and continuing to impose sanctions on Damascus, Washington is creating dilemmas for Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) states, such as the United Arab Emirates, that see Syria's reconstruction as representing important opportunities for economic and geopolitical empowerment. Undoubtedly, securing lucrative contracts in Syria's reconstruction will inevitably entail cooperating with the Damascus government. Yet this reality has potential to create further complications in regional dynamics, as well as U.S. - PGCC relations.

The UAE's hosting of a Syrian trade delegation earlier this month was a case in point. Mohammed Hamsho, a Syrian closely tied to the Assad family who has been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury, led the delegation. Other Syrian lawmakers and businessmen also targeted by U.S. sanctions attended too. The long reach of U.S. sanctions is unquestionably a concern for PGCC states that seek to exert their influence in Syria, primarily via construction projects. Non-U.S. companies, such as Emirati ones, seeking to enter Syria must account for Washington's sanctions because any involvement of U.S. citizens or American firms risks trouble. Given that Syria's business climate is opaque, even careful companies that do their due diligence may find themselves violating U.S. sanctions if they deal with Syrian individuals or entities targeted by Washington.

In September, the U.S. administration announced the imposition of new sanctions on Syrian individuals and entities for having provided Assad's government with weapons and fuel. Two of the companies were UAE-based: International Pipeline Construction FZE and Sonex Investments Ltd. The U.S. State Department may well target more entities in the Emirates based on their ties with the Damascus regime.

**As Arab governments continue exploring prospects for commercial opportunities in Syria's post-war reconstruction and the renewal of diplomatic relations with Damascus, Washington is using its financial leverage to slow down the Syrian government's reintegration into the Arab world's economic and political systems.**

The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act passed in the House of Representatives on Jan. 23 but is currently pending in the U.S. Senate. If signed into law, the legislation would require America's executive branch to sanction individuals or entities engaged in major transactions with the Syrian government or non-state actors allied with Assad in sectors such as construction, energy, engineering and defense, which are all key lifelines for Syria's government. The bill would also result in punitive measures being taken against the Central Bank of Syria if the U.S. Treasury Department concludes that the institution is a major concern in terms of money laundering.

From the perspective of American politicians and media pundits rallying behind the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, sanctioning Assad's government severely limits Damascus' access to economic support and limits the government's ability to continue consolidating its control over land it has retaken from the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS). The U.S. leadership believes that without its military leverage on the ground, financial pressure must sit at the center of Washington's strategy for affecting the Syrian government's conduct.

The lack of PGCC participation in Iraq's reconstruction following the fall of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul and other territories last year cost the Arab Gulf states an opportunity to regain influence in Iraq, which is not to be a repeated experience in Syria as the Emirati leadership sees it.

Against the backdrop of America's impending military withdrawal from northern Syria, both Washington and the PGCC states share concerns about fill a potential power vacuum. Yet the issue of sanctions on Syrian individuals and entities will likely result in greater divergence between Washington and Persian Gulf Arab states such as the UAE when it comes to dealing with the realities on the ground in Syria. As Arab governments continue exploring prospects for commercial opportunities in Syria's post-war reconstruction and the renewal of diplomatic relations with Damascus, Washington is using its financial leverage to slow down the Syrian government's reintegration into the Arab world's economic and political systems.

For the UAE and other PGCC states, which seek to become major players in Syria's post-conflict business landscape, U.S. sanctions that require such entities in the Persian Gulf to take even greater risk by entering Syria pose dilemmas as Abu Dhabi, Manama and other Arab capitals seek to gain greater economic, diplomatic and geopolitical influence in Damascus. The dynamics will likely serve to further frustrate PGCC states, which have on many occasions throughout both Donald Trump and Barack Obama's presidencies accused the leadership in Washington of failing to account for the interests of America's closest allies in the Persian Gulf when making key decisions on U.S. foreign policy vis-a-vis Syria.

(Source: Al Monitor)

# U.S. should keep its hands off Venezuela

By Jiang Shixue

The world is divided again. This time it's about Venezuela.

Nicolas Maduro's swearing-in ceremony took place on January 10, 2019. But less than two weeks later, on January 23, opposition leader Juan Guaido, a 35-year-old former engineer, declared himself the nation's "interim president."

People are surprised to see that Venezuela has two presidents. But this is not worthy of celebration. As a matter of fact, it represents the beginning of a new crisis for this poor but oil-rich South American nation.

The United States seems well prepared for this worsening crisis in its backyard. One day before Guaido's ceremony, on January 22, Vice President Mike Pence used a video address to directly urge Venezuelans to go to the streets to show support for the self-proclaimed president. "We stand with you, and we will stay with you until democracy is restored and you reclaim your birthright of Libertad," Pence said in his speech.

Soon after the 9/11 attack, George W. Bush, then U.S. president, said, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Now the U.S. wishes to divide the world again. In his remarks at the United Nations Security Council meeting on Venezuela on January 26, Mike Pompeo, U.S. secretary of state, said, "The United States stands with the Venezuelan people."

"So far, many other nations have chosen to do the same and they too have recognized the legitimate government of interim President Guaido ... And now it's time for every other nation to pick a side. No more delays, no more games. Either you stand with the



**People can easily conclude that the U.S. and the Venezuelan opposition orchestrated the whole drama so that, they wish, Maduro's presidential victory could be annulled, paving the way for Guaido's swearing-in.**

forces of freedom or you're in league with Maduro and his mayhem."

Both Pence and Pompeo say the U.S. support the Venezuelan people. In reality, however, they have failed to remember that Nicolas Maduro was elected by the Venezuelan people.

In western democracy, the ballot is the best place to express people's wishes and hopes. The Venezuelan opposition won a victory in the National Assembly on December 6, 2015. But the opposition boycotted the presidential election on May 20, 2018. Who was to blame for the boycott?

In retrospect, people can easily conclude that the U.S. and the Venezuelan opposition orchestrated the whole drama so that, they wish, Maduro's presidential victory could be annulled, paving the way for Guaido's swearing-in.

One of the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and international law is non-interference in other nations' domestic affairs. In the age of globalization, as the world has become a global village, non-interference has become all the more important and relevant.

That is to say, Venezuela's affairs must be and can only be dealt with by the Venezuelan

people. As Hua Chunying, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, noted at a press conference on January 25, 2019, "China maintains that all countries should abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, especially the norms governing international relations and the principles of international law such as non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and no threat of force."

Whether or not the U.S. will overthrow the Venezuelan government with military force is anybody's guess. But people in Latin America and elsewhere will not forget that the U.S. militarily intervened with the domestic affairs of the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989.

Luckily, this time, all the Latin American countries are opposed to U.S. invasion against Venezuela despite the fact that some of them support Guaido and the opposition.

Regrettably, in his UN speech, U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo also criticized China and others for the turmoil in Venezuela. This kind of accusation is groundless.

China's economic ties with Venezuela is a kind of South-South cooperation based on a win-win principle. It never targets against any third party. Moreover, Chinese investment and loans have helped Venezuela to promote economic and social development.

Needless to say, in the past two decades or so, the Chavez and the Maduro administrations have made some mistakes in economic and political fields. But this fact should not be the pretext for the U.S. and others to intervene in Venezuela's internal affairs.

It seems that, according to the hegemonic logic, right is not always might, but might is always right.

(Source: CGTN)

## Will corruption, cuts and protest produce a new Arab spring? In Sudan, Egypt and beyond, unrest is growing and hardline dictators are ill-equipped to respond

By Simon Tisdall

Sudan missed out on the Arab spring, but that may be changing. Protests against Omar al-Bashir, the indicted war criminal who has dominated the country for 29 years, are becoming a daily occurrence. Street-level unrest, sparked by rising bread and fuel prices, began last month and spread quickly. But the focus of demonstrators, their ranks swollen by teachers, lawyers and doctors, has switched to Bashir himself. They want him gone.

Bashir's response has been predictably repressive. And the president may succeed in battering his critics into silence, as in the past. But the causes of the unrest cannot be bludgeoned away: a struggling economy, low investment, high unemployment, corruption, bad governance and a potentially disastrous lack of opportunity for new generations of young people.

In this respect, Sudan has a lot in common with other Arab countries. Recent weeks have seen protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya and Morocco. Once again, the political temperature is rising. Once again, the failure of governments to meet citizens' aspirations grows critical. The question now is whether a new age of revolt – call it Arab spring #2 – is brewing.

Tunisia, home of the first Arab spring, in 2010, is another case in point. It, too, was rocked by riots last month. And the unrest was once again triggered by a desperate individual, who self-immolated in protest at low living standards and political stasis. Presidential and parliamentary elections later this year could prove another flashpoint.

Talk of democratic renewal in Syria and Yemen is at least premature. Attempts by citizens of these countries to dislodge entrenched governments led to devastating civil wars. Libya, too, has never regained its balance after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. In Egypt, the Arab world's largest country by population, the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak has been replaced by an even worse one – that of the general-turned-president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

Yet despite these tragedies, or perhaps because of them,



**Pressure for change across the Arab world is likely to continue to grow, keeping pace with the growth in populations, inequality and social injustice.**

pressure for change across the Arab world is likely to continue to grow, keeping pace with the growth in populations, inequality and social injustice. Some of this energy will inevitably be misdirected into support for extremist groups that promise radical solutions, such as Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS). Some of it will produce increased migration, particularly into southern Europe.

But most of the pressure will be directed at governments ill-equipped to respond – even if they wish to. Last Friday Egypt marked the eighth anniversary of the Tahrir Square revolution that toppled Mubarak. Thanks to Sisi's shadow,

it did so largely in silence. Public spaces are off-limits to protesters. Public media are closely regulated.

Human Rights Watch says tens of thousands of opposition activists, writers and intellectuals, secular leftists and Muslim Brotherhood supporters have been locked up under regulations introduced since 2013, including anti-terrorism laws. Only this month Ahmed Douma, who helped lead the Tahrir protests, was jailed for 15 years for allegedly attacking security forces in 2011.

Last autumn the Sisi regime was criticized by UN human rights experts for its use of anti-terrorism laws to detain women's rights activists and those campaigning against torture and extrajudicial killings. Yet Sisi has failed to halt terrorist violence in Sinai and against Coptic Christians. Meanwhile, IMF-prescribed austerity measures are increasing poverty. Given these tensions, something must give.

Western governments, too, are repeating the mistakes made before the first Arab spring: backing dictatorships that supposedly suit their interests while ignoring bad behavior. Emmanuel Macron, France's president, will be in Cairo this week, hoping to flog fighter jets. Mike Pompeo, the U.S. secretary of state, visited this month and stepped around Egypt's human rights black hole. And Donald Trump has become apologist-in-chief for a Saudi murder plot in Istanbul, Riyadh's war crimes in Yemen and abuses such as the persecution of women's rights activists.

"The problems that brewed in a cauldron of discontent from the early 2000s, sparking the Arab uprisings – a massive youth bulge, high unemployment, low wages, education systems mired in the past, a lack of innovation and absence of freedoms – are still stewing, and getting worse," said analyst Indira Lakshmanan. "The strongmen haven't delivered a system to address the underlying problems."

This will not continue indefinitely. In Egypt, as in Sudan and elsewhere, pressure is building. A second explosion cannot be far off.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Trump is outplayed over his Mexican border wall Having lost the shutdown battle, the U.S. president is in a hole of his own making

The U.S. government shutdown that ended on Friday broke many records. At 35 days, it was the longest ever (the previous was just over three weeks). It was also the first that a U.S. president conclusively lost. By agreeing to reopen government without having secured a single dollar of the \$5.7bn he demanded for the wall, Donald Trump lost a battle that he had needlessly created. The victor was Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the House of Representatives. Presidents have the usually decisive advantage of the bully pulpit. In two televised addresses during the shutdown, Trump painted himself ever deeper into a corner. His descriptions of invading Hispanics made him sound anything but presidential. His poll numbers kept falling. By folding to Pelosi's demand to reopen government before talks could begin, Trump has shattered the aura of power around him. He emerges from this gratuitous brinkmanship far weaker than when he began.

The nadir was the way in which Trump and his cabinet officials spoke about the idled

federal workers. Having missed two paychecks, many of the 800,000 or so government employees had to rely on the food banks that sprang up as the crisis wore on. One official said they were enjoying a paid holiday – it was just that the deposits would arrive late. Another questioned why they needed to take charity at all.

The latter, Wilbur Ross, the U.S. secretary

was the near-shutdown of New York's La Guardia airport on Friday. Too few air traffic controllers had turned up to work. The crisis is far from over.

Unless Trump and Pelosi strike a lasting bargain, the government could shut down again on February 15. Trump only signed up to three weeks of new funding last Friday.

**By folding to Pelosi's demand to reopen government before talks could begin, Trump has shattered the aura of power around him.**

of commerce, is worth an estimated \$700m. Trump said that most of the furloughed employees were Democrats anyway.

Given that the unpaid workers included members of the FBI, which is investigating the president, border patrol agents and air traffic controllers, this was not merely insensitive but also tactically misguided. The event that appeared to trigger Trump's climbdown

Trump is itching to disprove conservative critics who say he blinked first. That will make it even harder for him to make the necessary concessions – such as legalizing the 700,000 or so "Dreamers", who were brought illegally to the U.S. as children – to secure Democratic funding for the wall.

Pelosi has already described the border wall as "immoral". Any funding would there-


fore need to be spent on drones, electronic surveillance and courts. Whether it is built from steel or concrete, a 2,000-mile barrier is unlikely to pass. Pelosi's "evidence-based" test of what will work.

Most illegal immigrants overstay their visas rather than sneak over the border. Moreover, native-born Americans are likelier to commit crimes than newcomers. Trump's "big, beautiful wall" looks more politically unlikely than ever. In the absence of a deal, the danger is that Trump will declare an emergency and divert military funds to the wall.

That could trigger a far larger crisis than the shutdown. It would almost certainly end up in the courts. Trump was elected on a promise of building a wall. He was unable to advance it when Congress was controlled by Republicans. Why he believes he can pull it off now that he faces the formidably disciplined Pelosi is a mystery. Having advertised the art of the deal, Trump is tasting the reality of surrender.

(Source: FT)






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**National Iranian Drilling Company**

\* Tender descriptions:

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3189415	SS/97-06/33-5250	Three million (3,000,000) Euro

\* Qualitative evaluation of tenders

Method	
	1- Based on minimum scoring made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms. (60 score) 2- Tenderers which has a four active current contract with NIDC, will not be allowed to participate in other tenders . 3- Tenderers which have a two active current contract with same subject (exactly same subject) with NIDC, will not be allowed to participate in other tenders.

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Address					
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Value of guarantee	91,155 EURO
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Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.

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# Nationwide polio vaccination for children to get underway

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) will be given to children born on March 20, 2016 or later nationwide, head of the preventable diseases department at the Ministry of Health has said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are two vaccines for polio: the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) and IPV. OPV is taken orally as drops and can be easily administered. It does not require a trained health worker. OPV is still the main preventive measure against polio.

IPV is given through an injection by a trained health worker. In countries still using OPV, IPV does not replace the OPV vaccine, but is used with OPV to strengthen a child's immune system and protect them from polio.

The first phase of the scheme will be administered in 9 provinces of Bushehr, Isfahan, Fars, Yazd, Markazi, Golestan, North Khorasan, Tehran and Alborz, Mohsen Zahraei said, ISNA reported on Sunday.

With regard to the fact that the transmission of poliovirus has not stopped in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran's two neighboring countries, the best means to fight the virus is vaccination and currently homegrown OPV vaccine are being administered in the country, Zahraei explained.

Polio is almost eradicated in Iran but based on WHO recommendations all countries in the world should add IPV vaccine to their vaccination programs to immune children against the virus, he added.

He went on to say that since the year



1394 (March 2015-March 2016) administering IPV vaccine for children aging 4 months was approved, however, in the year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017) the two companies committed to produce the vaccine failed to provide it and Iran along with 54 countries faced shortages, however, the IPV vaccine was given to children in provinces adjacent to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Children in provinces of Qom, South Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, Sistan and Baluchestan, Hormozgan, and Kerman which are either neighboring Pakistan or Afghanistan or play host to Afghan and Pakistani nationals received the IPV vaccine,

Zahraei explained.

However, it was not possible to provide the IPV vaccine to other provinces due to the shortages and now regarding the two and a half year halt all children born since March 20, 2016 should receive the IPV vaccine, he added.

Currently children born in the year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017) in the 9 aforesaid provinces will get the IPV vaccine, he concluded.

Head of the communicable diseases department at the Ministry of Health Mohammad-Mehdi Gooya said on Saturday that some 8,000 children under age five will be vaccinated against polio in southeastern Iran.

The vaccination is on a house to house basis and the first round of the plan was implemented from January 26 to 29 and the second round is due from February 23 to 26, he noted.

According to WHO polio does still exist, although polio cases have decreased by over 99% since 1988, from an estimated more than 350,000 cases to 22 reported cases in 2017. This reduction is the result of the global effort to eradicate the disease. Today, only 3 countries in the world have never stopped transmission of polio (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria).

Despite the progress achieved since 1988, as long as a single child remains infected with poliovirus, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease. The poliovirus can easily be imported into a polio-free country and can spread rapidly amongst unimmunized populations. Failure to eradicate polio could result in as many as 200,000 new cases every year, within 10 years, all over the world.

There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented. Polio vaccine, given multiple times, can protect a child for life.

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.

## ‘Superbug genes’ found in one of Earth’s last ‘pristine’ Arctic wildernesses, scientists warn

Bacteria with the ability to withstand some of humanity's most powerful antibiotics of last resort have been discovered in the Arctic, suggesting even the world's last "pristine" environments are being colonised by superbugs.

Soil bacteria samples taken in the Kongsfjorden region of Svalbard have tested positive for drug resistance genes that were first observed in India in 2008 and rarely seen outside of hospitals.

The spread of the genes, known as blaNDM-1, are under close surveillance worldwide as they allow bacteria to resist a class of antibiotics known as the carbapenems, among other drugs of last resort.

Newcastle University researchers said the "pollution" was likely caused by migratory bird droppings or human visitors to the region, with bacteria able to share bits of their genetic code with neighbouring species.

"Polar regions are among the last presumed pristine ecosystems on Earth" said Professor David Graham, of Newcastle University.

"But less than three years after the first detection of the blaNDM-1 gene in the surface waters of urban India we are finding them thousands of miles away in an area where there has been minimal human impact.

"Encroachment into areas like the Arctic reinforces how

rapid and far-reaching the spread of antibiotic resistance has become, confirming solutions to antibiotic resistance must be viewed in global rather than just local terms."

It follows dire warnings from health secretary Matt Hancock at the World Economic Forum, that antimicrobial resistance is a "global health emergency" more important than climate change or war.

The evolution of bacterial defenses is being supercharged by inappropriate use of antibiotics, often for viral infections where they have no effect, and use in livestock production where they spread into the environment through runoff.

(Source: The Independent)

## Iran's first geriatrics clinic to be inaugurated

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — The first geriatrics specialty clinic in Iran will be inaugurated by the end of the current Iranian calendar month (Feb. 19) in Semnan province, Semnan University of Medical Sciences chancellor has said.

Geriatric medicine clinic looks after people who have conditions associated with aging. These could be memory loss, mobility problems and falls, bowel or bladder difficulties, poor nutrition or unexplained weight loss, as well as other challenges coping with multiple illnesses and medications.

This is the first time that a geriatrics specialty clinic will be set up in the country, ISNA news agency quoted Navid Danaei as saying on Monday.

He also said an Iranian traditional medicine clinic will come on stream in the province.

With regard to the growing population of the older persons in the country and increased life expectancy setting up such specialty clinics is essential, Danaei explained.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran Iranians' average life expectancy has risen to 74 years (72.5 years for males and 75.5 years for females). Census reports of 2016 indicate that the number of persons, aged 60 years or older, has increased by 1.5-fold over the past decade (2006-2016) in Iran. In 2006, some 5.1 million people were 60 or older, but the number rose to 6.1 million in 2011 and to 7.4 million in 2016. Currently, the country's total population stands at about 80 million, of which some 9.3 percent is 60 or older.

In September 2018, Shahla Kazempour, an Iranian demography expert, predicted that by the year 2050 older persons will make up 20 percent of the country's population.

"Older persons need special care and the clinic will not only provide the senior citizens with medical services but also rehabilitation services as well," he added.

Examples of aging-associated diseases are cardiovascular disease, cancer, arthritis, dementia, cataract, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension and Alzheimer's disease. The incidence of all of these diseases increases rapidly with aging, disabled-world.com wrote.

Some consequences of aging are age-related changes in vision, hearing, muscular strength, bone strength, immunity, and nerve function.

Elsewhere in his remarks he said that the public are interested in Iranian traditional medicine and using herbal medicine to treat their diseases, so that an Iranian traditional medicine clinic will be inaugurated in an attempt to use traditional medicine with scientific methods.

A traditional drugstore offering herbal medicine will be set up in the clinic as well, he added. The clinic will stop misuse of herbal remedies and traditional medicine which could have negative and adverse side effects, he concluded.



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## Pakistan eases visa rules to ‘heaven for tourists’

**ISLAMABAD (Reuters)** — Pakistan has loosened travel restrictions in the hope of reviving tourism by offering visas on arrival to visitors from 50 countries and electronic visas to 175 nationalities, the government said on Friday.

The reforms, approved by the cabinet, would open up a new era for the tourism industry, which was devastated by Islamist violence after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, Minister of Information Fawad Chaudhry said.



*Tourists enjoy the snow at the hill resort town of Murree, 60 km (38 miles) northeast of the capital Islamabad, February 5, 2012.*

“We have mountain tourism, we have beach tourism,” Chaudhry told reporters in Islamabad, referring to Himalayan peaks and Arabian Sea beaches seldom visited by foreigners.

“Pakistan is a heaven for tourists.”

Chaudhry did not identify the countries that would benefit from the new rules but in December, he told Reuters that citizens of most European countries would be granted a visa on arrival.

Tourists would also be allowed to visit the politically sensitive Himalayan region of Kashmir and other northern areas, which now require special permission.

The new rules would also ease travel restrictions on foreign journalists, Chaudhry said.

The new visa regime comes after some countries eased travel advisories on Pakistan in light of improvements in security.

Pakistan was last a prominent tourist destination in the 1970s when the “hippie trail” brought Western travelers through the apricot and walnut orchards of the Swat Valley and Kashmir on their way to India and Nepal.

Since then, deteriorating security and the imposition of a harsh interpretation of Islamic laws has chipped away at the number of visitors.

But security has since improved dramatically in recent years, with militant attacks down sharply in the mainly Muslim country of 208 million people.

The state Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation said last year tourist arrivals rose to 1.75 million in 2017, media reported.



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Group of monuments at Hampi

The austere, grandiose site of Hampi was the last capital of the last great Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar. Its fabulously rich princes built Dravidian temples and palaces which won the admiration of travelers between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Conquered by the Deccan Muslim confederacy in 1565, the city was pillaged over a period of six months before being abandoned.



The property encompasses an area of 4187, 24 hectares, located in the Tungabhadra basin in Central Karnataka, Bellary District, India.

Hampi’s spectacular setting is dominated by river Tungabhadra, craggy hill ranges and open plains, with widespread physical remains. The sophistication of the varied urban, royal and sacred systems is evident from the more than 1600 surviving remains that include forts, riverside features, royal and sacred complexes, temples, shrines, pillared halls, Mandapas, memorial structures, gateways, defense check posts, stables, water structures, etc.

Among these, the Krishna temple complex, Narasimha, Ganesa, Hemakuta group of temples, Achyutaraya temple complex, Vitthala temple complex, Pattabhirama temple complex, Lotus Mahal complex, can be highlighted. Suburban townships (puras) surrounded the large Dravidian temple complexes containing subsidiary shrines, bazaars, residential areas and tanks applying the unique hydraulic technologies and skillfully and harmoniously integrating the town and defense architecture with surrounding landscape.

The remains unearthed in the site delineate both the extent of the economic prosperity and political status that once existed indicating a highly developed society.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Outbound travels slump by 30%: tourism official

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s outbound tourism fell by 30 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018) from a year earlier, a tourism official has said.

“A total of 5,900,381 Iranians traveled overseas during the first nine months of the year, indicating a 30 percent decline compared with the same period last year,” Leyla Ajdari said, ISNA reported.

“During the same period last year 8,483,317 Iranian nationals traveled abroad,” said Ajdari, the director for tourism development office of the Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization.

A sharp rise in the value of foreign currencies against rial has pushed up the costs of traveling, which seems to be the main reason behind the decline in Iranians’ traveling overseas.

Talking on the country’s inbound travels, the official said “The nine-month foreign arrivals in Iran is up by 56 percent year on year.”

The country hosted 6,074,580 foreign nationals during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year as the figure reached 3,893,277 in the same period last



**A sharp rise in the value of foreign currencies against rial has pushed up the costs of traveling, which seems to be the main reason behind the decline in Iranians’ traveling overseas.**

## Iranian festival to highlight Zilou weaving art



**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s historical city of Meybod plans to hold a festival on February 16 with the goal of highlighting traditional floor covering Zilou.

“We should demonstrate our full potential to lay the ground for bringing rising prosperity to the Zilou weaving arena,” a local official said in a briefing session on Saturday, CHTN reported.

Last October, the oasis city was designated for being a world city for Zilou by assessors from the World Crafts Coun-

cil-Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR).

Iran’s handicrafts exports reached \$107 million in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018), showing 9.5 percent growth year on year.

Traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are among Iranian exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and Germany, the U.S., the UK and other countries.

## Remains of “prehistoric” creatures discovered in central Iran



**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — Some animal remains, estimated to date from prehistoric times, have recently been discovered in Yazd province, central Iran, IRNA reported.

“The remains are found in an ancient floodway used to keep residential places safe from floodwaters,” IRNA quoted a tourism official as saying on Saturday.

A team of archaeologists will soon be dispatched to the region, which nears Tall-e Hassanabad, an ancient archaeological hill, westward the city of Meybod.

He, however, didn’t provide further details on the remnants.

Evidence suggest that that the animal remains are “most probably” date back to prehistoric time, the official said, adding “Similar remains were also found in [the nearby region of] Barjin in [the Iranian calendar year] 1391 (March 2002-March 2003) but at that time archaeological surveys were not continued as no other remains found.”

Meybod is located in the middle of the Iranian plateau, some 50 kilometers north of the historical city of Yazd.

## Iran’s saffron-ice cream among world’s top 50 desserts

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s saffron ice cream or **d e s k** bastani, scented with saffron, rosewater and pistachios, is among the world’s 50 best desserts, according to CNN.

From a lightly golden color to its distinctive aroma, the creamy treat is the essence of spring. By tradition, this Iranian ice cream is a favorite at Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

“It is a memorable experience on its own, and its flavor alone easily snags a spot among the world’s greatest frozen desserts.”

For the complete bastani experience, though, opt for a traditional Iranian ice cream sandwich of saffron ice cream between two thin wafers. The wafers’ mild flavor and crispy texture are the perfect foil -- and conveniently shaped handle -- for the rich and aromatic ice cream.



According to CNN, the shortlist comes from unofficial elections of the stomach, both have been voted to a permanent place in the world’s food hall of fame.

“Head to any country to find tender slices of Italian tiramis? at the bottom of cafe menus or sniff out the creamy scent of Hong Kong’s dan tats in cities around the globe.”

Persian ice cream is dissimilar to other common forms of ice cream. It is made of milk and dairy that is heated before other specialized ingredients are added.

The dairy is skillfully mixed with saffron, rosewater, frozen clotted cream, and saleb (natural binder extracted from orchid). It is then served topped with pistachio nuts.

South America’s Alfajores, Austria’s Apfelstrudel, Turkey’s Baklava, Sweden’s Cardamom Buns, and Brownies from the U.S. are among the CNN’s best desserts as well.

## Queen Elizabeth II: The one thing the monarch refuses to travel without

Queen Elizabeth II, 92, has enjoyed plenty of travel throughout her long reign and it’s often done in great luxury. When the monarch traveled in the Royal Yacht Britannia she demanded one thing came with her.

Queen Elizabeth II is the most important member of the royal family and has fine-tuned her own travel desires during her lifetime. The Queen and Prince Philip, 97, once had the luxury of their own ship, the Royal Yacht Britannia - a vessel that also served as a place far from the cameras of the media for younger generations including Prince Charles, 70, and the late Princess Diana. Commissioned into the Royal Navy on 11 January 1954, the Britannia was designed as a royal residence to entertain guests around the world. It was decommissioned in 1997. When the Queen used to make state visits in the Britannia

she would demand staff brought one thing in particular on board.

Queen Elizabeth would demand Malvern water was brought on board for use in her tea, claimed author Peter Pigott in his book Royal Transport.

This was just part of the huge selection of luggage the royals brought on board.

“For each state visit, the royal family brought with them five tons of luggage, including Malvern water for the Queen’s tea,” wrote Pigott.

A surprising number of staff members also came on board with Her Majesty - 45 in total, according to Pigott.

There were plenty of other quirks to the Britannia - both the ship itself and life on board the yacht.

“It was the only ship not to have its name on the bow - the royal crest was sufficient,”

wrote Pigott.

“It was also the only ship in the Royal Navy on which the sailors were called by their first name.”

Life for staff was far from relaxed, however, and there were very, very strict rules on board.

“Shouting by staff was forbidden at all times to preserve the air of tranquillity that existed on board,” said Pigott.

“All orders were relayed by hand signal, and ‘red hot’ notice boards were used if there were any last minute order to be posted.”

The conditions could also be highly unpleasant for employees on the royal yacht as regal demands were met.

“Because of the continuous state function that required instantaneous change of clothing and linen, the sailors had to run a 24-hour laundry where temperatures could climb

above 120 degrees Celsius,” wrote Pigott.

Another interesting fact about the Britannia is that there were no double beds on board at all.

Writer Brian Hoey revealed in his book Not in Front of the Corgis that Elizabeth and Philip had separate cabins when they travelled on the Royal Yacht Britannia.

Hoey explained that when the Britannia was used for royal honeymoons, single beds would have to be roped together by the crew.

Another explanation is due to their bedding preferences. “The Queen likes a longer turn-back on her sheets and blankets and lace trimming on her pillowcases; Prince Philip does not,” Hoey wrote in the book.

Philip also allegedly “sleeps wide open whatever the weather temperature. He has never used a hot water bottle in his life.”

(Source: [express.co.uk](http://express.co.uk))

## Ancient Carved ‘Drums’ Give Exact Stonehenge Measurements, Say Archaeologists

A set of highly decorated chalk cylinders, carved in Britain more than 4,000 years ago and known as the Folkton drums, could be ancient replicas of measuring devices used for laying out prehistoric monuments like Stonehenge, archaeologists say.

The researchers from the University of Manchester and University College London in the UK said that a fixed number of turns of a string around the hand-size objects gives a standard measurement of 3.22 meters — or about 10.5 feet

— a length that was used to lay out many Neolithic stone and timber circles.

Three of the ornately carved chalk cylinders were found in 1889, near the village of Folkton, in Yorkshire in the north of England. The smallest is 4.09 inches (10.4 centimeters) across, the next is 4.88 inches (12.4 cm) and the largest is 5.75 inches (14.6 cm).

They were found in the grave of a child, which is thought to date to the late Neolithic period — from 3000 BC to 2500

BC— or the early Bronze Age Beaker period in Britain, lasting from 2500 BC to 1800 BC.

Due to the location of the find and the cylinders’ unusual shape, archaeologists call the objects the Folkton drums. They were thought to be unique until a very similar carved chalk cylinder was found more than 100 years later, in the village of Lavant near England’s south coast — it is called the Lavant drum.

(Source: [Live Science](http://Live Science))



# New study reports presence of microplastics in common groundwater source

Microplastics contaminate the world's surface waters, yet scientists have only just begun to explore their presence in groundwater systems. A new study is the first to report microplastics in fractured limestone aquifers - a groundwater source that accounts for 25 percent of the global drinking water supply.

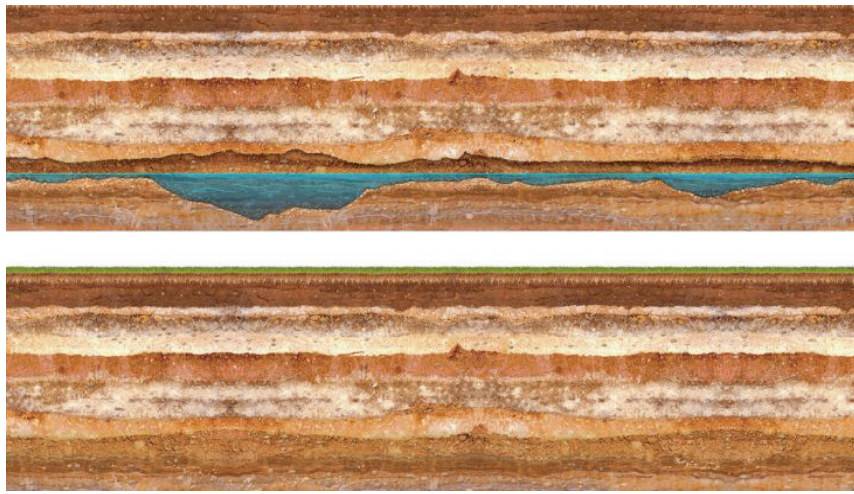
The study identified microplastic fibers, along with a variety of medicines and household contaminants, in two aquifer systems in Illinois. The findings are published in the journal *Groundwater*.

"Plastic in the environment breaks down into microscopic particles that can end up in the guts and gills of marine life, exposing the animals to chemicals in the plastic," said John Scott, a researcher at the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center and study co-author. "As the plastics break down, they act like sponges that soak up contaminants and microbes and can ultimately work their way into our food supply."

## Cracks and voids

Groundwater flows through the cracks and voids in limestone, sometimes carrying sewage and runoff from roads, landfills and agricultural areas into the aquifers below, Scott said.

The researchers collected 17 groundwater samples from wells and springs - 11 from a highly fractured limestone aquifer near the St. Louis metropolitan area and six from an aquifer containing much smaller fractures in rural northwestern Illinois.



All but one of the 17 samples contained microplastic particles, with a maximum concentration of 15.2 particles per liter from a spring in the St. Louis area, the study reports. However, deciphering what that concentration means is a challenge, Scott said. There

are no published risk assessment studies or regulations.

The researchers did find, however, that concentrations from their field area are comparable to those of surface water concentrations found in the rivers and streams

**Groundwater flows through the cracks and voids in limestone, sometimes carrying sewage and runoff from roads, landfills and agricultural areas into the aquifers below, Scott says.**

in the Chicago area, said Samuel V. Panno, an Illinois State Geological Survey researcher and lead author of the study.

## Very early stage

The "research on this topic is at a very early stage, so I am not convinced we have a frame of reference to state expectations or bounds on what is considered low or high levels," said Tim Hoellein, a biology professor at Loyola University Chicago and study co-author. "Our questions are still basic - how much is there and where is it coming from?"

The researchers identified a variety of household and personal health contaminants along with the microplastics, a hint that the fibers may have originated from household septic systems.

"Imagine how many thousands of polyester fibers find their way into a septic system from just doing a load of laundry," Scott said. "Then consider the potential for those fluids to leak into the groundwater supply, especially in these types of aquifers where surface water interacts so readily with groundwater."

"Even if we quit plastics cold turkey today, we will still deal with this issue for years because plastic never really goes away," Scott said. "It is estimated that 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic waste have been produced since the 1940s, and 79 percent of that is now in landfills or the natural environment.

(Source: [news-medical.net](#))

## Drier mountains pose a double whammy for cold-adapted amphibians

A species of frog endemic to the Pacific Northwest faces a 50 percent increase in the probability of extinction by the 2080s due to climate change, according to a new study published by SFU researchers in the *Ecological Society of America*.

The mountain-dwelling Cascades frog thrives in extreme climatic conditions, ranging from dozens of feet of snow in winter to temperatures in excess of 90°F in summer. Cascades frogs are explosive breeders and their role as predators of flying insects is critical to aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

SFU biologist Wendy Palen, along with co-authors Mike Adams of the United States Geological Survey and Maureen Ryan and Amanda Kissel of Conservation Science Partners, set out to understand the effects of climate change on these unique amphibians.

Specifically, they aimed to assess how the warmer and drier temperatures occurring with climate change affect the survival of two distinct aspects of the frog's life cycle: in the aquatic stage where the frogs develop as tadpoles in shallow ponds, and in the terrestrial environment stage where they live as adults.

## Frog's aquatic stage

During the frogs' aquatic stage, the researchers evaluated whether warmer temperatures would increase food production and result in larger, healthier frogs upon metamorphosis, or whether entire generations of frogs would die in years when warmer, drier winters lead to ponds that



dry quickly, stranding tadpoles before metamorphosis.

For the terrestrial stage, they evaluated whether the milder winters of climate change would present a warm welcome and lead to higher survival of adult frogs.

The species has been tracked in Olympic National Park's Sol Duc watershed for approximately 15 years. In fact, Palen, now a professor of biology at SFU, was a graduate student at the University of Washington when she began tagging hundreds of frogs with tiny microchips.

More recently Kissel, a lead scientist at Conservation

Science Partners, continued the work by monitoring more than 50 ponds that the frogs use for breeding. She tracked water levels and the timing of metamorphosis to identify how often ponds dried before the frogs could emerge.

The team found that currently, up to a quarter of the tadpoles are stranded and die each year. Applying projections from hydrologists from the universities of Washington and Notre Dame, the researchers predict that nearly 40 per cent of the tadpoles could be lost by the 2080s as a result of dry ponds.

## Terrestrial stage

The results from studying the frog's terrestrial stage were even more surprising. Data showed that thinner snow-packs and warmer summer temperatures actually reduced adult survival.

Taking both trends together, the researchers forecast that the Cascades frog will have a 62 per cent chance of extinction risk by the 2080s.

Kissel says, "This is a worst-case scenario, where a frog that largely occurs inside some of our most protected landscapes will be at high risk of extinction by the end of this century."

The study supports an emerging picture of climate change in the Pacific Northwest where, as a result of warmer temperatures, precipitation will fall more often as rain rather than snow, leading to longer, drier summers with compounding negative consequences for many wildlife species.

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

## Europe's 'new' periodic table predicts which elements will disappear in the next 100 years

A new periodic table sizes the boxes for each element based on their relative abundance. Oxygen is plentiful, but indium and helium may soon be scarce, thanks to humans' voracious appetite for smartphones and party balloons.

The European Chemical Society (or EuChemS, a group representing more than 160,000 chemists in the European Union). Unlike the ubiquitous classroom version of the table, which categorizes the universe's 118 known natural and synthetic elements with equal space for each element, EuChemS' chart has been warped and wobbled to show the relative abundance or scarcity of 90 naturally occurring elements here on Earth.

The bubbly new chart of life's building blocks is more than a cool curiosity; according to EuChemS president David Cole-Hamilton, it's also an important reminder

of which of Earth's elements are in danger of disappearing, thanks to human overuse.

"Some of these elements, we have less than a hundred years before it's much more difficult to get hold of them," Cole-Hamilton told the Marketplace "Morning Report" radio show. Others, he noted, may only have a shelf life of a few decades.

## Earth's atmosphere

According to the new table, oxygen — which makes up about 21 percent of Earth's atmosphere and is (knock on wood) allowing you to breathe right now — is the planet's most abundant element and faces no threat of extinction.

Many of the most-threatened elements, meanwhile, are being used to manufacture tech-heavy devices like computers and smartphones. Indium, for example, is a silvery metal used to create touch screens

for phones and computers. According to Cole-Hamilton, the world's indium supply is "extremely thinly spread" across the planet and could soon dry up if we continue chucking out our old devices every few years.

"In the UK alone, 1 million smartphones are exchanged every month," Cole-Hamilton told Marketplace. "If we use [indium] at the rate we continue to use it, the amount in the reserves is only enough for another 20 years."

Humans' appetite for shiny new tech is not the only threat to the elements, though. Helium, the second-most abundant element in the universe, may only have a few decades left of use on Earth, thanks largely to runaway party balloons.

## Deep-sea diving

While the helium used in MRI scanners and deep-sea diving is usually recycled, Cole-

Hamilton said, helium party balloons tend to release their gassy cargo directly into the atmosphere, where it is soon lost to space.

"If helium gets into the atmosphere, it can go right up to the edge of the Earth and be lost in outer space forever," Cole-Hamilton said. "Really, we shouldn't be putting helium into party balloons."

Cole-Hamilton added that there's only about 10 years' worth of helium left in Earth's reserves, if humans don't start changing their balloon-releasing behavior soon.

2019 marks the 150th anniversary of the periodic table, which was originally conceived by Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev in 1869. Last week, the world's oldest known classroom version of the periodic table was discovered in a cluttered storeroom in Scotland. The chart dates to 1885.

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

## Scientists find salamander genome may hold the key to human regeneration

Researchers have assembled the genome of the salamander axolotl and hope to deduce the key to its impressive regeneration abilities.

Regeneration is an amazing ability by some animals that allows them to regrow lost parts.

Scientists have long been interested in this ability testing everything from superpower hormones to super material in graphene to find a way to mimic it in humans.

Now, researchers at the University of Kentucky may have found a key discovery in the quest for human regeneration. They have assembled the genome of the salamander axolotl. This mapping is important as axolotls have long been known as ideal models for regeneration.

## The spinal cord

"It's hard to find a body part they can't regenerate: the limbs, the tail, the spinal cord, the eye, and in some species, the lens, even half of their brain has been shown to regenerate," said Randal Voss, a professor in the UK Spinal Cord and Brain

Injury Research Center and a co-PI on the project.



Mapping the salamander genome was no small feat. Though the axolotls share many of the same genes as humans, their genomes are ten times larger.

As such, scientists up to now had not yet succeeded in assembling the impressive genome in the correct order. This was thwarting them from making the large-scale analyses of structure that would allow them to discover how these animals get their super regeneration abilities.

Current undertaking to map the human genome has given researchers the power

to reproduce that data in other organisms. However, animals such as the axolotl possess genomes so complex they make these efforts largely impossible.

To overcome this issue, the researchers adapted a classical genetic approach called linkage mapping to put the axolotl genome together correctly. This marks the first genome of this phenomenal size to be assembled to date.

"Just a few years ago, no one thought it possible to assemble a 30+GB genome," said Jeremiah Smith, an associate professor in the UK Department of Biology and Voss' co-PI.

## Accessible method

"We have now shown it is possible using a cost-effective and accessible method, which opens up the possibility of routinely sequencing other animals with large genomes."

Voss and Smith have already used the assembled data to identify a gene responsible for a heart defect in an axolotl. The experimentation, meant to act as proof of concept, is providing a new model of human disease.

"Biomedical research is increasingly becoming a genetically-driven enterprise," said Voss. "To understand human disease, you have to see be able to study gene functions in other organisms like the axolotl."

"Now that we have access to genomic information, we can really start to probe axolotl gene functions and learn how they are able to regenerate body parts. Hopefully, someday we can translate this information to human therapy, with potential applications for spinal cord injury, stroke, joint repair ... the sky's the limit, really."

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

## Research shows that popular music lyrics become angrier and sadder over time

Popular music has changed over the years, and the music of 2019 is noticeably different from the music of the 1960s or 1970s. But it is not just the music that changed, but also the lyrics. Data scientists at Lawrence Technological University in Michigan used quantitative analytics to study the change in lyrics of popular music over seven decades, from the 1950s to 2016. The results showed that the expression of anger and sadness in popular music has increased gradually over time, while the expression of joy has declined.

In a research paper published in the most recent issue of the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Kathleen Napier and Lior Shamir analyzed the lyrics of over 6000 songs of the Billboard Hot 100 in each year. The Billboard Hot 100 songs are the most popular songs each year, and reflect the preferences of music fans. In the past the songs were ranked mainly by record sales, radio broadcasting, and jukebox plays, but in the more recent years it is based on several other popularity indicators such as streaming and social media to reflect the changes in music consumption.

The tones expressed in each song were analyzed by applying automatic quantitative sentiment analysis. Automatic sentiment analysis associates each word or phrase in the song with a set of tones that they express. The combination of the tones expressed by all words and phrases of the lyrics determines the sentiment of that song. The sentiments of all Billboard Hot 100 songs in each year are averaged, and the average of each year allows to measure whether the expression of that sentiment increased, decreased, or remained constant.

The analysis showed that the expression of anger in popular music lyrics has increased gradually over time. Songs released during the mid 1950s were the least angry, and the anger expressed in lyrics has increased gradually until peaking in 2015. The analysis also revealed some variations. Songs released in the three years of 1982-1984 were less angry compared to any other period, except for the 1950s.

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

## Birds can see a 'color' humans can't, say scientists

Birds see a very different world to the one we're familiar with, and now we can get a hint of what that looks like thanks to a specially designed camera that simulates birdo-vision.

Apart from being fascinating, the resulting images also explain why birds can navigate so accurately through dense foliage.

Behavioral biologist Cynthia Tedore formerly from Lund University in Sweden explains that the team wanted to look for patterns in nature that birds see, but scientists have not yet thought to look for.

They chose to explore bird vision because birds are very visually orientated - they use their sight to forage and hunt for food - and unlike human eyes, bird eyes can detect a fourth color.

In our eyes, we have three types of color receptors, or cones - they are sensitive to red, blue and green frequencies of light. Birds have a fourth receptor that varies across species in the type of frequency it can detect.



Some birds, like Australian honeyeaters, have their fourth color receptors sensitive to violet light; in others, such as parrots, these cones can detect light further into the UV part of the spectrum.

To find out how these violet- and UV-sensitive cones translate visually, researchers photographed dense forest habitat in both Sweden and Australia using a multispectral camera with specially designed filters to mimic what a bird can see.

The multispectral images clearly show how UV sensitivity detects a greater contrast between the upper and lower surfaces of leaves, making each leaf's position and orientation stand out in a very clear, 3D way.

"What appears to be a green mess to humans are clearly distinguishable leaves for birds. No one knew about this until this study," said biologist Dan-Eric Nilsson, also from Lund University.

Both the upper and lower leaf surfaces reflect similar levels of UV light, so the researchers think the differences are due to how much UV the leaves reflect versus transmit.

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

## 'GO dough' makes graphene easy to shape and mold

A team has turned graphene oxide into a soft, moldable and kneadable play dough that can be shaped and reshaped into free-standing, three-dimensional structures.

The team has turned graphene oxide (GO) into a soft, moldable and kneadable play dough that can be shaped and reshaped into free-standing, three-dimensional structures.

Called "GO dough," the product might be fun to play with it, but it's more than a toy. The malleable material solves several long-standing -- and sometimes explosive -- problems in the graphene manufacturing industry.

"Currently graphene oxide is stored as dry solids or powders, which are prone to combustion," said Jiaxing Huang, who led the study. "Or they have to be turned into dilute dispersions, which multiply the material's mass by hundreds or thousands."

Huang recounted his most recent shipment of 5 kilograms of graphene oxide, which was dispersed in 500 liters of liquid. "It had to be delivered in a truck," he said. The "same amount of graphene oxide in dough form would weigh about 10 kilograms, and I could carry it myself."

The research was published on January 24 in the journal *Nature Communications*. Huang is a professor of materials science and engineering in Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering.

"Adding binders such as plastics could turn anything into a dough state," Huang said. "But these additives often significantly alter the material's properties."

After being shaped into structures, the dough can be converted into dense solids that are electrically conductive, chemically stable and mechanically hard. Or, more water can be added to the dough to transform it into a high-quality GO dispersion on demand.

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



## Ebtekar calls Tehran mayor for more effort on gender equality

**WOMEN** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Vice President for Women's and Family Affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar, has asked Tehran Mayor, Pirouz Hanachi, to make more effort on gender equality.

In a letter published on Sunday, the VP called on the mayor to take effective steps for improving living space for all groups of the society, especially women, IRNA reported.



Emphasizing policy-making for increasing hope and happiness in the society and decreasing social vulnerabilities, Ebtekar called for designing urban furniture for the needs of different groups of citizens, including women with a strategy of supporting families.

Urban furniture includes items, objects, and equipment installed in public areas, such as urban parks, and streets, and including such elements as traffic signs, park benches, bollards and public fountains.

The female vice president also called for supporting non-governmental organizations, and developing sports spaces and women's parks.

She also called for paying more attention to strengthening the foundation of family and creating markets for supplies made by urban and rural women.

## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### Chicken curry and potatoes

“This is the best curry chicken you will ever have. It is also very good with a side of basmati rice! Hope you enjoy it.”

#### Ingredients:



- 1 (3 pound) chicken, cut into pieces
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 8 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/4 cup mild curry powder
- 2 tablespoons hot curry powder
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- Salt to taste
- 5 russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

#### Directions:

Place chicken into a large saucepan and cover with water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until chicken is no longer pink in the center, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium heat; cook and stir onion and garlic until onion is tender, about 5 minutes. Stir mild curry powder, hot curry powder, black pepper, and salt into onion mixture; continue to cook and stir for 5 minutes, then transfer mixture to chicken and broth.

Stir potatoes into chicken mixture. Simmer until potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes more.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Going On A Diet

A: Oh man! I've been starving myself for days now and I haven't lost an ounce!

B: Are you trying to lose weight?

A: Yeah, my friend is getting married next month and I'm supposed to be a bridesmaid. I have to fit into my dress and look nice for her wedding, but I haven't lost any weight! Look at these **love handles**.

B: You don't have to **starve** yourself to lose weight. I think that's where you're going wrong.

A: Why? If I eat less, then my body will start eating away at my fat reserves right?

B: Not really. You should try to not eat foods high in **calories**, salts or saturated fats. Stay away from oily food and artificial flavors.

A: So you are saying that I should eat, but I should just watch what I eat?

B: Yes! You can also try to reduce your **intake** of carbohydrates and foods that are high in cholesterol. You can have steamed veggies or increase your protein intake found in chicken or fish. A: If I do all this do you think I can lose twenty pounds in four weeks?

B: **Don't count on it.**

#### Key vocabulary

**starve**: to be very hungry

**love handles**: folds of excess fat on either side of the waist

**calorie**: a unit for measuring the amount of energy that food will produce

**intake**: a quantity take in

**do not count on**: do not rely on, depend on

#### Supplementary vocabulary

**to diet**: to change what you eat in order to lose weight

**Atkins diet**: a diet high in protein and low in carbohydrates

**anorexia**: a disease in which people starve themselves to be thin

**obese**: extremely fat

**low-carb**: not containing many carbohydrates

(Source: irlanguage.com)



## Without water, everything withers

# Traveling with a hijab, what's it really like?

By Martin Lashkari

Traveling with a hijab was not a subject I was planning to write about. The idea triggered when I received messages from other Iranian women who were confused about how they would be received outside of Iran while wearing a headscarf. I first wrote the post in Persian and thought that would be it. I don't really have a big readership of Muslim travelers and it was not going to be interesting for anyone else. But then I thought that people might actually be curious to know what it's like to travel around the world with a hijab. The reactions we get and the struggles we deal with...

Let's face it, the travel blogging community mostly represents travel through the eyes of Western travelers. I know a few successful Asian bloggers and fewer from the Middle East. I thought it wouldn't hurt to share an experience so many of us deal with because we still live in an Islamophobic world.

I personally don't want to make traveling with a hijab a thing. I hardly ever come to a point where I feel my headscarf is affecting my experience, but I still want to talk about it. Mostly because there are so many women who feel conscious about it.

#### What is traveling with a hijab really like?

My perception of a Muslim woman has truly changed through travel and life abroad. I believe that there are so many different versions of Islam and came to realize the significant difference between my beliefs with my Palestinian and Turkish friend. Sometimes the difference was so huge that what seemed right to me, would seem wrong to them and the other way around. There's no single way to be a good human or a Muslim and things get a lot easier once we all agree on that.

#### Living abroad and traveling with a hijab are two very different experiences

When living in a different country, you're bound to have interactions with locals of many different backgrounds. When travelling abroad, you're likely to meet people who've met tons of tourists or travel very often. The later will care very little about a piece of material on your head as they've probably met loads of Muslims and have a broader perspective of the world.

When I was studying in Lisbon, I was once horribly insulted by one of the students. I spent an hour crying in the bathroom because I felt like shit and hated my university. I couldn't believe that someone in an academic environment would do such a thing that I'm so embarrassed to even mention now.

Another time I was called a terrorist by an old man while waiting for a train and there have been a few incidents where I'd been followed or stared at while just walking in the street. I remember someone shouted terrorists at me and mum when I was only 9 years old living in down under just after 9/11. It was a long time ago but hey, it has stuck to my mind.

Fortunately, I never experienced any of those while traveling with a hijab. These were all experienced while living or studying abroad



and it's only been a handful of times.

#### The hijab can be an ice breaker

Traveling with a hijab is not always that bad. Sometimes it works as an ice breaker because, to be honest, a lot of people don't even know what the hijab stands for. I have been occasionally approached by people who were just curious to know what it was all about. It's good to be open to conversations and it's nice that people like to hear a personal opinion rather than just listening to mainstream media.

#### People can react differently in different countries

People's information or values are pretty different around the world. In North American or northern Europe, people are accustomed to seeing women with headscarves and hardly blink an eye. It doesn't mean that you'll never meet mean people but at least there's no staring.

In countries like Japan, despite the very few numbers of hijabis, people are raised to respect your personal space and choice of clothing. They'd never make an opinion about it on the street and they will absolutely not stare. In fact, I've had a few incidents in Japan where people actually wanted a photo with me as if I was some interesting creature. I never took it the wrong way and there was no harm in saying cheese for a photo while showing the peace sign with your fingers.

In India, the diversity people deal in their own country is just so massive that they wouldn't bother about you looking different. Is there anyone kinder and more peaceful than Indians? I'm yet to find.

In countries where Muslims are rarely seen, it's natural to catch a few stares. Most of the time they are just curious but it's still pretty annoying.

#### Everyone has a unique experience

People's experiences in one specific place can be very different. It's really a matter of luck. I've traveled to France quite a few times and I've never felt insulted by anyone. My friend's experience was however different.

Another friend of mine Zahra who works in Oslo says that she was treated well in Parisian shops because she was probably taken

as a rich Arab, which was very different from Oslo. In Scandinavia however, Muslims have lower incomes and people are not used to seeing them in expensive shops. Hence why you might experience someone following you around rather than just being nice.

#### It depends on the situation

I follow a lot of Muslim bloggers who wear burkinis while going to the beach in Europe or the USA. I've never had the guts to wear one because I just can't deal with all the eyes that will turn.

I was once walking along the beach in spring with a friend of mine in Cascais. We were both barefoot and the weather was still pretty chilly, so not so many people around. But I still remember the heavy stares of people who apparently thought it was absolutely MAD that two girls were walking along the beach with a hijab!

I've walked along plenty of beaches and this never happened again but it still makes me nervous about going to the beach in summer.

#### It's easier when you're dressed casually

I personally love colors and don't dress very different from other people apart from the additional scarf. I don't wear crazy makeup or have a very unique hijab style, and it helps not to catch too much attention. I also get a lot of compliments on my scarves here and there which is always nice.

Now everyone's choice of clothing is like this and I can imagine that wearing a long black abaya or a chador can be quite eye-catching in a non-Muslim country. It's totally cool if you're comfortable with it but it can cause unwanted attention.

#### Hijab has many different forms

A lot of people, mostly fellow Muslims have a specific idea of hijab. They expect you to either take it off or wear it according to their standards. The truth is that we're all on a journey of hijab. Hijab has so much to do with one's culture, backgrounds, and their overall beliefs. A Muslim woman from Africa will certainly be dressed differently compared to one from Indonesia, Turkey, Saudia Arabia or Iran and it's absolutely fine! Even if you're not a Muslim, people feel differently about

revealing too much skin.

Muslim women need to reach an agreement that their personal criteria for the perfect hijab is not necessarily the right one or the only one. Once we agree on that, we can then expect people to respect our different forms of hijab without prejudice.

#### Being insulted by your own countrywomen is the worse

The enforcement of hijab in Iran can be very harsh for people who don't believe in it. That's something I can truly understand and I believe that people should have the freedom to dress as they like. However, for many, we Iranian women who do wear the hijab on our own will and continue to wear it outside of Iran seem like a good target for a backlash. Since these people can't express their anger to the responsible men, we seem to be an easier target. And there's nothing worse than that!

#### One person's opinion should not affect your whole trip

As I said, there's very little chance that you'll deal with any of these situations while traveling with a hijab, but if you do, don't let it ruin your whole experience. It's ok to feel horrible and angry, but you shouldn't let one person's words to affect your trip. And please don't make a general judgment about a certain nationality because of some stupid person's ignorance.

#### We're not ambassadors of the Muslim community

I feel like there's a lot of pressure on Muslim women to prove the media wrong and I hate that. We don't have to continuously prove that we're not like some fools doing horrible stuff in the name of our religion. If people want to have prejudice or judge the whole population of Muslims based on the act of a few, then it's their loss. We have the right to feel hurt, angry or make wrong decisions like everyone else. We are so much more than our hijabs and we don't have to make up for anything besides our own actions.

I mean if we pay tons of money and go through extra security checks in the airport to travel the world, why the hell do we need to put so much pressure on ourselves to enlighten the ignorant world??

In the end, all I want to say is that it's ok to feel nervous to get out of your comfort zone. But none of this is serious enough to stop you from discovering the world. Most people are a lot nicer than you think and hardly care about your religion. Don't make your hijab an issue and no one else will do either.

I'd love to know if any of you have had any positive or negative experiences while traveling with a hijab. If you're non-Muslim, I'm curious to know your thoughts when meeting women in hijab either in your country or on your travel. Do you feel like an automatic prejudice fed to you by the media? How do you overcome it?

(Source: www.travestyle.com)  
(Martin Lashkari: I'm Martin, an Iranian Graphic Design graduate and a traveler at heart. I enjoy exploring new places, hunting for artwork, soaking into new cultures and meeting people from all walks of life.)

## Female ambassador to Brunei meets FM Zarif

**WOMEN** **TEHRAN** — Iran's newly-appointed female ambassador to Brunei, Homeira Rigi, met with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday before leaving Iran for the Southeast Asian country.

Rigi was appointed as an ambassador upon the proposal of Zarif and the approval of President Hassan Rouhani, IRNA reported.

The Baluch Sunni woman has served as the governor

of Qasr-e Qand city in Sistan-Baluchestan province since 2014. She had also served as the head of the welfare department of Chabahar.

She was among a number of female governors appointed by President Rouhani in various provinces, under a plan to empower women in political and economic domains.

Marzieh Afkham was the first Iranian female politician who was appointed as the ambassador to Malaysia in 2015.



## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Mobile testing teams to run HIV/ AIDS tests in high-risk neighborhoods

Sixteen mobile testing teams will perform HIV/AIDs tests in high-risk neighborhoods, deputy health Minister Alireza Raeisi has said.

We have prepared a map of high risk neighborhoods in all provinces nationwide and identified places packed with drug addicts and people with high-risk behaviors, ISNA news agency quoted Raeisi as saying on Saturday. People diagnosed with HIV/AIDs can also receive services at drop-in centers, he highlighted.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “alti-, alto-, alt-”

Meaning: high

For example: At high **altitudes** it is difficult to get enough oxygen.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Tear somebody/ something apart

Meaning: tear something apart to cause serious arguments in a group of people; rip apart

For example: Scandal is tearing the government apart.

## IDIOM

### Salt of the earth

Explanation: a person or group that is regarded as genuine, unpretentious, and morally sound

For example: Even with all his success, Robert is still the salt of the earth. He donates most of his salary to charity and volunteers weekly at the hospital.

## ایجاد تیم سیار برای شناسایی مبتلایانِ ایدز در محله های پر خطر

علیرضا ریسی معاون بهداشت وزیر بهداشت گفت: ۱۶ تیم سیار برای شناسایی مبتلایان به اچ‌ای در افراد پرخطر و در معرض آسیب، در محله های پرخطر مستقر شدند.

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایسنا ریسی گفت، درباره نحوه شناسایی موارد جدید ابتلا به اچ‌ای وی/ایدز در پاتوق‌های معتادان و افراد پرخطر، گفت: یکی از اقداماتی که امسال در این زمینه انجام دادیم این بود که در هر استان، نقشه‌برداری از مناطق پرخطر انجام دادیم و محل پاتوق‌های معتادین و افراد با ریسک بالا را در هر استان شناسایی کردیم.

وی همچنین بیان کرد: این افراد می توانند در مراکز DIC خدمت دریافت کنند.



# Bahrain's Supreme Court upholds Sheikh Ali Salman's life sentence

➡ Back then, Wefaq stated that the Bahraini judiciary was a tool in the hands of the ruling Manama regime, and the ruling reflected the magnitude of turmoil in the kingdom.

Sultan and Alaswad, who had been sentenced to life in absentia, also lost their right to appeal.

Qatar, currently embroiled in a rift with Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies, has categorically denied accusations of conspiring with Salman against Bahrain.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates severed their diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism. The four countries also imposed a land, sea, and air blockade on Qatar.

Human rights groups have frequently said cases against activists in Bahrain fail



to meet the fundamental requirements of fair trials.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have regularly held demonstrations in Bahrain ever since a popular uprising began in the kingdom in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. In March 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime's iron-fisted security response.

(Source: Press TV)

## Erdogan: Safe zones in Syria will allow refugees to return home

Turkey is aiming to form safe zones in northern Syria so that Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey could return to their home country, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

Speaking in Istanbul on Monday, Erdogan also said nearly 300,000 Syrians had already returned to areas controlled by Turkish-backed rebels in northern Syria, adding that he expected millions of Syrian nationals to return to the proposed safe zones.

Turkey hosts about four million Syrian refugees.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced in December the withdrawal of the 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria and Erdogan subsequently said they had discussed setting up a 32km-deep safe zone in Syria along the border with Turkey.

On Friday, Erdogan said that Turkey expected the safe zone to be set up within a few months, otherwise, it would establish a buffer zone without the help of other nations.

He added that the zone will aim to protect Turkey from "terrorists", referring to the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish militia that controls areas in northeastern Syria along the Turkish border.

Ankara wants the zone to contain the fighters of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which the United States has armed and trained to fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS).

The YPG is seen as an effective ground force by the U.S.

in the fight against ISIL, but Turkey says it is linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Ankara and Washington list as a terrorist group.

Turkey's foreign minister said on Thursday that Turkey has the capacity to create a safe zone in Syria on its own, but will not exclude the U.S., Russia, or others if they want to cooperate.

"Turkey has not forced refugees to go back for years. However, around 300,000 refugees returned to areas held by Turkey and Turkey-backed rebels in northern Syria, such as Jarablus and Al-Bab," Al Jazeera's Osama Bin Javid, reporting from Gaziantep on Turkey-Syria border, said.

"And more refugee returns are only possible, according to Erdogan, if Turkey can have some sort of control from the west side of the Euphrates River until the Iraqi border."

### ■ Turkish threat

For months, Ankara has threatened to launch a new offensive in northern Syria to drive out the U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters, following two other battles in the last three years.

Turkish forces shelled YPG positions in the northern Syrian region of Tal Rifaat last week, state media reported on Friday.

The YPG still controls the small region of Tal Rifaat, wedged between the area under Turkish control to the north and areas controlled by the Syrian government and



anti-Syrian government rebels to the south.

It is just 20km west of Afrin, which was taken by Turkey and its Free Syrian Army (FSA) allies in an operation last year aimed at driving out the YPG militia.

The YPG has rejected the idea of a "security zone" set up by Ankara, fearing a Turkish offensive against territory under their control.

Erdogan and Trump have had several telephonic conversations to discuss the proposed security zone, as well as the U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## EU has a Brexit message for May - Irish backstop is our red line

The European Union has a message for British Prime Minister Theresa May as she plots a path out of the Brexit impasse: a backup plan for the Irish border can be tweaked but will have to be included in any divorce deal.

With less than nine weeks until the United Kingdom is due by law to leave the European Union on March 29, there is no agreement yet in London on how and even whether to leave the world's biggest trading bloc.

Parliament defeated May's deal two weeks ago by a huge margin with many Brexit-supporting rebels in her Conservative Party angry at the Irish backstop, an insurance policy aimed at preventing a hard border in Ireland if no other solutions can be agreed.

Ahead of Tuesday's votes in the British parliament on a way forward, MPs in May's party are pushing for her to demand the European Union drop the backstop and replace it with something else.

Ireland said the backstop was staying and the European Commission repeated on Monday that the withdrawal agreement text, and its backstop component, is not open for renegotiation.

"The European Parliament will not ratify

a withdrawal agreement that doesn't have a backstop in it, it's as simple as that," Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister Simon Coveney told the BBC.

As the Brexit crisis goes down to the line, however, EU officials indicated there might be wriggle room if May came back with a clear, and viable, request for changes that she - and the EU - believe will secure a final ratification.

The backstop is a type of insurance policy aimed at preventing a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland if no other solutions can be agreed. It is the most contentious part of May's deal.

### ■ Ireland

The question for May is whether the EU can offer enough to get a variant of her defeated deal through the British parliament.

Possible amendments floated by EU officials range from further public assurances that the backstop would probably never be used or only for a brief period to amending the text which accompanies the treaty and which lays out expectations for the trading relationship that will come in after the transition.

The EU has explicitly said if Britain were to stay in a customs union indefinitely, as the opposition Labour Party favours, that could leave the backstop redundant.

One key element is maintaining a united front with the Irish government, which insists it needs the backstop without a time limit to ensure there is no physical frontier, which could become a target of the violence that has been reduced as a result of the two-decade-old Good Friday Agreement peace deal.

EU and Irish leaders insist that Dublin is under no pressure to relent.

However, a looming no-deal Brexit, in which the EU insists Ireland cannot leave an open door to British goods, has highlighted the difficulty Ireland will face if the backstop issue scuppers an agreement.

EU leaders are open to giving May more time beyond March 29 if she can convince them she will use the time to secure the elusive orderly outcome, whether leaving or staying.

### ■ "Show us your majority"

Brussels and the national governments are keeping their options open, however, determined not to give in to British demands that they believe would undermine their single market but also anxious to use every

possibility to avoid chaos.

But they are reluctant to offer May more concessions that then fail to satisfy British lawmakers.

"Theresa May must show us a majority for something concrete. Come back and be specific about what she needs to get the deal passed," one EU source told Reuters.

"All eyes are on the House of Commons, what amendments pass and what can be built on their basis, maybe around the middle of February," said another.

May is trying to use a series of votes in parliament on Tuesday to find a consensus that MPs in her own party could support, just two weeks since her deal suffered the biggest parliamentary defeat in modern British history.

The British parliament on Tuesday will vote on proposals put forward by MPs including a delay to Brexit and going back to the EU to demand changes to the Northern Irish backstop.

In essence, May is forcing MPs to show their cards on what sort of Brexit, if any, they want. MPs in her own party want her to demand a last-minute change to the deal to remove the backstop.

(Source: Reuters)

## HRW raps torture by al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Idlib

Human Rights Watch has accused the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) terrorist group of using "torture" against those opposing its rule in Syria's militant-held northwestern province of Idlib.

The New York-based rights group said on Monday that it had documented 11 cases in which HTS, which is a coalition of different factions of terror outfits, largely composed of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, "detained Idlib residents, apparently because of their peaceful work documenting abuses or protesting the group's rule."

"Six of those detained were apparently tortured," including a 16-year-old boy, it said in a statement.

"One man described being hung from a pole upside

down for hours during interrogation," it added.

Another detainee said he was locked up in something similar to a coffin for three hours, while a third said he was pushed through a tire and beaten incessantly.

"The maximum you can do is to move your shoulders a bit. And scream for help. But on several occasions, they stuffed things in my mouth so I can't scream. I used to lose my consciousness a lot," the captive told HRW.

Seven of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they were media activists or journalists, who had taken part in or covered protest rallies against HTS, or were working with foreign media outlets.

Four were forced to sign a document, pledging they

would no longer film or report on the militants.

HRW then demanded the immediate release of all unlawfully held prisoners, including four still being held or missing among the 11 cases documented.

"There is no legitimate excuse for rounding up opponents and arbitrarily detaining and torturing them," Lama Fakih, the deputy Middle East director at HRW, said.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups wreaking havoc in the country.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. lifts sanctions on three major Russian firms

The Trump administration has lifted sanctions on three major Russian firms in defiance of a Democratic-led push in the U.S. Congress to maintain the restrictions.

Earlier this month, the Senate voted to move ahead with a Democratic-backed resolution blocking Trump's plan to lift the sanctions on Rusal, its parent, En+ Group Plc, and power firm JSC EuroSibEnergy.

In a 57-42 vote on Jan. 15, the Senate advanced legislation that would disapprove of a Washington's plan to ease sanctions on

the three companies which are claimed to have ties with Oleg Deripaska, an aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some lawmakers from both parties said it was inappropriate to ease the sanctions while special counsel Robert Mueller investigates the alleged collusion between Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and Moscow.

However, the U.S. Treasury issued a statement on Sunday, saying the three companies had reduced Deripaska's direct and indirect shareholding stake and severed his

alleged control.

That action, it said, meant that most directors on the En+ and Rusal boards would be able to act independently. The directors include Americans and Europeans, who had no business, professional or family ties to Deripaska or any other person designated for sanctions by the department.

"The companies have also agreed to unprecedented transparency for Treasury into their operations by undertaking extensive, ongoing auditing, certification, and reporting

requirements," the department said. Deripaska himself will remain subject to U.S. sanctions.

Following the announcement, Rusal said chairman Jean-Pierre Thomas had resigned as part of the deal to lift the U.S. sanctions.

In April, the U.S. imposed fresh sanctions on a number of Russian individuals and companies over a range of activities, including Moscow's alleged meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

(Source: RT)

## Europe's vague future

➡ Hence, the German and French authorities do not face stable political conditions inside their own countries. Obviously, this will also dramatically reduce their maneuverability in the Europe's equations.

An overview of the political situation in Germany and France proves this very well. Undoubtedly, neither Macron nor Merkel possess the ability to guide and manage the new Europe as their presence at the head of their country's political equations is not guaranteed in the near future. Many analysts believe that Macron will face the same fate as Sarkozy and Hollande and he isn't going to win the next elections, which is to be held in 2022. Angela Merkel has also said that after 2021, she will not remain the Chancellor of Germany.

so, remarks by the French President and German Chancellor on building the new Europe can't be realized in near future. And this is what Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron are well aware of. The same ambiguity has made many analysts of European issues look suspicious about the future of the European Union, and especially the euro area.

## UN envoy says truce holding after 184 Saudi-led violations

➡ The city, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis, has seen some of the heaviest fighting in the Saudi-led war, which Riyadh began in March 2015.

The imposed war initially consisted of an aerial campaign but was later compounded by a naval blockade and the deployment of mercenaries to Yemen.

The efforts to destroy the Houthis and reinstate Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi have so far failed, forcing the kingdom to push for peace with the Yemeni resistance movement and its allies in the army.

(Source: Press TV)

## UN team probing Khashoggi killing arrives in Turkey

UN investigators carrying out the probe of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi arrived in Istanbul on Monday and will seek to enter Saudi Arabia's consulate where he was dismembered by a "kill team".



Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on executions, is leading the investigation and begins a week-long mission to Turkey at the government's invitation.

Callamard arrived with a forensic and legal team and met Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Monday. She will meet Istanbul's chief prosecutor on Tuesday, the prosecutor's office said.

Callamard said last week she hadn't yet received a reply from the Saudi authorities over her request to enter the consulate. The team also wants to visit Saudi Arabia as part of the investigation.

Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist who was living in the United States, was killed on October 2 at the consulate where he had gone to collect documents for his planned wedding. His body is yet to be found.

### ■ 'Gruesome and brutal'

U.S. intelligence agencies believe Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) ordered an operation to assassinate Khashoggi, a government critic. His body was dismembered and taken to an unknown location.

Riyadh denies the crown prince had any involvement in the murder. Saudi authorities have not responded to Callamard's request for access to the consulate.

During her visit, the UN special rapporteur is scheduled to meet Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Turkish prosecutors carrying out the local investigation into the murder.

"Callamard's investigation is significant because she said she launched it on her own accord, since no authority in the UN or any member state, to her understanding, are demanding an independent inquiry at the moment," Al Jazeera's Stefanie Dekker, reporting from Istanbul, said. "The crime is so gruesome and brutal that she decided to start an investigation."

### ■ 11 suspects 'indicted'

A Saudi public prosecutor's spokesperson said 11 suspects had been indicted and referred to trial, with five facing the death penalty.

The UN rapporteur praised the Saudi probe.

"I conceive of this inquiry to be a necessary step, among a number of others, towards crucial truth-telling and formal accountability for the gruesome killing of Mr Khashoggi," Callamard said.

UN investigators will try to find out "the nature and extent of the responsibilities of states and individuals" in relation to Khashoggi's killing, she added.

Evidence from other governments, including the U.S., has been requested, said Callamard.

Turkey wants Saudi Arabia to extradite those accused of carrying out the murder to be tried in Turkish courts, something Riyadh has balked at.

Late last year, Turkey briefed the US on the findings of the Turkish public prosecutor's investigation, repeatedly stating Khashoggi's murder had been ordered at the highest levels of the Saudi government.

(Source: Al Jazeera)



## George Groves announces retirement from boxing

Former world super middleweight champion George Groves has announced his retirement from boxing aged 30.

Groves (28-4, 20 KOs) lost the title in his last fight against Callum Smith (25-0, 18 KOs) in the World Boxing Super Series on 28. Sep in Saudi Arabia.

It ended Groves' 16-month reign as the champion and he confirmed his retirement via a statement on social media.

"Some of you might think it odd that I'm choosing this time to retire," he said. "I'm still young, still fit and healthy, and there are still some big fights out there for me.

"But it's for these reasons that I am choosing to retire now. I have a young family at home; it's time to spend some of my better days with them.

"I don't want there to be a time where I'm 'too old' to box on, or where an injury retires me in or out of the ring.

"Over the years I have seen and sadly known the dangers of the sport, and I want to respectfully bow out while I'm at the top of my game. I've learned that doesn't always mean coming off the back of a win.

"Boxing has been good to me and I believe I have been good for boxing. I hope I have entertained you all; I have always strived to be the best fighter I can be. Although we step through the ropes on our own, of course every fighter is backed by a team, and not just the ones in the corner."

(Source: ESPN)

## ‘Very difficult’ for Neymar to face Man United, says Tuchel

Paris St Germain coach Thomas Tuchel admits it will be "very difficult" for Neymar to regain full fitness for their Champions League clash against Manchester United next month.

The Brazil forward suffered a fractured metatarsal against Strasbourg in the French Cup last week, with the club confirming it was a recurrence of the injury that threatened his World Cup participation last year.

"It will be very difficult," the German coach told Canal Plus after PSG's 4-1 Ligue 1 win over Stade Rennais on Sunday. "It is too early to talk about a possible return date.

"To start with, we must wait at least one week — this period and his reaction to the treatment will be important. Only then can we be more precise. That said, it is not a secret — it will be very difficult."

PSG visit Old Trafford for the first leg of their last-16 clash on Feb. 12 before hosting the return leg on March 6.

(Source: Reuters)

## Alonso wins Daytona 24-hour race

Former Formula 1 champion Fernando Alonso added another motorsport trophy to his cabinet with victory in the Rolex 24 in Daytona.

Alonso, 37, retired from F1 at the end of the season but won a rain-affected race alongside Renger van der Zande, Kamui Kobayashi and Jordan Taylor in the Wayne Taylor Racing Cadillac.

The 24-hour race at the Florida circuit was red flagged twice because of rain.

"Just an amazing experience - perfect execution for the race," Alonso said.

"We were competitive in everything - dry, wet, night, day."

Alonso is the third F1 champion to win after Phil Hill and Mario Andretti.

The Spaniard - who has also won at Le Mans - made his debut in the Daytona race last year, finishing in 38th position.

He will try to join Britain's Graham Hill as the only racers to win the triple crown of the Monaco Grand Prix, 24 Hours of Le Mans and Indianapolis 500 when he competes in the latter for the second time in May.

Most of the final eight hours of the 24-hour event was run under a yellow flag and racing was halted under red-flag conditions for the final two hours of the event.

A result was finally declared after 23 hours and 50 minutes, with the Cadillac of Felipe Nasr in second and the Penske of Ricky Taylor in third.

(Source: BBC)

## Italy's Salvini slams 'mercenary' Higuain for Chelsea move

Italy's interior minister Matteo Salvini on Monday branded Argentina international Gonzalo Higuain a "mercenary" for leaving AC Milan for Premier League club Chelsea.

"I'm glad that Higuain has gone and I hope we'll never see him again in Milan because he really behaved in an unworthy manner," Salvini, a staunch AC Milan supporter, told Italian radio.

"I don't like mercenaries in politics or football," continued Salvini, who is also Italy's Deputy Prime Minister.

Higuain was loaned early in the season to AC Milan from Juventus following Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival in Turin.

But the 31-year-old failed to settle in at his new club and scored just six goals in 15 league games.

Last week, he joined his former Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri in Chelsea, still on loan, with Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek arriving in Milan in his place on a four-year deal.

"I like (Krzysztof) Piatek very much, plus he has an EU passport!" said Salvini.

Salvini had already taken Higuain to task after a red card received by the Argentine against Juventus in November.

"It is shameful, unworthy behaviour. I hope it will be heavily penalised," said the leader of the right-wing anti-immigration Lega Nord party, who has also in the past criticised coach Gennaro Gattuso's tactics.

(Source: AFP)

# Triumphant Djokovic motivated by matching Federer's top 20

Novak Djokovic has designs on Roger Federer's 20 Grand Slam crowns after completing a record-breaking Australian Open victory.

Djokovic won a record seventh Melbourne crown, 15th Grand Slam title and third in a row after Wimbledon and the US Open when he swatted aside Rafael Nadal 6-3, 6-2, 6-3 in a two-hour exhibition of tennis perfection on Sunday. The Serbian world number one said he was motivated to "have a shot" at Federer's record but conceded that it was "still far" away.

"I am aware that making history of the sport that I truly love is something special. Of course, it motivates me," he told reporters after celebrating the demolition of his greatest rival in their 53rd meeting.

"Playing Grand Slams, biggest ATP events, is my utmost priority," Djokovic added.

It was the manner of victory that had many, including Djokovic, believing he can go on to match or possibly overtake Federer.

At 31 years old, six years younger than Federer, he has time on his side.

"I do want to definitely focus myself on continuing to improve my game and maintaining the overall well-being that I have -- mental, physical, emotional -- so I would be able to compete at such a high level for the years to come, and have a shot at eventually getting



closer to Roger's record," Djokovic said.

■ **It's still far."**

Djokovic has already ripped one record from Federer's grasp -- lifting the Norman Brookes trophy for a seventh time put him clear of the Swiss maestro and Roy Emerson, who both won six Australian Open men's singles titles.

The Serb's victory was simply magnificent as he embarrassed Nadal in 124 minutes of

spellbinding dominance.

The Spaniard had not dropped his remodelled serve since the first round at Melbourne Park 13 days earlier.

But so dominant was Djokovic that he broke the world number two not once, but twice in each of the three sets, lost only 13 points on his own serve while delivering eight aces and committed just nine unforced errors.

The numbers were scarcely believable

considering the duo had battled for almost six hours in their previous Australian Open final in 2012 -- the longest final in Grand Slam history. "Under the circumstances, playing against Nadal, such an important match, yeah, I mean, it's amazing," said Djokovic.

"Obviously back-to-back semifinals and finals, I think I made 15 unforced errors in total in two matches. At this level, as I said, under the circumstances, it was truly a perfect match."

Djokovic will go to Paris in May for the French Open seeking to become the only man in the Open Era to win all four majors twice, and with victory would hold all four majors at the same time for the second time in his career. But Roland Garros is where the "King of Clay" Nadal rules, having won 11 French Opens in 13 years. Djokovic would love to dethrone the Spaniard there after humiliating him in Melbourne.

"Obviously I have to work on my game, my clay court game, a bit more, more specifically than I have," said Djokovic.

"I need to play better than I have last season. I am already playing better. But, I mean, clay specifically in order to have a chance and shot at the title.

(Source: Reuters)

## Solskjaer preparing United for next season regardless of his future



Manchester United caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is preparing the side for next season regardless of whether the Norwegian lands the manager's job on a permanent basis.

Solskjaer has won his opening eight games in charge at United in all competitions, rediscovering the kind of attacking verve associated with the trophy-winning sides he played in under former manager Alex Ferguson.

"What Manchester United are going to look like next season with or without me, it doesn't matter, I'm here to prepare for next season," he told a news conference ahead of Tuesday's Premier League clash against Burnley.

Solskjaer believes the next step should be to provide a pathway to United's homegrown academy products like Mason Greenwood, Jimmy Garner and Ethan Hamilton.

"We have quite a few talents in that youth team that you'd like to see and will see before next season, to put the club and team in a good position (for) how will we look like next season — Mason, Jimmy, Ethan — it's just about the right time," he added.

"But we've got Alexis (Sanchez), Juan Mata, and Romelu Lukaku who haven't played so much lately, they're three players you have to jump ahead of."

Solskjaer said he was not expecting any departures in the January transfer window, despite British media reports linking midfielder Andreas Pereira and right-back Matteo Darmian away from the club.

"At the moment, I can see everyone staying at the club because no deal has been done with anyone I think, but then again there is still a few more days," Solskjaer added.

Solskjaer has stuck with the midfield trio of Paul Pogba, Nemanja Matic and Ander Herrera but he expects Pereira, who has made just two Premier League starts this season, to earn more playing time in the second half of the campaign.

"I cannot see him going out on loan because Andreas is going fantastic in training," Solskjaer said.

"He is a player that you could see playing quite a few games for us towards the end of the season."

(Source: Mirror)

## Giroud: Higuain arrival at Chelsea makes my future bleaker



Olivier Giroud has said his Chelsea future looks "bleaker" following the arrival of Gonzalo Higuain from Juventus on loan until the end of the season.

Higuain made his debut in Sunday's 3-0 FA Cup fourth round win over Sheffield Wednesday at Stamford Bridge, and looks set to play against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Wednesday after Maurizio Sarri replaced him with Giroud in the 82nd minute.

Chelsea have an option to keep Giroud -- who is in the final year of his contract -- next season but, with the possibility of Higuain's loan deal being extended or made permanent, the France international is beginning to consider other options.

Asked by Canal Football Club about reports suggesting Barcelona are interested, Giroud said: "My agent is taking care of things. If they're looking for a forward we'll study the opportunities, whether it be there or elsewhere.

"It's certain that if Chelsea wants to sign another striker [permanently], like Higuain, my future would look bleaker. As I'm practically out of contract in June,

we'll see what the best decision to take is."

Giroud said in an interview with ESPN FC earlier this month that he had found it "difficult" to accept not being Sarri's first-choice striker, with the Chelsea head coach often deploying Eden Hazard as a "False No. 9" rather than picking him or Alvaro Morata.

"I haven't played much recently," he said. "The coach made the choice to play Eden up front. It's a tactical choice that is to the detriment of the forwards who are real No. 9s, in inverted commas.

"He's extraordinary. He's the best player I've ever played with, I've said it before. But I'm sure that if you ask him the question, his preferred position is No. 10 and not striker."

After seven successful years in English football with Arsenal and Chelsea, Giroud has been linked with a return to France, where he helped Montpellier to a surprise Ligue 1 title in 2012.

On the subject of reported interest from Marseille and Lyon, he said: "Of course, they're two big clubs.

(Source: Soccernet)

## Pochettino shrugs off cup exits as he targets bigger prizes for Spurs

Mauricio Pochettino stubbornly insists winning a trophy is not the priority for Tottenham but he is playing a risky game as he focuses on finishing in the top four in the Premier League. Spurs lost 2-0 at Crystal Palace in the FA Cup on Sunday, just three days after they fell to Chelsea on penalties in the semi-final of the League Cup.

The Argentine manager, while disappointed about the two defeats, has doubled down on his long-held contention that it is more important for the team to qualify for the Champions League each season than to win silverware.

"We are going to create a debate that to win a trophy is going to help the club," he said after defeat for his much-changed team at Palace. "I don't agree with that. That only builds your ego. In reality the most important thing is being consistently in the top four and playing in the Champions League. That is going to help the club to achieve the last step."

Pochettino has credit in the bank with fans for making

Spurs regular Champions League participants in recent years but some supporters are becoming restless as the wait for a trophy goes on -- the last time they tasted success was in the League Cup in 2008.

"Of course I am disappointed because, after Thursday and today again, out of two competitions, you feel disappointed. You can't feel anything different," said Pochettino, who has yet to win a trophy in his managerial career.

"But now we have to be positive. We are still in two competitions, in a good position in the Premier League and the Champions League is a massive motivation for the whole club. We have to be strong.

"Now the realistic targets are trying to be in the top four, try and be close to Manchester City and Liverpool and reduce the gap."

The problem for Pochettino, who is preparing his injury-ravaged side to face Watford on Wednesday, is that he

is walking a tightrope.

Spurs, third in the Premier League, four points ahead of Chelsea and seven clear of Arsenal and a charging Manchester United, are glancing nervously over their shoulders as much as they are looking up to Liverpool and Manchester City.

Being out of the two domestic cup competitions may help the club, who face Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League last-16 next month, by allowing them to narrow their focus. Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool appear to have benefited from early FA Cup and League Cup exits but the problem Pochettino faces is that their league form is also patchy and he will likely be without talisman Harry Kane and Dele Alli until March.

Spurs have lost two of their past four league matches and needed a last-gasp Harry Winks strike to beat Fulham last week.

(Source: France 24)

## Mbappe donates \$34,000 to Sala crowdfunding initiative

French World Cup star Kylian Mbappe has donated \$34,000 to a crowdfunding campaign launched to finance a private search mission in the hope of finding missing soccer player Emiliano Sala. Mbappe's Paris Saint-Germain teammate Adrien Rabiot and Marseille's Dimitri Payet as well as several other well-known players from across Europe have also made sizable donations to the campaign, which was set up by Sport Cover, the management agency that represents Sala.

The crowdfunding initiative, which has nearly reached \$400,000, was launched in response to the decision by UK authorities to abandon its recovery mission last Thursday.

Sala, who had just signed for Cardiff City, was flying from Nantes to the Welsh capital after saying farewell to his former teammates following his \$19.3 million move to the Premier League club.

Rescue workers had been attempting to locate the plane since it disappeared from radar near the Channel Islands just before 8:30 p.m. local time (3:30 p.m. ET) last Monday. The plane had requested descent on passing Guernsey but disappeared from radar at about 2,300 feet. But police finally called off the search at 15.15pm local time (10.15 a.m ET) Thursday, adding they had been unable to find any trace of the plane, pilot David Ibbotson or Sala

Guernsey harbourmaster Captain David Barker said any chances of survival were "extremely remote."

Sala's sister Romina, who arrived in Cardiff last week, had begged the authorities to reconsider its decision but to no avail. She has since been joined in the UK by other family members. "The family still have some hope, they're looking at this as a missing person, a missing plane, and until they are satisfied, that's the mode that we're in," David Mearns, a spokesman for the Sala family, told reporters Sunday.

"This is a family that have come from Argentina with this huge shock out of nowhere and (is) struggling with what had happened,

with very, very few answers about an unexplained loss."

Sala had been expected in Cardiff for his first day of training on Tuesday and would probably have made his Premier League debut at Arsenal on Tuesday.

But his failure to arrive in the Welsh capital sparked a rescue mission over the English Channel after the plane, a single turbine Piper Malibu, disappeared from radar after departing from Nantes.

Last Wednesday it emerged that Sala sent a WhatsApp audio message to a group of friends while on board the plane.

(Source: CNN)





**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s dream of making it to their first AFC Asian Cup final after 43 years was over as Team Melli lost to Japan 3-0 in the competition’s semi-final on Monday.

Carlos Queiroz’s side, who were the favorites to win the Asian Cup, lost to the Samurai Blue at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain.

Japan looked more dangerous in the start of the match and Ritsu Doan left-footed shot from the center of the box missed to the right.

Three minutes later, Sardar Azmoun shot from the left side of the box was pushed away for a corner by Japan goalkeeper Gonda.

In the 56th minute, Yuya Osako opened Iran’s goal with a header.

Japan were awarded a penalty in the 67th minute after Takumi Minamino cross touched the hand of a sliding Morteza Pouraligani.

Upon review with the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), Australian referee Chris Beath confirmed the penalty and Osako scored his second goal.

Team Melli tried to find a way back into the contest and young players Saman Ghoddos and Mehdi Torabi came off the bench but failed to pull a goal back.

In the dying moments of the match, Genki Haraguchi found the back of the net on a counter attack.

The Samurai Blue will face the winners of the UAE and Qatar on Friday.

JANUARY 29, 2019

S P O R T S

# Strong Iran left empty-handed in Asian Cup



## Salmeen eager for UAE to succeed on home soil

Dynamic United Arab Emirates midfielder Ali Salmeen has revealed that the prospect of winning the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 title on home soil is providing motivation aplenty ahead of Tuesday’s semi-final showdown with Qatar.

Under the wily guidance of head coach Alberto Zaccheroni, the UAE - who finished third at the competition’s 2015 edition in Australia - head into the game at Abu Dhabi’s Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium looking to emulate the nation’s achievements in 1996 when, as hosts, they reached the final.

Having not lost to Qatar since 2001, hope is now high among Emirati fans that the nation’s current generation

can at the very least emulate the heroes of yesteryear, with the importance of doing well at home not lost on Al Wasl favorite Salmeen.

“We are very well prepared for this important game, and our focus is purely on the match,” explained the talented 23-year-old who has been an ever-present at UAE 2019.

“We need to beat Qatar so that we can reach the final. It is true to say that it is a crucial game, not only because it is a semi-final, but also because it is in our own country.

“Although we have Khalifa Mubarak and Mohamed Gharib missing through injury, we will do our utmost to ensure that we do not miss them. Rest assured, we will be doing everything we can to beat Qatar and qualify

for the final.”

UAE fans have come out in large numbers to support their heroes since the tournament began on January 5, and with a full house expected for the game against Qatar, Salmeen is confident both he and his teammates will draw further inspiration from their presence.

“I do not think that our fans need a rallying cry because they have been with us from the beginning,” he said.

“They are the strength which can inspire us on the pitch. At our last game [against Australia] they came in large numbers so I hope even more will attend the semi-final with Qatar.”

(Source: the-afc)

## Mabkhout still the main man for UAE

Abu Dhabi: The United Arab Emirates is dreaming of a first AFC Asian Cup final berth since 1996, and most fans are looking to key striker Ali Mabkhout to get them there, ahead of Tuesday’s semi-final against Qatar.

Emirati supporters were justifiably concerned when injury ruled dynamic playmaker Omar Abdulrahman out of the tournament, but for the second edition running, Mabkhout has emerged as the UAE’s attacking focal point.

The Al Jazira forward was the star marksman of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, finishing as the top scorer with five goals, and has netted in the last four matches of the host nation’s run to the semi-finals of this year’s tournament.

He is now just four goals shy of Adnan Al Tanyani’s all-time UAE record of 52 international goals, and, if he scores again in Tuesday’s semi-final, he will become the first player in history to score five goals in successive AFC Asian Cups.

When assessing Alberto Zaccheroni’s squad, it is difficult to overstate the importance of this predatory striker, but Mabkhout’s goal rush comes after 2018 saw him score just twice for UAE, both against Laos, in his leanest ever year in the national team shirt.

That is all forgotten now. Four goals in



two weeks are part of 10 in his last nine games for club and country, numbers which could have easily been more impressive, had the striker taken all of the chances available to him, particularly against Kyrgyz Republic.

Mabkhout will be in familiar surroundings in Tuesday’s semi-final at Al Jazira’s Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium, where he has scored a large chunk of the 33 goals which won him the 2016-17

UAE Pro League Golden Boot.

Wael El Sisi remembers Mabkhout’s rise through the Al Jazira youth ranks, and the technical manager of the club’s academy is proud of what the former pupil has achieved.

“At first, he wasn’t an outstanding player, but after turning 18, we started seeing the real Ali Mabkhout,” El Sisi said.

“He showed a great goal scoring instinct and the character of a future star.

We worked with him on technical and mental aspects to prepare him for first team football and the rest is history.”

“Watching Mabkhout play so well really motivates the young players here, being able to see someone who has come through Al Jazira academy not just playing for the first team, but also starring for the UAE in the AFC Asian Cup.

“We have already started seeing more and more players dreaming of playing for the national team,” he concluded.

The white-hot spotlight of an AFC Asian Cup semi-final would be enough to unsettle many players, but Mabkhout has reason to believe he will be able to deal with the pressure.

He has the experience of this stage of the competition from Australia 2015, and the confidence of finding the back of the net twice the last time he played against Qatar, during a 4-1 win at the same tournament.

For Mabkhout, scoring goals is all about patience and belief.

“A striker must be confident and patient at the same time,” he told FIFA.com in 2016. “He needs to know that the goals will eventually come and boost his confidence.”

“I really believe in myself.”

(Source: FIFA.com)

## Preview - Semi-final: Qatar v UAE

Abu Dhabi: With two sides looking to take another step towards a first Continental title at a sold-out AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 semi-final, the-AFC.com examines the key information ahead of the clash between Qatar and United Arab Emirates.

**■ Injury clouds for hosts; Two in, two out for Qatar**

It will be a suspenseful wait for the Emirati team sheet to be revealed, after Ismail Al Hammadi, Mohamed Gharib and captain Fares Juma all suffered knocks in a bruising quarter-final win over Australia.

While the fitness of those players remains under a cloud, Alberto Zaccheroni will be able to call on Khamis Esmael, who served a suspension against the Socceroos.

Bassam Al Rawi and Abdelaziz Hatim, Qatar’s goal scoring heroes from their two previous knockout stage wins, are both suspended, but Omer Madibo and 2018 AFC Player of the Year Abdelkarim Hassan will be welcomed back with open arms.

Outstanding disciplinary records were erased following the quarter-finals, meaning only a red card in Monday’s match will result in a player missing the final.

**■ A tale of two strikers**

Tuesday’s semi-final will feature a coming together of two of the standout forwards of the competition in Almoez Ali and Ali Mabkhout.

After six goals at last year’s AFC U-23 Championship, Qatar’s Ali has burst into the spotlight at senior



level, leading the scoring charts with seven goals in five matches, including a sensational haul of four against DPR Korea, putting him just one goal behind Ali Daei’s record for a single tournament.

In addition to the top scorer, Al Annabi also boast the top provider of goals in the competition, with Akram Aff producing five assists, and creating a tournament-best 17 chances in his five matches.

While Qatar’s main goal threat is a relatively new arrival in the wider Asian consciousness, the Emiratis are being propelled by Mabkhout’s goals for the second successive edition.

The Al Jazira star, who will be playing at club home Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in the semi-final, won the Golden Boot with five goals in Australia four years ago,

and will become the first player in history to score five in successive AFC Asian Cups if he finds the net against Qatar.

**■ History made, and more in store**

Whatever comes to pass against the UAE, Felix Sanchez’s side have already surpassed the performances of all Qatari sides to have to come before them by reaching the semi-finals, and have improved immeasurably on their zero-point showing in 2015.

Qatar’s place in the final four is a first, but the hosts only need to case their minds back four years to their last semi-final showing, when Mabkhout and Omar Abdulrahman shone, before falling to the hosts in Australia.

The Emiratis are in their second successive semi-final for the first time since 1996, also on home soil. They beat West Asian opposition to reach the final that year, history local fans will be hoping repeats itself on Tuesday.

**■ UAE looking to extend streak**

United Arab Emirates have had the clear ascendancy in the minimal recent encounters between the two sides, winning in their last three meetings including an emphatic 4-1 win at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, where Mabkhout bagged a brace.

Qatar’s winless run at senior level against their West Asian rivals goes all the way back to 2001, when Ahmed Hashim and Abdelnasser Al Obaidly scored in a 2-0 win during qualification for the following year’s FIFA World Cup in Korea Republic and Japan.

(Source: the-afc)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY

TEHRAN TIMES

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## Mario Budimir officially joins Persepolis

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iranian football club Persepolis have completed the signing of Croat striker Mario Budimir.

Budimir, 32, has penned an 18-month contract with the Iranian giants after undergoing medical test on Sunday.

Budimir has replaced Godwin Mensha, who has been deemed as surplus to requirements in January. The Nigerian striker is on the verge of joining Foolad.

Budimir has most recently played at Dinamo Zagreb.

Persepolis, who finished runners-up in the 2018 AFC Champions League, are going to strengthen for new season.

Branko Ivankovic’s side are pitted against Qatar’s Al Sadd and Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia in Group D, while they want to win Iran Professional League for the third successive year.

## Bahrain closer to extradition of footballer held in Thailand

**DUBAI (Reuters)** — Bahrain’s government has submitted documents for the extradition of Hakeem Al Araibi, a Bahraini refugee footballer held in prison in Thailand, a source familiar with the matter said on Monday.

Araibi, who has refugee status in Australia and is a vocal critic of Bahrain’s government, was convicted of vandalizing a police station in 2014. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in absentia and has denied wrongdoing.

Araibi was arrested in November in Bangkok, where he had traveled for his honeymoon, on an Interpol notice issued at the Persian Gulf Arab state’s request. Under the Thai legal system, Bahrain must submit the documents for his extradition by Feb. 8 or apply for an extension for another 30 days.

Thai authorities could not immediately be reached for comment.

Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne had urged Thai authorities to release Araibi while rights groups have said he was persecuted for political reasons.

Bahraini Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa said in a statement to Reuters that proceedings to extradite him to Bahrain are ongoing and criticized what he described as “external interference” in Manama’s internal affairs.

“Those who speak now of Al Araibi having been mistreated and those who question the integrity of Bahrain’s courts ignore the fact that Al Araibi was released on bail of 100 dinars by the courts,” the statement added.

Bahraini authorities have said Araibi can return to appeal against the sentence, noting that others arrested with Araibi who have done so have been acquitted.



## Espanyol sign Chinese Super League top scorer Wu

**BARCELONA (Reuters)** — Espanyol have signed Chinese striker Wu Lei from Shanghai SIPG FC, the Spanish club said on Monday.

Spanish media reported that Wu, the Chinese Super League’s top scorer with 27 goals this season, arrived in Barcelona with a shoulder injury sustained at the Asian Cup, which could keep him out for three months.

Wu, 27, scored two goals in five games for China at the tournament, helping them reach the quarter-finals where they were eliminated by Iran.

Espanyol, owned by Chinese company Rastar Group, are 15th in La Liga and struggling for form with one win in their last 10 league games.

## Beiranvand likely to join bigger club after Asian Cup

Iran national football team goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand is among the players who’re likely to the subject of serious transfer interest from some of the bigger clubs after their performances in the AFC Asian Cup 2019.

As the tournament whittles down to its final four teams in Iran, Japan, Qatar and host UAE, Fox Sports Asia takes a look at some of the standout players who’ve performed admirably so far.

These players have used the Asian Cup as a platform to showcase their skills and talents on the world stage and as a result have already attracted or are on the cusp of attracting attention from some of the bigger leagues in the world.

Iran’s superman between the sticks Alireza Beiranvand has had yet another hugely impressive tournament, having conceded no goals in the five games.

In addition to his shot stopping abilities – which also included a penalty save against Oman in the group stages- he also went viral for his massive 80 yard throw to an attacker that traversed three quarters of the football pitch.

It comes as little surprise then, that Beiranvand has attracted interest from Turkish clubs like Caykur Rizespor Kulubu and even heavyweights Besiktas.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Younes Delfi to join Charleroi

**TASNIM** — Esteghlal Khuzestan forward Younes Delfi will travel is on the verge of finalizing his contract with Belgian First Division A club Charleroi.

The 19-year-old striker had already been linked with a move to PSV Eindhoven and Besiktas in the summer transfer window.

He represented Iran at the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in India. Delfi burst onto the scene by recording two goals and one assist in the group stages of the competition.

He also showed phenomenal technical ability by also getting two penalties for the Iran U-17 national team in the three group matches.

Delfi will replace his compatriot Ali Gholizadeh in the Belgian team who has been sidelined due to foot injury.



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The worst provision for the next world is  
oppressing God’s creatures.

Imam Ali (AS)

Illustrator Mohammad-Hossein Matak to attend BIB-UNESCO Workshop

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Young Iranian illustrator Mohammad-Hossein Matak will attend the BIB-UNESCO Workshop of Albin Brunovsky, which will take place in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava during October.



An illustration by Mohammad-Hossein Matak.

Matak has been picked by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), the Children’s Book Council of Iran, and the Iranian Illustrators Society, the IIDCYA announced in a press release published on Monday.

The Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava and UNESCO co-organize the workshop for young illustrators less than 30 coming from different countries.

The theme of the workshop 2017 was “Folk Tales”, and Zahra Mohammadnejad from Iran took part in the workshop. Matak is a member of the Iranian Illustrators Society and his illustrations have been published in the catalogues of exhibitions in Singapore, Croatia, and Ukraine.

Iranian troupe performs Chekhov’s “Marriage Proposal” in English

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — An Iranian troupe is performing Russian playwright Anton Chekhov’s “A Marriage Proposal” in English at the Iran Tamasha Theater in Tehran.

Shahin Ramezani is the director of the play, which is a fast-paced, one-act farce that tells the story of a long-time neighbor of Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov, who comes to propose marriage to his 25-year-old daughter, Natalia.

Farnaz Khoshniat, Saman Kashefipour and Aref Qadimi are the main members of the cast for the play, which will be on stage until February 9.

Russian police find stolen painting, detain suspected thief

**MOSCOW (Reuters)** — Russian police have recovered a painting by prominent artist Arkhip Kuindzhi stolen from a Moscow gallery on Sunday and detained the suspected thief, TASS state news agency said on Monday, citing a police official.

A 31-year-old man told police where he had hidden the painting, TASS quoted a spokeswoman for the Russian Internal Ministry, Irina Volk, as saying.

The work, “Ai Petri. Crimea”, was painted in 1908 by Kuindzhi, a Russian artist of Greek origin, and depicts a mountain in the Crimea peninsula.

It was stolen from Moscow’s Tretyakov art gallery on Sunday. Kuindzhi’s 1881 work “Birch grove” was sold at auction house Sotheby’s for more than \$3 million in 2008.

“Immortality” to stage Daesh atrocity at Fajr theater festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A large Iranian troupe plans to perform a play entitled “Immortality” about the atrocity of Daesh during the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival.

Amir-Hossein Shafiei will direct the play in the Daneshju Park near the City Theater Complex, the troupe has announced in press release.

The play tells the story of a girl, who in her dreams travels to Syria to find her father who was martyred by Daesh forces in Syria.

“The play actually tries to find the answer to the question that which powers and ideologies are involved in Daesh formation,” said Shafiei who is also the director of Iran’s Center for Dramatic Arts.

“When we are talking about fighting against Daesh, no one can ignore the role of the Iranian soldiers in the struggle,” he added.

A cast of 60 actors and a team of 30 technical crew are collaborating in this project.

The troupe will give its first performance on February 10 and it will be running until the end of February.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from February 11 to 23.



Actors rehearse for “Immortality” in an undated photo. (Iran Theater)

Candle & Fog to pay tribute to songwriter Afshin Yadollahi



Iranian songwriter Afshin Yadollahi in an undated photo.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Candle & Fog, the London-based Iranian-British publishing house, plans to commemorate Iranian songwriter Afshin Yadollahi during a ceremony at the Paris Book Fair.

The ceremony will be organized to mark the second death anniversary of the poet who died in a car crash in March 2017. Candle & Fog director Afshin Shahnetabar told the Persian service of Tasnim on Monday.

His collections “La Clepsydre de L’amour” translated into French by Mithra Farzad and “Sidewalk in the Clouds” rendered into English by Caroline Crockery will be put on display at the Paris Book Fair,

which will be held from March 15 to 18.

Yadollahi, who was also a psychiatrist, began his professional activity with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in 1997. His very first songs were performed by singers Khashayar Etemadi and Shadmehr Aqili.

Theme songs from the TV series “The Tenth Night” and “Zero Degree Orbit”, both directed by Hassan Fathi, were composed by Yadollahi.

The publisher will also offer “Tant De Doute Pour Une Evidence”, a book written by Iranian scholar Mohammad-Ali Movahhed on the Persian Gulf. Farzad is the translator of the book.

“Black Panther” takes top SAG awards prize, elevating Oscar chances

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Superhero film “Black Panther”, heralded for its mainly black cast and vibrant celebration of African culture, won the top Screen Actors Guild award on Sunday, boosting its stature ahead of next month’s Oscars ceremony.

“Black Panther” from Walt Disney Co’s Marvel Studios was named best movie ensemble in a surprise triumph over favorite “A Star is Born”, the Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga musical revival, which ended the night without any SAG trophies.

Glenn Close was honored as best film actress for playing a devoted spouse in Sony Pictures film “The Wife.” Rami Malek won best film actor for his portrayal of Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury in “Bohemian Rhapsody”, released by 21st Century Fox.

The awards from SAG-AFTRA, Hollywood’s largest actors’ union, are closely watched because actors form the largest voting group in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which hands out the Oscars.

“Black Panther” has been embraced by audiences, becoming the second highest grossing movie at worldwide box offices in 2018, and applauded as a milestone for diversity in Hollywood.

“I didn’t think I was going to have to speak,” shocked star Chadwick Boseman said on stage, surrounded by his castmates.

Boseman said his co-stars “all know what it’s like to be told that there is not a place for you to be featured, yet you are young, gifted and black,” referring to the 1969 Nina Simone anthem of racial pride.

But he added that they realized early on that “We had something special that we wanted to give the world.”

Malek, who defeated Cooper and “Vice” star Christian Bale, praised the character he played. “I get some power from him that is about stepping up and living your best life and being exactly who you want to be,”



Jodie Foster presents Angela Bassett with the Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture award for “Black Panther” onstage during the 25th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at The Shrine Auditorium on January 27, 2019 in Los Angeles, California.

Malek said of Mercury.

Close said she wore her grandmother’s wedding ring to the SAG awards after recently learning she had wanted to be an actor. But the option was unavailable to her, Close added.

The victory for “Black Panther” is a sign that it will enjoy broad support in this year’s Oscars best pictures race, which has confounded experts with a strong field of contenders and no clear frontrunner.

Only one film in the last 23 years has won the prestigious best picture Oscar without being nominated for SAG’s ensemble prize. That was last year’s fantasy romance, “The Shape of Water.”

That scenario could repeat itself this year as SAG snubbed some of the best picture candidates in the ensemble category, including Spanish-language drama “Roma”, British period comedy “The Favourite” and Golden Globe best comedy winner “Green Book.” The Oscars will be awarded Feb. 24.

“Green Book” did take home one SAG award. Mahershala Ali received the trophy for best supporting actor in a movie for his role as jazz pianist Don Shirley. Emily Blunt won best supporting actress in a movie for “A Quiet Place”.

Tehran Symphony Orchestra to perform at Vahdat Hall



Conductor Shahrzad Rohani acknowledges the audience after a performance by the Tehran Symphony Orchestra in an undated photo.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Symphony Orchestra will perform at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on January 30 and 31.

Speaking to at a press conference on Sunday, conductor Shahrzad Rohani said that the orchestra is scheduled to perform a different repertoire of pieces by a number of world-renowned composers.

“Carnival Overture” by Czech composer Antonin Dvorak and “Symphony No. 2” by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff are the highlights of the repertoire.

The repertoire also includes “Baroque

Flamenco” by American musician Deborah Henson and “Peter and the Wolf” by Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev.

Veteran Iranian voice actor George Petrosi will collaborate as a narrator in performing “Peter and the Wolf”.

“This is the beginning of our winter performances as we will also give a concert during the Fajr Music Festival,” Rohani said.

“I am really proud that we have a large number of young audiences as well as the young musicians in our orchestra,” he added.

Alan Alda, star of TV’s anti-war comedy “M\*A\*S\*H” hailed for 60-year career

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Alan Alda, best known for playing a wise-cracking Army doctor on the long-running anti-war television comedy “M\*A\*S\*H,” received a lifetime achievement award from his fellow actors on Sunday, celebrating a 60-year career on stage and screen.

Alda, 82, who announced in July that he had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease three years earlier, was presented the honor by film star and one-time-costar Tom Hanks at the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards dinner in Los Angeles.

“I see more than ever how proud I am to be part of our brotherhood and sisterhood of actors,” Alda said, after receiving a sustained standing ovation from his peers.

Declaring it was every actor’s job to “get inside a character’s head and to search for a way to see life from that person’s point of view.”

“It may never have been more urgent to see the world through another person’s eyes than when a culture is divided so sharply,” he added.

Alda is most remembered for his Emmy-winning portrayal of the insubordinate but highly skilled Army surgeon Captain Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce on “M\*A\*S\*H”, the landmark comedy series set during the Korean War.

A show that ran 11 seasons on CBS and years more in syndicated reruns. Its 1983 series finale was watched by nearly 106 million viewers, a record that stood three decades as the largest audience for a U.S. TV broadcast.

The New York-born performer got his start in live theater, made dozens of motion pictures and worked extensively elsewhere on TV, including two seasons on NBC’s celebrated political drama “The West Wing,” playing a Republican U.S. senator.

“The West Wing” earned Alda his sixth Emmy Award, on top of five previous Emmys for his work on “M\*A\*S\*H.” He is the only



Alan Alda poses backstage with his Life Achievement Award at the 25th Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles, California, U.S., January 27, 2019. (Reuters/ Monica Almeida)

performer to win Emmys for acting, directing and writing on the same series. He also was a three-time Tony Award nominee for his Broadway work, most recently in 2005 for “Glengarry Glen Ross.”

On the big screen, Alda earned an Oscar nomination for his supporting role as a real-life U.S. senator, Republican Owen Brewster, in Martin Scorsese’s 2004 historical biopic “The Aviator” about mogul Howard Hughes.

Alda, however, will remain forever associated with “M\*A\*S\*H”, based on the 1970 Korean War movie satire directed by Robert Altman and adapted from a novel of the same name by a real-life doctor who served in Korea.

The show centered on the antics of Hawkeye Pierce and fellow doctors and nurses of the 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital - MASH for short - as they struggled to keep their sanity and save lives. When not tending to waves of wounded GIs, Hawkeye and his pals passed their time playing practical jokes, carousing with nurses and drinking to excess.

A far cry from several military sitcoms that came before it, “M\*A\*S\*H” went beyond poking fun at Army life to deal with such issues as circumstantial ethics and the morality of war.