



Major defense exhibition opens in Tehran **2**



CIA director says Iran has been in compliance with nuclear deal **2**



Non-oil trade balance at \$678m in 10 months **4**



Warsaw Conference will not have any practical impact on Iran **7**

Leader pays tribute to Imam Khomeini

See page 2



© khamenei.ir

Iran, Syria to set up joint bank in Damascus

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Central Bank of Iran's Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati announced that based on the agreement signed between Iran and Syria on Tuesday for developing and facilitating bilateral banking relations, the two countries will set up a joint bank branch in Damascus, IRNA reported.

"Based on the agreement, banking relations between the two countries are established and the license to establish a joint Iranian-Syrian bank in Damascus is also to be issued. This will enable the two sides' banks to conduct transactions in their local currencies." Hemmati said in an Instagram post. **→4**

Yellowcake consignment transferred to Isfahan UFC

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran on Wednesday transferred the second yellowcake consignment, weighing 30 tons, from Aradkan, Yazd province, to the uranium conversion facility (UFC) in Isfahan, Mehr reported.

Speaking to reporters, Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization

of Iran, described the procedure as a "big step" that Iran has taken. He also thanked Iran's nuclear experts for their efforts.

Back in April 2018, in a ceremony to mark National Day of Nuclear Technology, President Hassan Rouhani issued an order to transfer yellowcake produced in Aradkan to a uranium conversion facility in Isfahan.

Maduro accuses Trump of ordering his murder

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accused Donald Trump of ordering neighboring Colombia's government to kill him, but said he was open to the possibility of talks with the U.S. leader and his own domestic foes.

In an interview with Russia's RIA agency, Maduro rejected calls for an early election, said an order to arrest his rival Juan Guaido had not yet been given, and promised Caracas would honor debts to

Russia and China.

Facing the biggest challenge of his six-year rule, the 56-year-old socialist leader also said his armed forces remained loyal and President Vladimir Putin was firmly behind him.

Maduro's comments were published Wednesday as the fight for control of Venezuela escalated with the government preparing an investigation into self-declared interim president Guaido, and new street protests planned. **→13**

'Why U.S. DNI says Iran, China and Russia interfering in U.S. election?'

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Robert David Steele, a former Marine Corps infantry officer and CIA spy who was recommended for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, regularly answers questions by the Tehran Times.

Following is the full text of the interview:
Q: The U.S. director of National Intelligence has just testified that Iran, China, and Russia are all seeking to interfere with – to affect the outcomes of – the U.S. elections in 2020. What do you think of this?

A: I thought Jim Clapper and John Brennan and Mike Hayden were a disgrace. It never occurred to me that their successors, ostensibly appointed by President Donald Trump, would turn out to be worse.

I will not belabor my qualifications here, other than to observe that I was the opening speaker at Hackers on Planet Earth in 1994; a co-founder of the original Information Warfare conference in 1994; and the author of the first warning letter to the White House on cyber-vulnerabilities, also in 1994. I wrote the book on information operations, and more. I am as well, with the Honorable Dr. Cynthia McKinney, the founder of #UNRIG and the architect – drawing on the work of hundreds of others – for the twelve specific electoral reforms required to make every vote count and mandate evidence-based decision-making in Congress, instead of the rigged elections and "pay to play" legislative system we have in place now.

All of this is idiocy. Coats – perhaps finally going senile and reading words he may not understand – should be fired. His staff is clearly

combining ignorance about practical realities in the field of election processes with ideological biases. They are not serving the President or the public with integrity.

■ You are, in addition to being a U.S. intelligence reformer, the founder of #UNRIG, the Election Integrity movement in the USA. Can you put the DNI's accusations in context?

A: Below I offer a concise primer on the major "influencers" of US elections and will say clearly that anyone who asserts that Iran, China and Russia Iran can compare in the slightest with these internal – domestic – election "fixers" and the one real foreign influencer – Zionist Israel – is either ignorant or lying for political effect.

1) Factor One: The Two-Party Tyranny Enabling the Deep State **→7**

No link between delays in launching SPV with Iran's missile program: Nephew

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the U.S. team negotiating with Iran, is of the opinion that "the main cause of the delay in SPV (special purpose vehicle) has been to create a structure that avoids to the extent possible the risk of U.S. sanctions while at the same time providing Iran with something meaningful."

Nephew, the current fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says that if the SPV is "linked only to humanitarian trade, then, I think it will

be efficient and effective."

He also says that there is no relation between delays in launching of the SPV with Iran's missile program.

Following is the text of the interview:
■ The "special purpose vehicle" or SPV was supposed to be registered on Monday but once again it has been postponed to a later time. What are the main causes of this delay?

A: I think the main cause of the delay has been to create a structure that avoids to the extent possible the risk of U.S. sanctions while at the same time providing Iran with something meaningful. I think an important second cause has been the normal discussions that always occur about who

will be in charge, who will fund it, etc.

■ Some believe that SPV won't be launched as long as Iran pursues its missile program. What is your opinion on this matter?

A: I do not think that's true. I think that the missile issue is being handled separately by the EU and its constituent members, just as they have said they'd like to handle the nuclear issue separately from the missile issue. I think that, ironically, only Iran and the United States see these issues as directly linked.

■ German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said SPV would be limited to humanitarian trade. What are the reasons behind this limitation? **→7**



ARTICLE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

The second shock of British Parliament to May

For the second time in recent weeks, the Parliament of the United Kingdom opposed British Prime Minister Theresa May's proposed Brexit. The legislators of the House of Commons, while rejecting PM May's plan to withdraw without an agreement from the EU, asked her to try to re-negotiate with the European Union.

They urged the May government to replace the clauses relating to the agreement about the borders of Northern Ireland on Brexit with another understanding and to resume negotiations with the European Union. This is while the European authorities have explicitly underlined the previous agreement reached with the English authorities on the issues and the clauses referred to therein.

The President of the European Council Donald Tusk and other senior European officials have stated that such talks will not take place despite the recent vote by the British Parliament on the election and withdrawal of Britain from Europe.

It seems like, May is faced with a political dead-end. On the one hand, the British PM cannot implement the agreement with Europe due to opposition from the parliament and, in particular, the Labor Party, and on the other hand, she has lost the power of a hard withdrawal from Europe without a new parliamentary vote.

There are only three ways ahead of Theresa.

The first is an attempt to negotiate with Europe, a difficult path that basically its realization is ambiguous. Although some European leaders like the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas have shown a green light to the British government, most of them, including French President Emmanuel Macron, have stressed on an irreversible agreement between Brussels and London.

Undoubtedly, one of the victorious people of the recent developments in Britain is Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the British Labor Party who has achieved a major victory against the prime minister May. The British Parliament's negative attitude to May's plans for leaving the European Union has made it difficult for her to move on. The 432 opposition voted by the parliament, with 202 votes in favor, left no room for maneuver for the British prime minister. **→7**



PERSPECTIVE

Heshmatollah Rahnama
Latin American expert

The truth is gradually emerging

In an undisclosed report, Mario Cimadevilla, an Argentine lawyer, former senator, and AMIA (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association) accused the Maruricio Macri government for lack of transparency and fraud in AMIA case.

In an interview with the Radio 10, Cimadevilla said, "One of our responsibilities was to act as a petitioner and to be a helping hand for Attorney General Germán Garavano in the case. Therefore, after a while, it was important to bring up the accusations, and I as a plaintiff, brought the case against AMIA in the court of law. However, Attorney General Strongly opposed our standards and said Attorney General Mullen and Barbaccia are friends and are not supposed to be convicted and warned me that they are apprehensive of Fino Palacios.

Cimadevilla has accused Macri that he was reluctant to pursue his commitment to the truth in the case, and his objective was to support his friends from government and to divert the case to the interests of the U.S. and Israel.

He said there are a lot of obstacles in further research in this case. Additionally, he adds, "The government does not allow the recruitment of specialists or experts on certain special issues." "Macri's government is building a new covert" in the case.

Undoubtedly, the Argentinean government, the U.S. and Israel have nothing for clarification of truth of AMIA case, but they are struggling to have no "accusations against the government transparency and accountability."

Mario Cimadevilla has been under AMIA investigation during the two years and two months, so he received all the information from the judiciary, the police and the intelligence agency. In his report to President of Argentina Mauricio Macri, he reached remarkable results.

In short, Cimadevilla initially questioned all the investigations conducted by Judge Juan José Galeano and then the Attorney General of Elberto Nisman, who finds the results of the investigation to a predetermined position by geopolitics.

"The U.S. and Israel, instead of deeper research, prefer to remain uncertain about Iran," he told Trelew daily newspaper. In this case, he believes that the Macri's government as obedient to the U.S. **→7**



Filmmakers Masud Kimiai (L) and Bahman Farmanara attend the 37th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran.

Fajr Film Festival opens with big nostalgia for "days of snow and coldness"

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 37th edition of the Fajr Film Festival, Iran's major film event, opened at the Tehran Theater Complex on Tuesday night during a ceremony blended with filmmaker Masud Kimiai's nostalgia for "the days of snow, coldness and SAVAK."

A highlight of the opening ceremony was that Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi declined host Mansur Zabetian's call for making a speech, which is always warmly welcomed by Iranian officials in all meetings. **→16**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Nuclear chief
lauds Russians for
'delivering what
they promised'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, has lauded Moscow for its nuclear cooperation with Iran, saying the Russians have so far delivered whatever they had promised. "In my opinion, they even delivered beyond what they had promised, but of course, within the framework of the [International Atomic Energy] Agency's regulations," Salehi said in a lengthy interview with IRNA part of which published on Wednesday. He also criticized other signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement for not making enough efforts with regard to their obligations under the deal, warning that Iran has different options for dealing with any failure to fulfil their obligations.



Larijani to Arabs:
Normalizing ties
with Israel is
disgraceful

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday the project of normalizing relations between Israel and Arabs has been launched, describing the move as "dark stain" on the Muslim countries' dignity.

Larijani made the remarks in a meeting with Abdelhamid Si Afif, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Emigration of the National Popular Assembly of Algeria.

The speaker also attacked the U.S. peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict known as "the deal of the century", saying by the "fake plan", the Americans are seeking to reduce the Palestinian issue to the situation in the Gaza Strip.



Envoy slams
BBC Persian for
legitimizing U.S.
sanctions

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ambassador to the UK Hamid Baeidinejad on Wednesday strongly criticized the BBC Persian for trying to "legitimize" U.S. sanctions against Iran through revealing the names of companies involved in circumventing the sanctions.

In a series of tweets, Baeidinejad said America's intelligence agencies have provided the BBC Persian with intelligence on some Europe-based companies which help Iran in circumventing the sanctions.

He also advised the UK-based TV channel against cooperating with the Trump administration in a "historic treason" against the Iranian nation and called for changes in the channel's programs.



Major defense
exhibition
opens in
Tehran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A major exhibition, dubbed Eqtedar 40 (strength), opened at Tehran's Grand Mosalla on Wednesday, showcasing the latest defense achievements of the Iranian Armed Forces, ahead of the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The opening ceremony was attended by Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri and his deputy Major General Ataollah Salehi, Mehr reported.

Speaking at the ceremony, Baqeri said over 500 home-grown defense products are on display for the general public, stressing that the Islamic Republic has the capability to mass produce and export its military products.

The most recently developed item on show was "Kaman-12" drone, which can fly at 200 kilometers per hour and carry objects weighing 100 kg.



Eight
environmentalists
charged with
spying go on trial

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Eight Iranian environmentalists accused of spying appeared in a court on Wednesday morning for the first session of a closed-door trial, ISNA reported.

Kazem Hosseini, an attorney for one of the accused, said during the trial, which was attended by all of the accused and their lawyers, the charges were read out by the deputy prosecutor.

"Four of the accused in this case have been charged with corruption on the earth, and the other four with participating in espionage, cooperating with a hostile government and gathering and colluding with the aim of acting against national security," Hosseini said.

He also said the second part of the trial will be held on Saturday.



4 policemen
injured after
sound bombs
explosion

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Two sound bombs went off in front of a police station in Iran's southeastern city of Zahedan on Tuesday, injuring at least four police officers.

Sistan-Baluchestan provincial police chief, Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari, told Mehr news agency that an explosion rocked the city at 8:30 p.m. local time (1700 GMT), which was caused by a handmade stun grenade.

He added that a bomb disposal unit was dispatched shortly afterwards to the site of the explosion, where they found a suspicious package on the street and the second device blew up as they were trying to defuse it, slightly injuring four members of the bomb squad.

Rouhani says the U.S., not his government, is to blame for problems

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that it is the U.S. and not his government or the Islamic Republic system that should be blamed for the problems arising from the restoration of sanctions.

During a ceremony held to renew allegiance to founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini, Rouhani said, "There should not be wrong interpretation. Today, our main problems are because of the U.S. and its allies' pressure. No one should condemn the serving government or the great Islamic system instead of the U.S."

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

All the countries condemned the U.S. for pulling out of the nuclear deal (JCPOA). Only



Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE welcomed the illegal move by the Trump administration.

Rouhani said all countries, except for certain ones, have condemned the U.S. ap-

proach towards Iran.

However, he said that the U.S. psychological war against Iran has failed.

The Iranian people will defeat the U.S. eco-

nomie war through resistance, he predicted.

Behaving like a bully, the U.S. has threatened to punish any company or country that do business with Iran.

'Imam Khomeini's power was raising hope among people'

Rouhani also said that Imam Khomeini's power was raising hope among the people which resulted in unity and integrity.

"No power, neither the U.S. nor others, can harm us as long as we follow Imam Khomeini's path and policies of the Leader [of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei]," he pointed out.

The president said all should be united against enemies and their "reactionary allies" in the region in order to overcome the problems.

"This is the most intense economic pressure against the Iranian people over the past 40 years since the Islamic Revolution. Hopefully, we will overcome these problems through unity, integrity and hope," he said.

Leader pays tribute to Imam Khomeini

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — As the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution approaches, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei paid respect to late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini on Wednesday.

Visiting Imam Khomeini's mausoleum in southern Tehran, he offered his prayers and recited verses from

the Holy Quran.

The Leader then visited the burial ground of the martyrs, where he prayed for the souls of the people who lost their lives either during the popular uprising that led to the Revolution or in the course of their struggle to uphold revolutionary values afterwards, in Behesht-e Zahra, Tehran's main cemetery.

Europe starts registering company to trade with Iran

By staff and agency

France, Britain and Germany are this week executing their plans to set up a special-payments company to secure some trade with Iran and blunt the impact of U.S. sanctions.

"After months of delays, people familiar with the plan said Tuesday the three European governments had started the process of registering the company to run a payments channel that would allow goods to be bartered between European and Iranian companies without the need for direct financial transactions. The company should be established by Thursday or Friday," the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.

The company is being registered in France and will be headed by a German official with the French, British and German governments as shareholders — an arrangement intended to ward off U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's threat of sanctioning the entity by putting it under the aegis of Washington's traditional European allies.

In an interview with the European



Council on Foreign Relations published on January 11, Mogherini said that the United States cannot impose its policies on the 28-nation bloc's legitimate trade relations with Iran.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said on Monday that the EU is on the verge of launching an alternative channel to send money to Iran that would sidestep U.S. sanctions against the Islamic republic.

"As far as the special purpose vehicle is concerned: it will be registered, it has not yet been registered, but I would say that the implementation of our plan is imminent," according to AP, he told reporters in Brussels.

CIA director says Iran has been in compliance with nuclear deal

By staff and agency

CIA Director Gina Haspel has said that Iran has remained in compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

During a session of the Senate Intelligence Committee held to study an annual "Worldwide Threat Assessment" released on Tuesday, Haspel said that Iran has been committed to implementation of the JCPOA, but the Iranian leaders are considering steps that would "lessen their adherence" to the agreement.

"They are making some preparations that would increase their ability to take a step back if they make that decision. So at the moment, technically they are in compliance, but we do see them debating amongst themselves as they've failed to realize the economic benefits they hoped for from the deal," she said.

Director of U.S. National Intelligence Dan Coats also said that Tehran continued to comply with the deal even after the U.S. withdrawal from it.

Despite warning by the international community, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 2015 nuclear deal in May and ordered sanctions against



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

To blunt the sanctions, the European Union is set to register its special payment mechanism for trade with Iran.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said on Monday that the EU is on the verge of launching the alternative channel to send money to Iran that would sidestep U.S. sanctions against the Islamic republic.

Trump: Haspel is "navie"

Hours later, Trump came down on Haspel for her assessment, tweeting CIA officials were "passive and naive" in their take on Iran.

"Perhaps Intelligence should go back to school!" Trump added.

The U.S. has used every possible coercion policy against Iran - and it failed

By Seyyed Hossein Mousavian

Shortly after Secretary of the State Mike Pompeo embarked on a Middle East tour to mobilise US allies to "confront" Iran, his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, tweeted that "whenever/wherever US interferes, chaos, repression & resentment follow".

From overthrowing the democratically elected government of the late prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, to continuously supporting authoritarian states, to waging wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, all U.S. interventions have led to the destruction of physical capital and democratic institutions, collateral damage, political instability, displacement and the empowerment of autocratic rulers.

Where direct military intervention may not be a viable solution, as seems to be the case with Iran, imposing illegal sanctions has been a convenient strategy for the U.S. to exert power and project its hegemony. "America's economic sanctions against the regime are the strongest in history, and will keep getting tougher until Iran starts behaving like a normal country," Pompeo recently said in Cairo.

U.S. coercion policy

From Carter to Reagan, and Bush to Obama, U.S. presidents have long viewed sanctions as an effective means of achieving political gains with respect to Iran. Short of full-fledged military action, the U.S. has deployed every possible coercion policy against Iran - but thus far, it has failed.

In U.S. President Donald Trump's era, however, these pernicious policies are being pursued most comprehensively and aggressively. A clique of notorious warmongers, including Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, have taken key policymaking positions in the Trump administration.

Representing the most radical and conservative factions of the American polity, they have mobilised all their resources not just to put pressure on the Iranian govern-

ment, but also to possibly overthrow it.

The U.S. focus is now on garnering further international support to confront Iran. It will host an international summit next month to promote stability and freedom in the Middle East, focusing on Iran's regional influence. "We'll bring together dozens of countries from all around the world," Pompeo said in announcing the 13-14 February event in Poland.

Moreover, top U.S. officials and their Arab allies in the region, along with Israel, hold regular meetings to hatch plots against Iran. This new strategy has economic, political and military dimensions. From violating the terms and conditions of the Iran nuclear deal, to impeding Iran's European and Asian trade partners, the U.S. has become the flag-bearer of an economic war against Iran.

Israel's role

On the military side of this strategy, Israel has vowed to take action if necessary. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently said Trump was "acting against Iran at the economic level, and we here in Israel are acting against Iran at the military level". This is only part of Netanyahu's warmongering strategy: he also invoked God to destroy the Iranian government.

Despite these collective effort to "contain" Iran's regional role, recent developments in the region have seemed to favour Iran, Russia and Turkey. The U.S. and its allies waged wars in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, with very mixed results.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah played a key role in the establishment of a cabinet in 2016 headed by Saad Hariri and in the appointment of Hezbollah ally Michel Aoun as president.

In Syria, Russian and Iranian support for the Syrian government undermined the U.S. regime-change strategy and played a decisive role in preventing the country's collapse.

In Iraq, Tehran came to Baghdad's aid to manage a military force in the form of the 120,000-strong Popular Mobilisation Units to liberate Iraqi lands occupied by the

Jahangiri visits holy shrines in Damascus

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri rounded up his three-day visit to Syria on Tuesday by visiting the holy shrine of Zeynab bint Ali, the daughter of the first Shia Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, according to the Islamic Republic News Agency.

When her brother, Imam Hussein, stood up against Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah in 680 CE (61 AH), Zeynab accompanied him. She played an important role in protecting the life of her nephew, Imam Ali ibn Al-Hussein, and because of her sacrifice and heroism, she became known as the

"Heroine of Karbala". Zeynab died in 681 CE, and her Masjid is located in Damascus.

Also on Monday, Jahangiri paid a visit to the holy shrine of Imam Hussein's daughter, Ruqayya bint Hussein, in Damascus, according to Ahl ul-Bait News Agency.

The first vice president also visited the different parts of Umayyad Mosque in the old city of Damascus.

The Umayyad Mosque, also known as the Great Mosque of Damascus, located in the old city of Damascus, is one of the largest and oldest mosques in the world.



Jahangiri (C) at Zeynab bint Ali's holy shrine

UAE used cyber super-weapon to spy on iPhones of foes

A team of former U.S. government intelligence operatives working for the United Arab Emirates hacked into the iPhones of activists, diplomats and rival foreign leaders with the help of a sophisticated spying tool called Karma, in a campaign that shows how potent cyber-weapons are proliferating beyond the world's superpowers and into the hands of smaller nations.

The cyber tool allowed the small Persian Gulf country to monitor hundreds of targets beginning in 2016, from the Emir of Qatar and a senior Turkish official to a Nobel Peace laureate human-rights activist in Yemen, according to five former operatives and program documents reviewed by Reuters. The sources interviewed by Reuters were not Emirati citizens.

Karma was used by an offensive cyber operations unit in Abu Dhabi comprised of Emirati security officials and former American intelligence operatives working as contractors for the UAE's intelligence services. The existence of Karma and of the hacking unit, code named Project Raven, haven't been previously reported. Raven's activities are detailed in a separate story published by Reuters today.

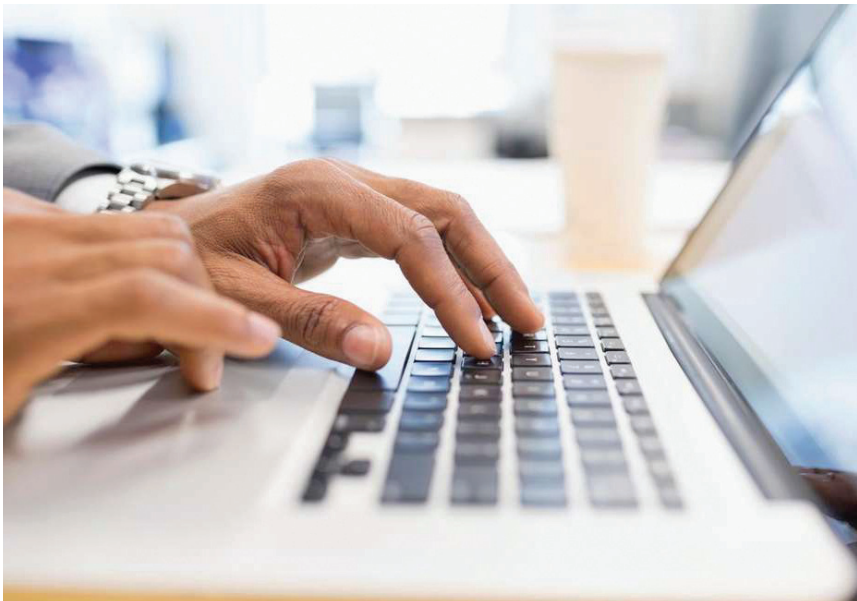
The ex-Raven operatives described Karma as a tool that could remotely grant access to iPhones simply by uploading phone numbers or email accounts into an automated targeting system. The tool has limits — it doesn't work on Android devices and doesn't intercept phone calls. But it was unusually potent because, unlike many exploits, Karma did not require a target to click on a link sent to an iPhone, they said.

In 2016 and 2017, Karma was used to obtain photos, emails, text messages and location information from targets' iPhones. The technique also helped the hackers harvest saved passwords, which could be used for other intrusions.

It isn't clear whether the Karma hack remains in use. The former operatives said that by the end of 2017, security updates to Apple Inc's iPhone software had made Karma far less effective.

Lori Stroud, a former Raven operative who also previously worked at the U.S. National Security Agency, told Reuters of the excitement when Karma was introduced in 2016. "It was like, 'We have this great new exploit that we just bought. Get us a huge list of targets that have iPhones now,'" she said. "It was like Christmas."

The disclosure of Karma and the Raven



unit comes amid an escalating cyber arms race, with rivals such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE competing for the most sophisticated hacking tools and personnel.

Tools like Karma, which can exploit hundreds of iPhones simultaneously, capturing their location data, photos and messages, are particularly sought-after, veterans of cyberwarfare say. Only about 10 nations, such as Russia, China and the United States and its closest allies, are thought to be capable of developing such weapons, said Michael Daniel, a former White House cyber security czar under President Obama.

Karma and similar tools make personal devices like iPhones the "juiciest of targets," said Patrick Wardle, a former National Security Agency researcher and Apple security expert.

A spokeswoman for UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment.

Apple Inc declined to comment.

■ A flaw in Apple's iMessage system
The former Raven insiders said Karma allowed the operatives to gather evidence on scores of targets — from activists critical of the government to regional rivals, including Qatar, and the UAE's ideological opponent, the Islamic political Muslim Brotherhood movement.

It also granted them access to compromising and at times sexually explicit photos of targets. The material was described to Reuters

in detail but reporters didn't inspect it. Reuters saw no evidence that the UAE leaked damaging materials discovered through Karma.

Raven was largely staffed by U.S. intelligence community veterans, who were paid through an Emirati cyber security firm named DarkMatter, according to documents reviewed by Reuters. The company did not respond to numerous emails and phone calls requesting comment. The NSA declined to comment on Project Raven.

The UAE government purchased Karma from a vendor outside the country, the operatives said. Reuters could not determine the tool's creator.

The operatives knew how to use Karma, feeding it new targets daily, in a system requiring almost no input after an operative set its target. But the users did not fully understand the technical details of how the tool managed to exploit Apple vulnerabilities. People familiar with the art of cyber espionage said this isn't unusual in a major signals intelligence agency, where operators are kept in the dark about most of what the engineers know of a weapon's inner workings.

Three former operatives said they understood Karma to rely, at least in part, on a flaw in Apple's messaging system, iMessage. They said the flaw allowed for the implantation of malware on the phone through iMessage, even if the phone's owner didn't use the iMessage

program, enabling the hackers to establish a connection with the device.

To initiate the compromise, Karma needed only to send the target a text message — the hack then required no action on the part of the recipient. The operatives could not determine how the vulnerability worked.

A person with direct knowledge of the deal confirmed Karma's sale to the Emiratis from an outside vendor, details of its capabilities and its reliance on an iMessage vulnerability.

The Raven team successfully hacked into the accounts of hundreds of prominent Middle East political figures and activists across the region and, in some cases, Europe, according to former Raven operatives and program documents.

■ Targeting the 'iron woman' of Yemen

In 2017, for instance, the operatives used Karma to hack an iPhone used by Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, as well as the devices of Turkey's former Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek, and Oman's head of foreign affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah. It isn't clear what material was taken from their devices.

Simsek, who stepped down from his position in July, told Reuters the cyber intrusion on his phone was "appalling and very disturbing." The Washington embassies of Qatar, Oman and Turkey did not respond to multiple emails and calls requesting comment about the targeting of political figures in their countries.

Raven also hacked Tawakkol Karman, a human rights activist known as the Iron Woman of Yemen. Informed by Reuters she had been targeted, she said she believes she was chosen because of her leadership in Yemen's Arab Spring protests, which erupted around the region in 2011 and led to the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

For years she had received repeated notifications from social media accounts, warning that she had been hacked, she told Reuters. But the fact that Americans helped the Emirati government monitor her was shocking, she said.

Americans are "expected to support the protection of human rights defenders and provide them with all protection and security means and tools," she said, "not to be a tool in the hands of tyrannies to spy on the activists and to enable them to oppress their peoples."

(Source: Reuters)

Trump pushes back against U.S. spy chiefs on NKorea, Daesh



U.S. President Donald Trump Wednesday pushed back against threat assessments offered to Congress by the nation's top intelligence officials a day earlier and defended his more optimistic assertions on North Korea and Daesh (ISIL).

In a series of early-morning posts on Twitter, Trump said Daesh "will soon be destroyed," and that there was a "decent chance of denuclearization" with Pyongyang. On Tuesday, the intelligence officials broke with Trump in their assessments of the threats posed by North Korea and other nations.

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats joined the heads of the CIA, FBI, National Security Agency and other intelligence agencies Tuesday to deliver their annual assessments of the most critical threats facing the United States in a public briefing with U.S. senators.

Coats said North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons, while Trump has said the country no longer poses a threat. Trump plans a second meeting next month with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. On Daesh, Coats said the militant group would continue to pursue attacks from Syria and Iraq against regional and Western adversaries, including the United States.

(Source: Reuters)

Britain, EU 'running out of road' on Brexit: Irish foreign minister

Brexit negotiators are "running out of road" to avoid a scenario where Britain crashes out of the European Union without a deal, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Wednesday.

"We have less than two months to go now until Brexit happens on 29 March. We are, quite simply, running out of road," Coveney said in a speech in Dublin.

(Source: Reuters)

I escaped Khashoggi-style killing: Saudi dissident



A Saudi political dissident says he avoided a destiny similar to that of renowned journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was killed in the Arab kingdom's consulate in the Turkish city of Istanbul three and a half months ago.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with the Arabic news outlet Lebanon Debate, Maan al-Jaraba, the leader of the Saudi opposition group Harakat al-Karama (Movement for Dignity), said Saudi officials lured him into the country's embassy in Lebanon in September. Jaraba noted that he would have met a gruesome end in case he had not been accompanied by bodyguards.

One source close to Jaraba, who requested anonymity, later told Middle East Eye that the events occurred 10 days before Khashoggi was killed in Turkey on October 2, 2018.

The source highlighted that Saudi officials told Jaraba they wanted to speak with him to convince him to return to Saudi Arabia.

"After years of being blacklisted, Sheikh Maan was contacted by Saudi embassy officials in Beirut. They said they were ready to engage in talks to bring him back into the fold," the source said.

The official in charge of negotiations then suggested a face-to-face meeting with Jaraba following several phone conversations.

The Saudi dissident agreed, stipulating however that the meeting be held in a neutral public place, such as a restaurant or cafe.

"They talked about it at length and eventually scheduled a meeting in a building in Beirut belonging to the Saudi embassy," the source said.

Jaraba drove to the meeting place with three armed bodyguards on the day of the appointment. A more substantial security force was also on call nearby.

"The embassy officials who welcomed him were surprised to see the bodyguards," the source said. "They thought the sheikh would come alone, though they themselves were heavily guarded."

Jaraba's interlocutors tried to induce him to return to Saudi Arabia, where they claimed he would be "free" to pursue his work. The dissident turned down the offer, and the meeting concluded with promises of further appointments and talks.

A few days later, Khashoggi was murdered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

"After what happened in Istanbul, Sheikh Maan's associates were convinced he narrowly escaped a similar fate," the same source said. "He didn't trust them, so he took the precaution of going to the meeting with bodyguards. This is probably what saved him."

(Source: Press TV)

Afghan president accuses Pakistan of holding 'keys to war'

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said on Wednesday the "keys to war are in Islamabad, Quetta, Rawalpindi", accusing Pakistan of being a safe haven for cross-border militant activities.

Ghani said by contrast the "key to peace was in Afghanistan" — at a time when peace talks to end the 17-year war between the Taliban and U.S. officials have gained momentum.

He was speaking at a national conference for youth and peace in Kabul.

■ Roadblocks cast shadow over path to peace in Afghanistan

U.S. diplomats and the Afghan Taliban have seen cause for hope in talks to end the United States' longest war, but the pivotal issues of a ceasefire and the militants sitting down with the Afghan government are far from being resolved.

Areas in which both sides have hailed progress - plans for the withdrawal of foreign troops 17 years after the U.S.-led ouster of the Taliban and assurances that Afghanistan won't become a base for al Qaeda or ISIL - still need detailed negotiation, sources on both sides said.

The withdrawal, for example, is contingent on a ceasefire that the Taliban have yet to discuss.

"We want to be absolutely sure that the U.S. is leaving before we call off the fight," said a senior Taliban official on condition of anonymity.

But a senior U.S. official privy to the negotiations was clear a ceasefire had to come first: "How could we even do a withdrawal without a ceasefire?"

And the Taliban's assurances on counter-terrorism also come with caveats.

They say they can guarantee the United States the security of the half of the country they now control, but they would have to be in an interim government to be sure of stopping al Qaeda or ISIL from attacking anywhere else.

Left to watch the unlikely U.S. and Taliban tango as he eyes a second term, Western-backed Afghan President Ashraf Ghani refuses to accept an interim government as part of any deal.

"We want peace, we want it quickly, but we want a proper plan ... so the mistakes of the past do not repeat," Ghani said in a televised address on Monday, referring to a bloody history of failed governments, military coups and civil war.

Ghani mentioned the deaths of previous rulers, including former President Najibullah, who was hanged from a Kabul lamppost when Taliban guerrillas swept into the capital in 1996.

Former U.S. ambassador Ryan Crocker wrote in the Washington Post that by negotiating with a Taliban that refused to talk to the Afghan leadership "we have ourselves



de-legitimized the government we claim to support".

■ New negotiator

The next round of talks will be held in Qatar on Feb. 25 when Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a former mujahideen fighter against the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, will head the Taliban side following his release last year from eight years in a Pakistani jail.

U.S. officials told Reuters they hope he will have the authority to negotiate on the ceasefire and the need for discussions with the Afghan government. The Taliban have so far refused to talk to the government which they dismiss as a puppet of the United States.

Baradar, a co-founder of the movement and a former military commander in western Afghanistan, will enter new talks from a position of relative strength as its new political chief, Taliban officials said.

For years, the Taliban have fought to expel foreign forces and drive the government from power, so they can restore their version of hardline law across Afghanistan.

After intensifying attacks over the last two years, the Taliban are more powerful than any at other time since they were toppled by Western forces.

And senior Taliban officials say they know the United States and other foreign forces are tired and want out. While they, meanwhile, can sense victory and a future role in government.

"If the Afghan government and the Taliban have an agreement, it will involve altering government arrangements in some respect, creating a more inclusive government and consolidating the Afghan security forces and the Taliban in some new security architecture," said James Dobbins,

a former diplomat who is now senior fellow at the RAND Corporation think-tank.

Dobbins, who was the Obama administration's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2013, said it would take a long time to reach a deal that would be sustainable.

But however much time the talks took, the senior U.S. official privy to the talks, who did not want to be identified, insisted: "We will not leave Afghanistan without a deal. We want to leave a good legacy."

■ Uncertain future

Doubts have increased in recent weeks whether U.S. President Donald Trump would stomach a protracted presence in Afghanistan amid mixed signals from Washington.

U.S. officials told Reuters last month that Trump had issued verbal orders to plan for a withdrawal of about half of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. However, they said he could reverse course.

On Wednesday, Trump tweeted that talks "are proceeding well". He did not address any possible pact with the Taliban or troop withdrawals.

The U.S. troops in Afghanistan are part of a NATO-led mission and a U.S. counterterrorism mission largely directed at groups such as ISIL and al Qaeda.

Some 8,000 troops from 38 other countries are participating in the operation, known as Resolute Support.

Diplomats and military attaches from many of those countries describe an intense desire to leave. Italy is considering sending home its 900 troops within a year.

The period after any deal and withdrawal is also fraught with risks. Kabul-based Western envoys say little hard thought has been given to how aid plans and other support would have to be intensified and tailored to fit a new era of peace, and possible power sharing.

Some also warn of a spike in violence as fighters on both sides return to villages and start new lives.

Afghans and regional diplomats also fear a U.S. bid to cut a hasty deal with the Taliban could allow militia groups to exploit ethnic rivalries to usurp power.

Then there is the worry that the country's nascent democracy and women's rights could crumble in the absence of foreign forces.

Ghani made clear this week they are worries he shares, even if question marks remain over his ability to shape events ahead.

"I, as an elected leader in charge of 35 million Afghans, ... know what are the probable dangers and threats after the peace deal."

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	160294.9
IFX	1932.04

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,051 rials
GBP	55,976 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$61.82/b
WTI	\$53.90/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.57/b
Gold	\$1,312.60 /oz
Silver	\$15.93/oz
Platinum	\$820.40/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



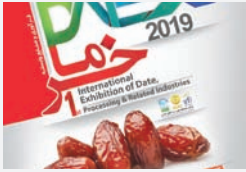
‘Iran among top 10 transformer manufacturers in world’

ENERGY

TEHRAN — “Iran stands among the 10 top transformer manufacturers in the world,” the secretary of Iran’s 5th International Transformer Conference and Exhibition announced on the sidelines of the event, Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.

As Arash Aghaiefar said Iran seeks transfer of transformer-knowledge to other countries and is capable of exporting the electricity generated by its transformers to other countries.

The international event was held on January 29-30, 2019 in Tehran.



1st intl. date exhibition to be held in Shiraz

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Iran’s First International Exhibition of Date, Processing and Related Industries is to be held in the capital city of the southcentral Iranian province of Fars, Shiraz, Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) announced.

The exhibition is to be held at the Fars International Permanent Fairground from February 12 to 16, 2019, the report added.

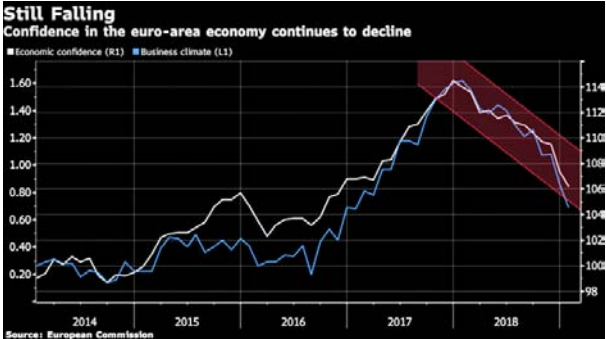
Some B2B and specialized meetings and seminars, with participation of Iranian and foreign commercial attachés and experts, are to be held on the sidelines of the exhibition.

Related MOUs on establishment of exports consortiums in Oman, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan are also planned to be inked during the exposition.

Europe stays in gloomy mood as Germany slashes its 2019 outlook

Euro-area confidence extended its worst losing streak in a decade and Germany’s government added to the pain by slashing its forecast for the region’s largest economy.

With countries across the 19-nation currency zone facing a range of domestic risks and trade uncertainties, sentiment tumbled to the lowest in more than two years in a report Wednesday. Germany predicted its economy will only grow 1 percent in 2019, the least in six years.



The euro area has turned into a weak spot of the world economy. The European Central Bank acknowledged risks have “moved to the downside,” and when the IMF cut its global growth forecast this month, Germany and Italy had the biggest downward revisions.

In its German outlook, the government in Berlin downgraded its 2019 prediction to 1 percent from 1.8 percent, citing in part the deteriorating global trading environment.

German gloom

Economic growth is set to weaken to the slowest pace in six years in 2019.

The report will fuel the pessimism about Europe after an almost non-stop deluge of disappointing economic indicators recently. And it may continue on Thursday, with figures forecast to show Italy probably slipped into recession at the end of 2018. GDP figures for Spain and the euro area are also due.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell will offer his view of the U.S. outlook when he holds a press conference on Wednesday. He’s also had to take note of a changed global backdrop and is expected to emphasize patience in raising interest rates.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Non-oil trade balance at \$678m in 10 months

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Iran’s non-oil trade with other countries registered a \$678 million positive balance in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 – January 20, 2019), IRNA reported on Wednesday citing the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

As reported, the country exported 94.875 million tons of non-oil goods worth \$36.35 billion during the mentioned time span, registering 2.21 percent growth in terms of value.

IRICA data showed that gas condensate valued at \$3.053 billion, LNG worth \$1.815 billion, liquefied propane valued at \$1.484 billion, methanol worth \$1.229 billion, low-density oils and their byproducts except for gasoline valued at \$1.223 billion were the main exported products during the ten-month period with China, Iraq, United Araba Emirates (UAE), Afghanistan, and Turkey as the main export markets of Iranian non-oil goods.

The country’s imports of non-oil products during the first ten months of the present year stood at 26 million tons worth



\$35.672 billion, indicating 18.8 percent fall in terms of value compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Corn as livestock food valued at \$1.618 billion, auto parts worth \$1.266 billion, rice valued at \$1.102 billion, soy bean

worth \$975 million and soybean meal valued at \$493 million were the major imported products.

China, UAE, Turkey, Germany, and India were the main exporters of non-oil goods to Iran during the ten-month period.

Tehran hosting over 200 companies in furniture exhibition

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — The 12th edition of Iran’s Furniture Exhibition, which kicked off on Tuesday, is hosting over 200 companies and production units at Imam Khomeini Grand Prayer Grounds (Mosalla), IRNA reported.

Showcasing the latest technology in furniture sector, expanding knowledge and



trade exchange among the exhibitors and visitors, helping domestic production, and offering products at proper prices are some of the main objectives of the five-day event.

As reported, furniture exports from Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – September 21, 2018), stood at \$36 million which indicates

227 percent growth compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

Iraq, Afghanistan, and Oman were the major importers of furniture from Iran during the nine-month period, while exports to these destinations increased 241 percent, 157 percent, and 160 percent growth, respectively.

Iran, Syria to set up joint bank in Damascus

1 →

The agreement is part of the two countries’ efforts aimed at boosting trade and investment between the two sides as Damascus looks to its ally Tehran to help rebuild from war.

The document was one of the 11 long-term cooperation agreements Iran and Syria signed on Tuesday during a two-day visit of a high-ranking Iranian delegation led by First Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri to Syria.

Also, during the Iranian delegation’s stay in Syria, an Iran-Syria business forum was held in Damascus on Tuesday which was attended by senior officials and businessmen from both sides, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

During this event, a 25-member trade delegation headed by Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, the chairman of ICCIMA, gathered with Syrian counterparts to explore ways of developing trade ties between the two countries.

Jahangiri and Hemmati as well as Mahmoud Hamsho, the secretary general of the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce, were also among the participants of the business gathering.

On the sidelines of the forum, the two countries’ chambers of commerce signed an agreement to establish a joint economic committee.

The joint committee is comprised of 10 Syrian members as well as 10 Iranian businessmen and the Syrian members are due to visit Tehran in the upcoming months.



An Iran-Syria business forum was held in Damascus on Tuesday attended by senior officials and businessmen from both sides.

U.S., China face deep trade, IP differences in high-level talks

The United States and China launch a critical round of trade talks on Wednesday amid deep differences over Washington’s demands for structural economic reforms from Beijing that will make it difficult to reach a deal before a March 2 U.S. tariff hike.

The two sides will meet next door to the White House in the highest-level talks since U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed a 90-day truce in their trade war in December.

People familiar with the talks and trade experts watching them say that, so far, there has been little indication that Chinese officials are willing to address core U.S. demands to protect American intellectual property rights and end policies that Washington says force U.S. companies to transfer technology to Chinese firms.

The U.S. complaints, along with accusations of Chinese cyber theft of U.S. trade secrets and a systematic campaign to acquire U.S. technology firms, were used by the Trump administration to justify punitive U.S. tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese imports.

Trump has threatened to raise tariffs on \$200 billion of goods to 25 percent from 10 percent on March 2 if an agreement cannot be reached. He has also threatened new tariffs on the remainder of Chinese goods shipped to the United States.

“Clearly on the structural concerns, on forced technology transfer, there remains a significant gap if not a wide chasm between the two sides,” a person familiar with the talks told Reuters.

Chinese officials deny that their policies coerce technology transfers.

They have emphasized steps already taken, including reduced automotive tariffs and a draft foreign investment law that improves access for foreign firms and promises to outlaw “administrative means to force the transfer of technology.”

China is fast-tracking that new law, with the country’s largely rubber-stamp parliament likely to approve it in March.

A crucial component of any progress in the talks, according to top administration officials, is agreement on a mechanism to verify and “enforce” China’s follow-through on any reform pledges that it makes. This could maintain the threat of U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods long term.

(Source: Reuters)

Second Announcement

IN THE NAME OF GOD

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 97/121-57/10

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Tender:
Purchasing of one set of Diesel Generator 1500 KAV and 26 sets of low power Pressure Plates and installation & Commissioning in accordance with the technical specifications and other terms and conditions mentioned in the tender documents.

Deadline and How to Receive the Tender Documents:
From **02nd Feb. 2019 (1397/11/13)** by **4 p.m.** on **Tuesday 07th Feb. 2019 (1397/11/18)** with presentation of introductory letter by company or its representative and the receipt of paying the documents fee.

Place of Receiving the Tender Documents:
Interested participants may refer to purchasing (KALA) Dept., 4th Floor of IRIB Administration Complex, Hotel Esteghlal St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran Iran.

The Fee of the Tender Documents and How to Deposit it:
Submission of payment receipt for the amount of 2,000,000 Rials to Account No. 4101029171204273 (IBAN: IR310100004101029171204273) with CENTRAL BANK OF IRAN in the name of IRIB.

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participation to Tender:
The amount of deposit for participant in tender is **USD 30,000** fixed or its equivalent in 2,900,000,000 Rials which should be in the form of Bank Guarantee.

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted no later than **10 a.m.** on **Sunday 10th Mar. 2019 (1397/12/19)** and at the address mentioned in the 4th clause.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes:
The date of opening the envelopes A&B is on **Sunday 10th Mar. 2019 (1397/12/19)** at **3 p.m.** in the office of Financial Vice President and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.

For more information, please see:
www.iriboffice.ir/tenders and http://iets.mporg.ir/ **Tel: 00982122167463**

Purchasing (Kala) Dept. of IRIB

Oil prices steady, torn between Venezuela sanctions and gloomy economy

Oil prices held steady on Wednesday, boosted by concerns about supply disruptions following U.S. sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry but pegged back by a bleak outlook for the global economy.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$53.34 per barrel at 0950 GMT, up 3 cents or 0.06 percent. International Brent crude oil futures were at \$61.45 per barrel, up 13 cents or 0.21 percent.

Washington announced export sanctions against state-owned oil producer Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) on Monday, limiting transactions between U.S. companies that do business with the firm.

"The sanctions so far have been mostly disruptive for refiners on the U.S. Gulf Coast, who are being forced to seek alternative heavy crude supplies, and have stepped up purchases from Canada," said Vandana Hari of Vanda Insights, an energy consultancy.

The sanctions aim to freeze sale proceeds from PDVSA's exports of roughly 500,000 barrels per day of crude to the United States.

World oil futures rose by more than 2 percent on Tuesday, but the market has not



seen panicked buying as a result of the U.S. decision to target Venezuela's oil output.

Its output was already near seven-decade lows and the sanctions affect Venezuelan

supply only to the United States.

"The (Venezuelan) export volumes will not be eliminated from the market, but rather rerouted to other countries," said Paola

Rodriguez-Masiu, an analyst at consultancy Rystad Energy.

With the United States dropping out as a customer for Venezuelan oil, she added that "China and India ... will be able to pick up these oil volumes at great discounts".

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said on Wednesday he was ready for talks with the opposition although he ruled out snap elections the opposition is demanding.

Beyond Venezuela, analysts pointed to economic weakness as countering supply-side troubles.

"Another major risk event for the oil market will be U.S.-China trade talks which get underway today," said Stephen Brennock, analyst at London brokerage PVM Oil.

"Both sides are now faced with a now or never moment in settling their trade spat."

Global economic growth is slowing amid a trade dispute between the United States and China, the world's two biggest economies.

Officials from Washington and Beijing are set to launch a new round of trade talks on Wednesday. The two sides have slapped hefty import tariffs on each other's goods.

(Source: Reuters)

Libyan oilfield 'won't reopen until occupiers leave'

Libya's biggest oilfield El Sharara will remain shut until an armed group and protesters occupying the site leave, the head of the National Oil Corp. (NOC) said on Tuesday, more than a month after the field was closed because of a protest.

The oilfield, with a capacity to produce 340,000 barrels per day (bpd), has been under force majeure since December. Libya now produces more than 900,000 bpd, below average production in 2018 of 1.1 million bpd, NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanalla said in London.

"The armed group attempting to hold NOC and Libya's economic recovery to ransom must leave the field before NOC will consider restarting production," Sanalla told a Chatham House conference.

Libya's oil industry has faced disruption since 2011 when the nation plunged into conflict that led to rival power centers in west and east. Protesters and armed groups have often targeted oilfields and energy infrastructure.

Libya's oil industry has faced disruption since 2011 when the nation plunged into conflict that led to rival power centers in west and east. Protesters and armed groups have often targeted oilfields and energy infrastructure.

General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which is based in east Libya, launched a campaign this month in southwest Libya that it says aimed to combat militant groups and secure oil facilities in the area, including El Sharara.

NOC is based in the capital Tripoli, in



the west and home to the internationally recognized government.

Referring to the LNA initiative, Sanalla said the effort to restart the field "has been complicated further by the launch of an international counter-terrorism mission which has expanded into an attempt to seize control of territory, including potentially, national oil infrastructure."

"It is my concern that a sequence of events has been set in motion with unknowable consequences for Libya, and NOC," he said.

He said the preferred solution for securing the field involved deploying a Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) force, managed by NOC. Different factions of the PFG have previously been responsible for shutdowns at oil facilities in the country. He said NOC has suggested that "a mixed force might provide a solution within a negotiated security framework" led by the Government of National Accord in Tripoli and with the support of the UN.

(Source: Arab News)

Oil group OMV to create Middle East refining and trading hub

OMV is creating a refining and trading hub in the Middle East as the Austrian oil and gas company seeks to bolster its downstream sector and target sales in Asia amid rising demand for fuels and petrochemicals.

The company, alongside Italy's Eni, paid nearly \$6bn for a 35 percent equity stake in Abu Dhabi National Oil Company's refinery subsidiary, as part of a privatization that values the company at \$19.3bn.

Rainer Seele, chief executive, told the Financial Times that the thinking behind OMV's 15 percent share for around \$2.5bn was part of a push to create a more integrated energy player that would withstand downturns better.

ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and BP are among global majors with significant exploration and production divisions as well as refining, marketing and trading arms that can provide a buffer when oil prices fall.

Seele said the latest investment was a "natural hedge", while it enabled the company to invest in refining infrastructure that would cater to fast-expanding regions in Asia such as India.

"We are going to see more stagnating and declining margins in Europe," he said. "OMV is preparing now to invest in capacity that is supplying the growth market."

OMV's existing refineries are able to produce 17.8m tons of petroleum product annually and the Adnoc investment will create another 7.1m tons of additional



capacity.

Mubadala Investment Company, Abu Dhabi's \$200bn sovereign wealth fund, has an almost 25 percent stake in OMV.

OMV together with Adnoc and Eni will spend a further \$1.9bn on building capacity at Adnoc's existing three refineries in the emirate, with one eye on building a fourth.

"We want to diversify our sales market," Seele added, when asked about the new global trading venture set up between the three companies, that will export two-thirds of the products refined by Adnoc.

Seele said the global oil market was grappling with geopolitical crises from the U.S.-China trade spat, to sanctions against Iran and turmoil in Venezuela.

As traders assess the effectiveness of supply curbs from OPEC and Russia, he said Brent crude, the international oil price, would probably stay between \$60-\$70 a barrel.

"I don't see any change in the picture right now," he added.

(Source: Financial Times)

Russia plans to defend interests in Venezuela, including in oil

The Kremlin will defend Russian interests in Venezuela using "all available" legal mechanisms, with Russia's top oil producer Rosneft facing heightened risks to its major investments in the troubled Latin American country.

The U.S. on Monday announced sanctions against PDVSA, Venezuela's state-owned oil company and Rosneft's partner, in a move aimed at cutting off the regime of President Nicolas Maduro from oil revenues and diverting those revenues to the fledgling alternative government of opposition leader Juan Guaido, who the U.S. formally recognized last week as the legitimate president.

Russia, however, does not recognize the opposition leader, claiming the U.S. sanctions against Venezuela are illegal.

"We do not consider this to be correct. We consider this... a sign of unfair competition, in this case it is open interference in the internal affairs of Venezuela," Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Tuesday, as quoted by Prime news agency.

"We will defend [Russia's interests] within the framework of existing international law, using all mechanisms available to us," he said.

Russia has built close ties with Venezuela's President Maduro, investing billions of dollars into the country's economy, including in its oil sector.

Caracas could face problems with servicing its debt to Moscow, Russian deputy finance minister Sergei Storchak admitted, estimating current debt at over \$3 billion. Venezuela is due to pay more than \$100 million in two months under the debt redemption schedule, he said, as reported by local media.

This debt does not include prepayment



deals between Rosneft and PDVSA reached between 2014 and 2016. Under those deals, the Venezuelan company received \$6 billion to be fully redeemed by the end of 2019. PDVSA's 49.9 percent stake in U.S. refiner Citgo is collateral on part of this loan. Other creditors, though, have laid claims to the company over unpaid debts as well.

The latest sanctions by the U.S. further highlighted difficulties for Rosneft should it try to claim the Citgo stake. The U.S. administration said PDVSA-owned Citgo assets in the U.S., which include refineries in Louisiana, Texas and Illinois and three pipeline systems, will be allowed to continue to operate at least for three months, although revenues also will be required to be held in blocked accounts.

***Rosneft interests in Venezuela

Whatever the outcome of the current political turmoil, which heightens political risk for companies involved in the country, Venezuela's authorities are unlikely to

take any action that threatens Rosneft, analysts believe.

"Venezuela's economy depends heavily on oil revenues, up to 90 percent," said Ekaterina Grushevenko from the Skolkovo Energy Center. "The new government will need petrodollars to restore the economy and its oil sector... In this respect, the authorities are likely to welcome the presence of Russian companies in the country."

Rosneft and PDVSA are jointly developing five upstream oil projects in Venezuela -- PetroVictoria, Petromiranda, Petromonagas, Boqueron and Petroperija. Combined production amounted to around 234,000 bpd on average in 2018, Patricia Ventura Nicolas, senior analyst with IPD Latin America, estimated in December.

Those barrels are used for supplies under the prepayment deal and the deliveries are likely to continue as it is hard to see the projects being shut down any time this year, a Moscow-based oil

analyst said.

Rosneft did not reply to a request by S&P Global Platts to comment but analysts believe the Russian company is unlikely to see major disruptions if PDVSA defaults.

"The worst-case scenario -- which is unlikely to materialize -- under which Rosneft loses all the money it invested in Venezuela, would be biting but not critical for the company, with quarterly free cash flow at over \$4 billion," an oil analyst with Western bank said.

He estimated Rosneft's assets in Venezuela at around \$2 billion-\$2.5 billion, with an additional \$2.5 billion of prepayment loan that is yet to be covered with oil supplies. In November, Rosneft said that Venezuela was meeting its obligations and that it expected that to continue.

Venezuela cleared \$1.5 billion of prepayments in the first nine months of 2018, and a total of \$3.1 billion remained outstanding, according to the company's presentation at the time.

In December, Russia and Venezuela also inked a number of contracts to the tune of \$6 billion during a visit by Maduro to Moscow, including in the telecommunications sphere. At the time, Maduro said Russia would invest \$5 billion to raise Venezuela's oil production by 1 million bpd but no further details on the deal were provided.

Venezuela's crude output fell to 1.17 million bpd in December, according to the latest S&P Global Platts OPEC survey. The country's output is forecast to decline by 350,000 bpd through 2019, but, depending on sanctions and other risk factors, could fall by as much as 800,000 bpd by late this year, according to Barclays.

(Source: Platts)

Europe to become an increasingly important LNG market

Europe has long been considered as the 'sink' of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) market, absorbing the cargoes that don't get sold on the booming Asian market.

LNG analysts and industry officials, however, expect Europe to become a genuine LNG demand market after 2021, as natural gas production in northwest Europe is set for a decline and as global LNG supply growth is set to likely outstrip Asian demand growth.

This winter's LNG trade patterns have highlighted the role of Europe as a 'last-resort' LNG market for suppliers.

Asian LNG prices have been at their weakest in three years so far this winter. So U.S. cargoes have found home in Europe, which has been the top buyer of U.S. LNG this winter season.

Meanwhile, Asian LNG spot prices fell last week for a fifth consecutive week amid above-average temperatures and ample supply. Major Asian buyers—especially China—had stockpiled gas well ahead of the winter. Milder winter weather in some parts of Asia and high stockpiles mean that there is currently little appetite for spot cargoes.

With weak Asian prices, Europe has been acting as the 'dump' for LNG cargoes, but experts at the ongoing European Gas Conference in Vienna believe that the European market will start to show 'genuine' demand in a year or two.

"Europe will not just play the balancing role... Europe will become more dependent on LNG," S&P Global Platts quoted the head of LNG at OMV, Elena Sidorochkina, as saying at the conference.

Natural gas production in northwest Europe is set for a decline in coming years, as the Netherlands is reducing production at the huge Groningen field, aiming to terminate production by 2030. The UK and Norway may also see drops in natural gas exports to nearby countries in northwest Europe.

At the same time, global LNG supply is expected to continuously grow, likely outpacing Asia's LNG demand growth, analysts and officials say.

According to energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie, this year could be a record year for LNG projects approved, with more than 60 mmtpa of capacity likely to reach final investment decision (FID). This will be well above the previous record of 45 mmtpa sanctioned in 2005 and triple the 21 mmtpa projects sanctioned last year.

"Frontrunners in the race to hit FID include the US\$27 billion Arctic LNG-2 in Russia, at least one project in Mozambique and three in the US. Our picks in the US are Golden Pass, Calcasieu Pass and Sabine Pass Train 6," WoodMac said in its 2019 outlook.

At the same time, the consultancy noted that "Asian LNG demand growth will not keep pace with LNG supply and Europe, northwest Europe in particular, will have to absorb the surplus, especially during the summer."

European natural gas import demand will grow, while Russia's pipeline gas capacity is limited by infrastructure bottlenecks in Europe, especially at the Baumgarten gas hub in Austria, according to Wood Mackenzie's Hadrien Collineau, Senior Research Analyst, EMEARC Commodity Analytics for Gas and LNG.

It's not that Russia doesn't have the natural gas or the capacity to export that gas, rather, it will be infrastructure bottlenecks that could limit volumes to Europe.

"Wood Mackenzie believes Europe's LNG requirements will more than double by 2025. Europe's growing gas import dependency, coupled with constraints on Russian pipeline exports, mean that LNG imports will have to increase," Collineau said.

"For some time, northwest Europe has been regarded as the 'sink' of the global LNG market," the analyst added.

However, northwest Europe will have to compete for LNG imports on the global market after 2020, Collineau noted.

Europe may have been seen as the one picking up the leftover supply from Asia, but analysts believe that the European market will soon start to play a more important role in LNG demand.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Oil major Total plans biggest exploration drive in years

Total is launching its biggest exploration campaign for years in 2019 as part of a turnaround plan that is ditching the company's focus on risky long-shots in favor of areas known to contain commercial levels of oil or gas.

The French major aims to drill 23 wells this year, its senior vice president for exploration, Kevin McLachlan, told Reuters, in waters off Mauritania, Senegal, Namibia, South Africa, Guyana and Brazil.

While the company declined to say how many wells it drilled in 2018, McLachlan said 2019 would be Total's largest program in years. The 23 wells planned represent about a trebling of the levels of 2017 and 2016, and is higher even than the 20 drilled in 2013, before the oil price crash.

The company's new game plan is to concentrate efforts on emerging and mature basins, which offer a greater chance of exploration success. It is moving away from its higher-risk, higher-reward strategy of targeting "frontier" areas that have not been commercially exploited, an approach which yielded scant rewards and saw outlier Total fall behind rivals.

As a result the proportion of its exploration capital the African-focused company is spending on frontier areas has dropped to 15 percent, from 40 percent five years ago.

"We were spending a lot of money in frontier," said McLachlan, a Canadian geophysicist who joined Total in 2015 to lead the five-year revamp of its exploration strategy. "Now we want balance."

Most of the wells it aims to drill this year will target known giant fields, he added.

Total has broken ranks with some rivals in recent years and largely ignored the rush to U.S. shale. It is looking to eke out conventional resources, particularly in Africa where it has the biggest industry presence. The strategy carries risks though, and has left the company exposed to the kind of political instability that has deterred others.

McLachlan said Total's exploration budget would remain broadly in line with 2018, when it was \$1.2 billion, and 2017, when it was \$1.1 billion. That is still less than half the level of 2014, when the price crash forced all majors to cut spending.

(Source: Reuters)



Trump could be the new Clinton if Democrats impeach: Sympathetic and stronger than ever



By J.T. Young

Democrats risk burning themselves if they fan the flames of Trump impeachment. Caveat igniter: Roasting someone at the stake is hotter than it appears. Political winds can change suddenly and blow the flames back on those who set them. No one knows this better than the Republicans who impeached Bill Clinton.

The parallels between the Clinton and Trump presidencies are closer than Democrats would care to admit, and the consequences of impeachment are something Republicans would care to forget.

Arguably, President Clinton was in a weaker position than Trump is. Both were dogged by personal scandal suspicion. Both won the presidency by unusual means — Clinton by seeing third-party candidate Ross Perot split the opposition and Trump won one of America's greatest upsets — and with well less than popular vote majorities (Bill Clinton with just 43 percent and Trump with 46 percent).

In office, both had major policy failures. Clinton raised taxes too much (and admitted it) and spectacularly botched health care reform. Trump failed to replace ObamaCare. Both also suffered midterm defeat: Clinton lost 54 House seats, nine Senate seats, and Congress; Trump lost 40 House seats and the House. And both have been preoccupied by scandalous accusations in the White House.

With all his negatives and aided by independent counsel Ken Starr's findings, Republicans felt they had just cause to impeach Clinton in 1998. They did, taking him before the Senate — on two charges: perjury and obstruction of justice — only the second president so tried. And although Republicans had accumulated animosities and congressional majorities, they lacked the votes to remove him. More importantly, they lacked support in the court of public opinion.

The parallels do not yet extend to impeachment. However, vocal Democrats believe they have cause for it. And like Clinton, Trump has an untethered investigation — Robert Mueller's probe — that only further fuels these Democrats' fire.

All this adds up to Democratic leaders' impeachment problem. With a new House majority — populated by many who feel it is due to strenuous Trump opposition — impeachment is now within their grasp. How to keep firebrands from inflaming their caucus and burning it at the same time?

Republicans' impeachment experience is a cautionary tale of playing with fire. Instead of Clinton's, they began his rehabilitation. Clinton became for the first time a sympathetic figure.

Despite having evidence Clinton had lied under oath, along and other past actions fitting within what many considered the broad gamut of "high crimes and misdemeanors," Americans were uncomfortable with removing him. Senate Democrats therefore felt no real political pressure when it came time to vote. Republicans did not close to the needed two-thirds threshold and Clinton remained.

That a repetition could occur for Trump should give today's Democrats ample reason to reconsider taking action on red-hot rhetoric — especially considering that while Trump's position is similar to Clinton's, theirs is weaker than Republicans' two decades ago. Trump does not have strong poll numbers; neither did Clinton — even winning re-election he failed to get 50 percent of the popular vote. Like Clinton, Trump has a strong economy to fall back on. And unlike Clinton, Trump does not have — at least yet — a damning outside counsel's report.

Unlike Republicans of 20 years ago, Democrats lack a Senate majority, so reaching the two-thirds threshold appears impossible. And even getting there would require tough votes for many House Democrats holding districts Trump won in 2016.

However, more important than raw congressional numbers is the American public's reaction. Can Democrats be sure they will not encounter the same backdraft effect from a public again uncomfortable with a political process attempting to circumvent an electoral one?

Two decades ago, Americans were comfortable in their political dissonance of having elected both Republican congressional majorities and a Democratic president. Americans are again in that position, are Democrats sure it would change in their favor this time?

Democrats' final concern should be timing. Republicans attacked Clinton after his re-election — Democrats would be attacking Trump before his.

Certainly, an argument could be made that the proceedings would undercut Trump in 2020. However, it could also be more cogently argued, based on the Clinton experience, that the likely acquittal would equate to innocence to most Americans. A rehabilitated Trump could then be even more formidable than incumbent presidents seeking re-election already are. Make no mistake: Failure to remove Trump from office would amount to personal exoneration — regardless of the facts faced — and political vindication that the effort was a witch hunt gone awry. (Source: The Hill)

War on Yemen aims to restore Saudi hegemony with complicity of western countries

A French newspaper said that four-years of war on Yemen aim to restoring Saudi hegemony, where this war would not have been launched or continued without the complicity of Western countries, which receive billions of arms sales for a few million dollars to Yemenis in the name of aid.

Mediapart newspaper pointed out that the silence applied by Western policymakers about what is happening in Yemen is deafening, because it can not be useful or in the interest of resolving the Yemeni crisis.

The European silence is because the leaders of the European Union are still engaged in continuing arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as these deals allow the Saudi monarchy and its allies to launch a fierce war, killing and destroying the lives of millions of civilians in Yemen, the newspaper added.

The report said that the only objective behind the military campaign of restoring the absconder President, Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi, is to strengthen the Saudi hegemony over Yemen, noting at the same time that this campaign stalled after thirty months



The Mediapart newspaper mentioned that the dealing of European Union has always been working through dual diplomacy to provide humanitarian aid and arms sales.

How seriously should the world take Trump's Venezuela threat?

By David A. Graham

On Monday, as Donald Trump's administration ratcheted up its pressure on the Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro, the White House wanted Maduro to know that sanctions on the state-owned oil company, PDVSA, might not be the end of the road.

"Look, the president has made it very clear on this matter that all options are on the table," National-Security Adviser John Bolton said during a White House briefing. He also said that violence against not only U.S. personnel in Venezuela but also the National Assembly and Juan Guaidó, whom the U.S. has recognized as the country's legitimate leader, would be "met with a significant response."

Bolton declined to say quite what that meant. "We're not going to define it, because we want the Venezuelan security forces to know how strongly we think that President Guaidó, the National Assembly, the opposition, and most importantly American personnel [should not be] harmed." (In either an elaborate mind game or a stunning display of absent-mindedness, Bolton also allowed photographers to see a legal pad on which was scrawled, "5,000 troops to Colombia.")

This was, on the one hand, a remarkably blunt intimation of military action, especially coming from the administration of Donald Trump, who ran for president while criticizing foreign military adventurism. On the other hand, it was yet another threat from an administration that has often failed to follow through on them. The question is whether Venezuela will be different, and whether the presence of veteran regime-change advocates such as Bolton and Elliott Abrams will make the difference.

As I've noted before, Trump has a long pattern of talking a big game and then caving. Most recently, he agreed to end the government shutdown on Friday with no promise of funding for his border wall, despite having previously said that he would not reopen the government unless Congress agreed to wall spending. (In earlier cases, Trump had folded on funding for the wall as well.) After vowing to do so, he decided not to brand China a currency manipulator. He said he'd go after the NRA on gun control, then didn't. He announced he would withdraw funding to countries that voted against the U.S. at the UN, then didn't. He has threatened full-scale military action against Iran, Syria, and North Korea, and has not made good on any of those threats. Of course,



This isn't the first time the president has threatened military force against the country, but now he is surrounded by regime-change advocates.

Trump has sometimes followed through. He pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Paris climate accord. After several flinches, he eventually went forward with the trade war with China that he wanted. And his threats have on occasion appeared to work. He seems to have rattled NATO enough to make other nations worried about their contributions to the alliance. His threat of "fire and fury" in North Korea arguably helped bring Pyongyang to the negotiating table, though the material results since then have been basically nothing.

This is also not the first time Trump has threatened military action against Venezuela. In August 2017, he suggested it publicly, with little warning.

"They have many options for Venezuela — and, by the way, I'm not going to rule out a military option," Trump said. "We're all over the world, and we have troops all over the world in places that are very, very far away. Venezuela is not very far away, and the people are suffering, and they're dying. We have many options for Venezuela, including a possible military option, if necessary."

Trump's focus on Venezuela is perplexing. As my colleague Uri Friedman has written, the support for Maduro's

ouster is one of the least Trumpy things that the president has done, from the support for regime change to the international cooperation involved. The president has no obvious reason for being so focused on the country. Though he's used Venezuela as a shorthand for what he sees as the failings of socialism, Trump has otherwise evinced little interest in Latin America outside of immigration.

So why would the threat that Bolton delivered Monday be any different? One factor is that Trump has just suffered a humiliating defeat at home, on the shutdown, that involved his folding. When presidents are stymied at home, they often look overseas for a chance to accomplish something quickly and without the pesky limitations of the legislature and judiciary. They often see a quick and decisive military action abroad as a good way to bolster sagging poll numbers, another constant Trump bugaboo. And while Trump has lamented American deployments to the faraway Middle East, he himself noted Venezuela's proximity in 2017.

The other big factor is personnel. When Trump made his threat in 2017, he was flanked by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, and National-Security Adviser HR McMaster, all of whom looked on uneasily as he spoke. All three are gone now; Tillerson and McMaster were unceremoniously fired, and Haley left of her own accord. Tillerson has been replaced by the more hawkish Mike Pompeo, but the real changes are at the National Security Council. Bolton, McMaster's replacement, has long favored regime change, most famously in Iraq.

In an echo of the case that George W. Bush's administration, in which Bolton served, made for the Iraq War. Assisting Bolton is another veteran of the Bush team, Elliott Abrams, who was just named special envoy for Venezuela. Abrams has ample experience in Latin American regime change dating back to the 1980s, when he helped support the Contras, a right-wing group attempting to topple the Nicaraguan government.

The simple presence of Bolton and Abrams doesn't mean that military intervention is a lock. Trump might decide against intervening directly for any number of reasons. Threats might also help erode support for Maduro, ending his government and obviating a U.S. deployment. If Trump does follow through on threats of military force, though, the fresh faces around the president are likely to be a major factor. (Source: The Atlantic)

When anti-corruption protests succeed



in the elected legislature and led to popular demands for an end to a culture of impunity.

The report found full democracies scored an average of 75 out of 100 on the corruption index. Flawed democracies averaged 49 while autocratic regimes averaged 30. Yet the real value in the survey lies in a list of countries that have reduced corruption by improving their democracies. That link

was clear.

In the past seven years, 20 countries have made such progress. They include Estonia in Europe, Senegal and Ivory Coast in Africa, and Guyana in South America. None are perfect. Even Denmark, a strong democracy that is also ranked as the least corrupt, saw its largest bank caught in a huge money-laundering scheme last year. Yet nations on the list can

provide lessons for the majority of countries that remain below average in the TI rankings.

Anti-corruption reforms in Senegal and Ivory Coast, for example, are a result of a new "political will ... demonstrated by their respective leaders." In Argentina, Ecuador, and El Salvador, reform is led by better investigations in corruption cases against high-profile individuals, including some former presidents. Estonia's progress is a result of radical reform of the courts and public administration, a relatively clean privatization of state enterprises, and digital transparency in government dealings.

Among its own recommendations, TI researchers cite the need for a broad societal consensus in favor of integrity in public institutions. "Engagement of citizens in oversight of government decisions and spending, particularly at the local level, not only crowd-sources accountability but promises to re-invigorate the democratic process," the report states.

So while watching protests like those in Sudan or Venezuela, it is helpful to view them as simply an outbreak of citizen engagement in favor of integrity. Many other countries have been there, done that.

(Source: The CSM)

Theresa May's disastrous dithering

On Tuesday night, the UK sent a resounding message to the European Union: "We demand that you give us what we want." Don't expect the audience to be receptive.

Parliament was considering changes to Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal, which it rejected by a spectacular margin two weeks ago. One measure that carried the day,

and which May supported, was a kind of ultimatum. In effect, it tells the EU to reopen the agreement the two sides reached in November, do away with the so-called backstop that avoids a hard border with Ireland, and replace it with ... well, something else.

EU officials have said they won't. Even if they were open to

some renegotiation — as in fact they should be — asking them to rip up the most contentious provision of the hard-fought agreement in favor of an entirely unspecified alternative is absurd. If May has a more detailed plan that could feasibly satisfy them, and mollify all 27 EU countries that would wield a veto over it, she has kept it to herself. →13

‘Why U.S. DNI says Iran, China and Russia interfering in U.S. election?’

➡ It is a fact – documented incontrovertibly – that in the U.S. the Republican and Democratic parties comprise a two-party tyranny that systematically suppresses fifty percent of the eligible voters to the point that they do not vote, and marginalizes another twenty percent. Elections are generally determined by the thirty percent of the voters that are mobilized and manipulated by the two parties. The two parties work in concert with one another to “rig the system” so that Independents and small party candidates (Constitution, Green, Justice, Libertarian, Reform, Working Families) have absolutely no serious chance of being placed on the ballot or if – by extraordinary effort they make it to the ballot as a candidate – of winning.

2) Factor Two: Electronic and Party Vote Fraud

It is a fact – documented incontrovertibly – that the electronic voting machines were designed to allow for the selection of a winner before a single vote is cast – they are “officially rigged.” “Fractional voting” is a proven method – many books have been written about this – to simulate an active voting process but ensure that the desired outcome is achieved. Hillary Clinton used this method to steal thirteen primary elections from Bernie Sanders in 2016, and was prevented from repeating the theft against Donald Trump in the general election. I will mention that HR 1, For the People Act, is probably a reaction to the righteous work of Dr. McKinney and myself, and it is also a fraud – it seeks to federalize and privatize the drawing of Congressional district boundaries, and it sets the stage for voting by non-citizens. It does not provide for paper ballots counted on site, instant run-offs to achieve a true majority choice, and more.

3) Factor Three: #GoogleGestapo – Crime by Facebook, Google, MeetUp, Twitter, and YouTube

It is a fact – documented incontrovertibly – that the social media ecology in the USA, many of its elements receiving start-up funding from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), is dominated by the Zionists, with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Zionist secret police, serving as the “trusted flagger” deciding who lives and who dies in cyber-space. Each element, with the ADL as a common element, has been censoring and in some cases digitally assassinating (“de-platforming”) conservative and progressive voices that dispute the official narrative. Polls or surveys have been manipulated to favor Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump, and internal algorithms have been manipulated to radically reduce – to take one prominent example – the reach of President Donald Trump with his tweets – fewer retweets, fewer likes, fewer recommendations. This entire ecology is deeply and persistently manipulated against the President and in favor of the extremists opposing the President.

4) Factor Four: Deep State and Zionist Money in Politics & Media, Dual Citizens & Sayonim

It took Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr. and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce almost a quarter century to buy and lie their way into a Supreme Court decision (CITIZENS UNITED) that allows unlimited corporate money to be used to lie to the public about everything. It has gotten to the point that one



cannot be elected – at least 80% of the time – without swearing allegiance to the Deep State generally and Zionists particularly. As President Donald Trump has stated so clearly, “the system is rigged.” President Trump is an “accidental” President in this context – or perhaps given to us by the hand of God in the face of a constellation of Satanic forces quite certain that Hillary Clinton would be “elected” by the rigged system – and it will be his responsibility, in his second term, to finish the job of taking down the Deep State and eradicating the parasitic influence of Zionists on the U.S. economy, the U.S. Government, and U.S. society.

The Zionist control of Congress, so famously stated with clarity on Fox News by Congressman James Traficante, only to have his host Sean Hannity scream and shout the usual “anti-Semitic” canards (Zionism evil, Judaism good, they are not the same thing), is matched by the Zionist control of the Mainstream Media (MSM), with Sean Hannity of Fox as the perfect example of a cowed obedient tool.

Add to that the vast numbers of “dual-citizens” – at least 10% of the Senior Executive Service in the Executive – who are unregistered agents of a foreign power – Zionist Israel – and the thousands of sayonim not counting pedophile entrapment expert Jeffrey Epstein – and you have a “captured” country.

There is indeed a foreign nation that manipulates U.S. elections but it is not China, Russia, or Iran. It is the Zionist genocidal apartheid state of Israel, working through its agents – U.S. citizens who are unregistered but well-known agents of a foreign power, such as Sheldon Adelson, Michael Bloomberg, Howard Schultz, Chuck Schumer, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Jared Kushner, John Bolton, and Elliott Abrams, among others. In combination with their penetration of all federal, state, and local communications and computing systems, the Zionists are the parasite that “owns” the host.

■ This is an excellent analysis of the reality – the context within which the DNI claims foreign powers are interfering – having an effect – on U.S. election. What are the relative expenditures and impacts?

A. Domestic actors including Sheldon Adelson, an unregistered agent of the Zionist genocidal apartheid state of Israel, spent \$6.5 billion dollars on the 2016 election. Russia is reported to have spent as little as \$5,000 on ads, but by some accounts as much as \$1.5. Let’s agree on a high end estimate of Iranian, Chinese, and Russian expenses at the \$6.5 million level. That is 1% of 1%!

As someone who champions evidence-based decision-making, I find it utterly reprehensible for the DNI, the Members of Congress, and the U.S. media – including Fox News now known to be desperately beholden to Zionist funding – to put forward the idea that China, Russia, and Iran are in any way serious players in any U.S. election.

I am reminded of a U.S. president in the 1960’s asking a Mexican president to please declare Cuba a threat to Mexico’s national security. The Mexican president politely declined to do so. Asked why not, the Mexican president is reported to have replied “Mr. President, if I declared Cuba a threat to Mexican national security, forty million Mexicans would die laughing.”

So here we are today. The DNI, the Members of Congress, and the U.S. media are asking us to believe that China, Russia, and Iran somehow represent an existential threat to the integrity of the U.S. electoral process, a process so deeply and broadly corrupt in every possible respect that it shames every American who still has a modicum of intelligence and integrity. At the same time, they maliciously avoid stating the obvious: the only serious foreign influencer of U.S. election is the Zionist genocidal apartheid state of Israel utilizing bribery, blackmail, and lies to get its way (the nine million decent Jews in the USA are 5% of the total voting population – the power of Israel in the USA is not based on Jewish voters).

■ How does all this affect President Donald Trump as he moves toward 2020?

Let me say first that I continue to support our President, and I also believe he will be introducing some stunning economic and legal initiatives in February, to include a gold-backed dollar, the virtual nationalization of the Federal Reserve, a multi-trillion dollar

bottom-up economic stimulus, and the beginning of arrests and military tribunals – from Dick Cheney to the Clintons, Brennan, and Comey, justice will be done. Robert Mueller could find himself indicted for 3,000 counts of obstructing justice and 3,000 counts of complicity after the fact in murder, since he covered up the Zionist planning and execution of 9/11 throughout his term as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The grotesque failure of the DNI with his lame national intelligence strategy and his pathetic and terribly incomplete and inadequate testimony to Congress is an indictment of the entire U.S. secret intelligence community.

The time has come for President Donald Trump to eliminate the office of the DNI, reduce the size of the U.S. secret intelligence community by up to 70%, consolidate the salvageable pieces in a new Consolidated Classified Central Intelligence Agency (CCIA), and establish the Open Source Agency (OSA) as I have been recommending – against unyielding CIA sabotage – for thirty years.

The time has also come for President Trump to introduce his own #UNRIG – Election Integrity Act – so as to achieve 100% citizen participation in the 2020 election, and raise his own standing from the 27% who voted for him in 2016 to 70% -- a Trump Triumph.

Our President is doing hundreds of good things that are not addressed by the Zionist-controlled media; he has a \$100 million campaign fund that will only grow larger; and the Democrats are self-destructing.

■ Allow me to challenge you on a small point. You clearly identify the Zionist state of Israel as the only foreign influencer of note, yet you say nothing about when and how they will be expelled as a parasite. Would you care to comment?

A. Fair question. It is obvious to everyone that as along as Jared Kushner and John Bolton are in the White House, the Zionists control U.S. national security policy at a superficial level. Let me just point to what Q – which I believe is managed by my respected colleague Michael Flynn – has said: the Zionists come last. First the President must increase his base and end Deep State control of the economy, and start the military tribunals. Then we can begin the difficult job of cleaning out the Zionist parasite from the U.S. economy, U.S. government, and U.S. society. Howard Schultz, the alleged Independent candidate, is actually a Zionist – this is a Zionist gambit to explore an anti-Trump option if and when Trump starts taking them down. America has woken up. The traditional Zionist defense – using charges of anti-Semitism to block all criticism of the Zionist genocidal apartheid state of Israel and its global criminal network that carries out assassinations and kidnappings for dictators world-wide – is no longer working. In addition, with help from myself and others, I believe we now have processed all of the videos and guest lists turned over by Jeffrey Epstein in return for his very light sentence for pedophilia, and we are close to finishing the processing of all National Security Agency (NSA) data on the Zionist network of traitors, elite pedophiles, and white collar criminals that are the backbone of the Deep State. Justice will be done; may God have mercy on their souls, and may God Bless America the Beautiful as it expels this Satanic parasite from its body.

The second shock of British Parliament to May



➡ Second, the British Parliament’s emphasis on the lack of withdrawal from the United Europe has led PM May to the political abyss. In this case, Jeremy Corbyn could pursue his idea of holding an early election in England and holding new talks with Europe (on behalf of the next government).

There is also a third option which is holding a referendum again on election, an idea that is pursued in a particular way by some members of the conservative party and the Labor Party and people like Tony Blair and John Major.

However, the realization of this option means the British official should forget the previous referendum and the count on people’s vote. In this case, we will witness a sharp controversy in the British political and social equations, a conflict that will be held in particular between supporters and opposition leaders.

The truth is gradually emerging

➡ As late as last year, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said to Secretary of State Hector Timerman, “That’s enough, for what more?”

Cimadevilla, the former head of the AMIA research unit, disclosed that foreign intelligence experts who were in the country in 2016 said that the case had to be changed. They believed that behind these cases there was a smuggling of weapons.

In a 50-page text, Mario Cimadevilla former chairman of the Amy Special Branch from the Department of Justice, discovers that foreign intelligence services arrived in Argentina in 2016, and that Iranian agents, Hezbollah’s involvement and suicide attack were questioned.

One conclusion presented in the text to Macri is that the attack on the Israeli embassy, the AMIA bombing and the Rio Tercero blast should be analyzed together. We guess that there is a in weapons trafficking and illicit trade of firearms behind the attacks. There was not a huge conspiracy to carry out an attack, but the reason for this should be to search for a massive business framework.

This is in line with the judgment of the Rodolfo Canicoba Corral judge, who has repeatedly said that the evidence is intelligence reports and do not have legal value..

It is clear why the Argentinean government, the U.S. and Israel are trying to ratify the court without the presence of the defendants (which are not legal in Argentina), or because of the implementation of the truth-clarifying committee between Iran and Argentina, since they have no evidence at all. As this is not a legal case, it’s just a political case that is full of unimportant reports from U.S. intelligence agencies, Israel and Argentina.

A month after the departure of Mario Camidevilla from the AMIA Special Unit, a group of masked men broke into his house, he denounced it as a robbery, saying, “The situation was like nothing stolen.”

Mario Cimadevilla, leader of the UCR party, said that his domestic worker was questioned: “where does your boss keep his tools of job?” “They did not carry a notebook; they did not take my son’s game player or my new cell phone. They checked the folders and envelopes, everything was very strange: they did not ask for valuable items, they only looked for the means of my activity.”

The police chief had the same viewpoint as he had and didn’t consider it as robbery case. Cimadevilla said that it was surely the fabrication of government and intelligence services.

EU committed to finalize SPV: Finaud

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Marc Finaud, the former French Foreign Ministry spokesman, says that the position of the European Union and its Member States regarding support for full implementation of the JCPOA has been clearly reaffirmed on several occasions and will not be changed even if some EU countries participate in Warsaw’s Conference. Former Senior Resident Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) adds “At this stage, it is not even sure that the conference will take place or if it does, at which level and with which results.”

A senior member of Geneva Centre for Security Policy also says that “The EU is committed to finalizing the entry into force of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) in a near future and will not be distracted by the attitude of the U.S. Administration.”

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The United States has announced that it will hold a meeting in Poland on the issue of stability in the Middle East, but the name of the meeting is still vague and unclear. Although the Warsaw’s Conference was initially announced against Iran, Acting Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Jonathan Cohen, recently announced that the Polish summit would not be to defame Iran. Why the goals and the name of the Polish meeting is Ambiguous and unclear?

A: This initiative seems part of a U.S. campaign to rally support to the American policy towards Iran and overcome Washing-

ton’s isolation on the Iran Nuclear Deal.

■ If Warsaw’s Conference been anti-Iranian, whether the presence of European countries in this summit will Undermine Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran (JCPOA)?

A: The position of the European Union and its Member States regarding support for full implementation of the JCPOA has been clearly reaffirmed on several occasions and will not be changed even if some EU countries participate in this event.

■ Do you think that the presence of European countries in Warsaw’s Conference will mean that Europe surrenders to trump, and then the SPV mechanism with Iran will no longer work?

A: The EU is committed to finalizing the entry into force of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) in a near future and will not be distracted by the attitude of the U.S. Administration.

■ Whether Warsaw’s Conference will has a practical achievement against Iran?

A: At this stage, it is not even sure that the conference will take place or if it does, at which level and with which results. Iran should maintain its consultations with its JCPOA partners to preserve the agreement and avoid responding to provocations.



Warsaw Conference will not have any practical impact on Iran: Fitzpatrick

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Mark Fitzpatrick, director of International Institute for Strategic Studies says that the name of the Warsaw’s Conference had to be changed when it was clear that few EU states would participate in an event that was clearly identified as Iran bashing.

“I do not expect the Warsaw Conference will have any practical impact on Iran,” Fitzpatrick told the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The United States has announced that it will hold a meeting in Poland on the issue of stability in the Middle East, but the name of the meeting is still vague and unclear. Although the Warsaw’s Conference was initially announced against Iran, Acting Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Jonathan Cohen, recently announced that the Polish summit would not be to defame Iran. Why the goals and the name of the Polish meeting is Ambiguous and unclear?

A: The name of the conference had to be changed when it was clear that few EU states would participate in an event that was clearly identified as Iran bashing. Pompeo should have realised this before he announced the conference.

■ If Warsaw’s Conference been anti-Iranian, whether the presence of European countries in this summit will Undermine Joint Comprehensive Plan of



Action with Iran (JCPOA)?

A: Whatever the name of the conference, participation by EU states would not change their strong support for the JCPOA. But it would have given a misleading impression, so it was wise to change the name.

■ Do you think that the presence of European countries in Warsaw’s Conference will mean that Europe surrenders to trump, and then the SPV mechanism with Iran will no longer work?

A: No, it would buy signal a surrender to Trump, only a diplomatic way of fending off his demands. The conference has no impact on the SPV, which will go ahead as planned, although there has been some delay.

■ Whether Warsaw’s Conference will has a practical achievement against Iran?

A: I do not expect the Warsaw Conference will have any practical impact on Iran. It may be like the Security Council meeting on Iran that Trump called last autumn, where he ended up finding himself isolated.

There is no relation between delays in SPV with Iran’ missile program: Nephew

➡ A: Ultimately, it is because while the Europeans oppose the U.S. decision to reimpose sanctions on Iran, European companies and banks remain unwilling to do business with Iran that might contravene sanctions.

Humanitarian trade does not have this same set of problems and, so, it is far easier to begin with humanitarian trade than to try -- and probably fail -- to entertain a wider, deeper set of economic connections.

■ The ex-member of the US nuclear negotiating team Robert Malley recently told Euronews that EU is not fully united behind the SPV because some countries in the European Union are more sensitive to the US argument or pressure. With regard to this matter, do you think that SPV will be efficient enough once launched?

A: If it is linked only to humanitarian trade, then, yes, I think it will be efficient and effective. Breaking down the barriers to humanitarian trade would be beneficial in its own right and there is a glaring need of financial services in this area. Companies are less reluctant to do this business than banks are to do any business with Iran under U.S. sanctions.

The real question is whether this is enough of a benefit for Iran to convince it to remain in the JCPOA. I hope so but I fear not.

Pars Diplomatic Real Estate

Apartment

Apt in Elahieh
brand new, 120 sq.m
1 Bdrs., fully furn, equipped
kitchen, balcony, spj, elevator
storage, parking spot, **\$2000**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Mahmoodieh
3th floor, 250 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
unfurn, equipped kitchen, spj
elevator, parking spot, **\$3500**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Fereshteh
8th floor, 200 sq.m
3 Bdrs., fully furn, spj
elevator, parking spot
\$2500
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Zafarani
brand new, 180 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
beautiful furn, roof garden
parking spot, **\$3400**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apt in Jordan
4th floor 134 sq.m, 3 Bdrs. furn, 11
sq.m balcony
elevator parking spot, **\$700**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in South Qeytarieh
3th floor, 140 sq.m
3 Bdrs., 3 bath rooms
furn, equipped kitchen
sauna, swimming pool
indoor Jacuzzi
parking spot, **\$1300**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Villa

Villa in North Kamranieh
duplex, 750 sq.m land
500 sq.m built up, unfurn
servant quarter, renovated
2 parking spots
Price negotiable
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Triplex Villa in Velenjak
1250 sq.m land, 1000 sq.m built
up, unfurn, terrace
outdoor swimming pool
renovated, parking spot
Price negotiable
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Duplex Villa in Zafarani
650 sq.m land, 650 sq.m built up
7 Bdrs. unfurn, nice garden
completely renovated
parking spot
Price negotiable
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Duplex Villa in
Shariti-Mirdamad
290 sq.m, 4 Bdrs., unfurn balcony
renovated, fire place
Storage, parking spot
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Villa in Niavaran
900 sq.m land, 1000 sq.m built up
8 Bdrs., 7 bath rooms
3 kitchens, 3 big reception saloons
with one suit for servant, Jacuzzi
swimming pool
outdoor / indoor parking spots
\$12000
Ms.Sara: 09128103207



Holder of

ISO 9001:2008

ISO 10004:2012

ISO 10002:2014

From Oxford Cert Universal

**Best Consultation
Best Services, Best Result**

Intl. Department Manager "Tina 09128103205"

Tel: 22662452-8, Fax: 22667173

Hot Line: 28141
info@parsdiplomatic.com
www.parsdiplomatic.com

Building & Office

Whole Building in Darous
2 floors, 700 sq.m land
one apt 330 sq.m with 4 Bdrs.
another duplex apt 300 sq.m with
5 Bdrs., furn, equipped kitchen
renovated, huge terrace
mountain view, parking spot
\$6000
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Whole Building in Pasdaran
almost new, 5 floors, each floor
2 apts, 10 apts totally, 90 sq.m to
100 sq.m, storage, parking spots
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Whole Building in Zafarani
4 floors, each floor one apt
each apt 350 sq.m with 4 Bdrs.
fully furn, equipped kitchen
spj, 2 parking spots, **\$14000**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Office in Saadat Abad
administrative office license
4 apts, 750 sq.m, parking spots
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Whole building in Jordan
administrative office license
5 floors, 1700 sq.m totally
almost new, 43 parking spots
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Office in Valiasr
administrative office license
3 apts, 102 sq.m, elevator
lots parking spots
near Niayesh highway
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Ideal Offers

Apt in Elahieh
4th floor, 150 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.
2 bath rooms, fully furn
balcony, swimming pool
Jacuzzi, billiard table
parking spot, **\$1700**
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Fereshteh
185 sq.m, 2 master room
with one room, furn, spj
parking spot, **\$1700**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Apartment in Velenjak
2nd floor, 200 sq.m, 3 Bdrs. furn
balcony elevator, storage spj
parking spot, 24/7 security
\$1700
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Luxury Apt in Mahmoodieh
4th floor, 120 sq.m, 2 master rooms
almost new, luxury lobby, luxury
& new furn
parking spot, spj
good access to highway
\$1800
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Zafarani
4th floor, 220 sq.m
3 Bdr., fully furn, spj
parking spot, **\$1600**
Ms.Sara: 09128103207

Suite in Yusef Abad
63 sq.m, 1 Bdr, fully, equipped
kitchen, renovated, yard
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

مالکین محترم

ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان،
ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت

مالکین محترم املاک مبله و غیر مبله، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات
شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

ویلاهای شما را جهت اجاره به منزل سفیر و مدیران
شرکت های بین المللی در مناطق شمالی تهران
نیازمندیم.

PARSIAN Real Estate
SHANON
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
+989121907875
Tel : 88745542

Jordan (\$1700) 200sq.m, 3bdrs S/p, S, J, & F.F	Farmanieh (\$2100) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p balcony, Fully Furn	Zaferanieh Villa 2000sq.m, 7bdrs S/p, F.F (\$9000)
Elahieh (\$2400) 4bdrs, S/p, & F.F	Darrous (\$1600) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p S, J, yard, & F.F	Vanak bldg (\$7000) 3stoery, 10bdrs

Don't Waste Your Time
Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties
www.DeltaHOME.ir
The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners
HOME
Real Estate
Member of DELTA Real Estate Group
(021) 88888865

In the Name of God
**Invitation Notice of Partners of Nojoom Armaghan
Qeshm Co. (Ltd.)**
Reg. No. 3383 and National ID No.: 14000255100
Hereby, all partners of the aforementioned company are cordially invited to take
part in the Extraordinary General Assembly meeting which will be held at 9 am on
Tue. dated Feb. 12 at the following address:
No. 141, Old Market, Shahr-e Dargahan, Qeshm Island
Agenda:
Entry of new partner
Other cases at the jurisdiction and authority of the General Assembly.
Signed and sealed by the Board of Directors

English
speaking
driver & guide
searching
for job
09196334674

TEHRAN TIMES

Iran's Leading
International Daily
Advertising Dept



Tel:

021 - 430 51 450



FARDA Legal Institute

Registration

- Brand
- Trademark
- Companies' Affairs
- Company Registration

Local and International Call

+98 – 912 937 9869

International Call and WhatsApp

+98 – 912 3756792

8% diagnosed with HPV in sample population

HEALTH DESK TEHRAN — Eight percent were diagnosed with human papillomavirus (HPV) in Health Ministry's pilot program for early detection of cervical cancer, said the ministry's head of cancer department.

"In our opinion, eight percent is an alarming number, so we recommend that all people receive the HPV vaccine," ISNA quoted Ali Qanbari-Motlaq as saying.

The right age for receiving the vaccine for girls is usually between 9 and 26, he added.

The results were derived from a pilot program for early detection of cancer that also included examinations for cervical cancer.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), HPV is a group of viruses that are extremely common worldwide.

According to WHO:

* There are more than 100 types of HPV, of which at least 14 are cancer-causing (also known as high risk type).

* HPV is mainly transmitted through sexual contact and most people are infected with HPV shortly after the onset of sexual activity.

* Cervical cancer is caused by sexually acquired infection with certain types of HPV.

* Two HPV types (16 and 18) cause 70% of cervical cancers and pre-cancerous cervical lesions.



"In our opinion, eight percent is an alarming number, so we recommend that all people receive the HPV vaccine."

* There is also evidence linking HPV with cancers of the anus, vulva, vagina, penis and oropharynx.

* Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women living in less

developed regions with an estimated 570,000 new cases in 2018 (84% of the new cases worldwide).

According to Qanbari-Motlaq, the early cancer detection plan was mainly focused

on detecting three cancers: cancers of the breast, cervix and colon. It was first started in 2014 and it was piloted in 2015 and 2016 in four cities. After the pilot projects and recognition of their shortcomings, the new round of examining people for early diagnosis of cancer began and in 2018, 50,000 people in every medical science university were examined.

■ What happened to HPV vaccine?

"Currently we can't initiate a national program for HPV vaccinations, but we recommend people to receive the vaccine on their own," Qanbari-Motlaq explained.

"Our biggest challenge in producing the HPV vaccine is the costs. Currently, two organizations have started doing research about HPV vaccine production and if we can come up with a cost-effective plan to produce the vaccine or import it we would certainly do it," he said.

He went on to say that a "Specialized HPV Laboratory" has been set up and is ready to be inaugurated.

The laboratory has the capacity of running at least 1,500 tests per day, he added.

"This laboratory was designed based on the global medical experience, and will enable us to detect cases suspicious with HPV with high precision and with a very low cost," he further explained.

National scheme for birth defects management to be launched

HEALTH DESK TEHRAN — A national scheme for management of birth defects will be launched all around the country by the next one or two years, said Hamed Barakati, the director general for population, health and family office at the Ministry of Health.

A birth defect, also known as congenital disorder, is a condition present at birth regardless of its cause. Birth defects may result in disabilities that may be physical, intellectual, or developmental.

According to Barakati, the scheme is currently being piloted in East Azarbaijan province and still needs some time before its large-scale implementation, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"First and foremost, the plan is focused on prevention of congenital disorders. Next steps are registration of all birth defects as well as making early intervention in treating them and giving adequate supports to the patients," he noted.

According to Barakati, registration of people's birth defects should continue until they are 18 or 20 years old as many congenital abnormalities are revealed in the second decade of life. In some countries, the process could last even up until the age of 30.

"Accumulating all the necessary information is quite vital in management of birth defects as many of them are caused by local environment such as the composition of food or water. Besides, some genetic disorders only exist in certain geographical areas," Barakati explained.

"The scheme also includes giving genetic consultation, but it would not be enough as many congenital disorders are revealed after birth. For example, more than 70% of cardiovascular birth defects are only detectable three to five days after the birth. Another example is the symptoms of digestive system disorders which are usually revealed at the age of two."

"Consequently, registering the demography of congenital disorders and analyzing them is certainly not limited to the time of birth, but it is an ongoing process that must be applied over a long period of time," he further explained.

In September, an official with Welfare Organization announced that some 25 to 30 thousand children are being born with congenital disabilities in the country annually; so it is decided to make genetic counselling a mandatory requirement for couples before officiating their marriage.

According to the head of Iran's genetic foundation, some 400 genetic disorders are diagnosable in Iran and genetic testing can help to prevent 50 percent of genetic disorders before pregnancy.



Elder abuse in Iran at 56.4%: survey

HEALTH DESK TEHRAN — A research surveying 3,436 Iranian elders over a ten-year period from 2005 to 2015 revealed that elder abuse in the country stands at around 56.4%, the Iranian Research Center on Aging reported.

The research was conducted by Mazyar Mollaei from Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences.

The results showed that the abuse was of different types including emotional abuse (30.7%), psychological abuse (25.4%), neglect (25.1%), financial abuse (19.7%), physical abuse (13.1%) and abandonment (11.7%).

According to the research, elder abuse is often a neglected and under-researched subject; however, it is quite widespread in the society.

Not having a single and clear definition of "the elder abuse", not reporting the abusive incidents or conceal-

ing them, the lack of proper methods and equipment to better care for the elderly as well as difficulty of collecting statistics are among the main reasons of the prevalence of the senior abuse in the society, the research concluded.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), elder abuse is "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person."

Around 1 in 6 people 60 years and older experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year.

Rates of elder abuse are high in institutions such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities, with 2 in 3 staff reporting that they have committed abuse in the past year.

Elder abuse is predicted to increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations.

The global population of people aged 60 years and older will more than double, from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050.

In October 2018, the deputy health minister for nursing announced that they are developing and implementing various short-term and long-term plans to respond to the needs of elderly citizens.

In June 2018, Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, the then caretaker of cooperatives, labor and welfare ministry, said that some 7.3 million people in Iran are ageing, 3.7 million of them are women and 3.6 million are men.

Also, First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri said that the population of senior citizens standing at 7.4 million in Iran is projected to increase to 30 million by 2050.

TASHRIFAT INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE AGENCY

**SATISFACTION
GUARANTEED**

APARTMENT

Jordan
4 Bdrs,fully
furn,260sq.m,spj,\$3000

Elahiyeh Chenaran
Fantastic 4 Bdrs,500 Sq.m, for
those seeking the best

Darous
2Bdrs,fully furn,3rd fl.,brand
new,100 sqm,lobby
1600

Zaferaniyeh-Yekta,
Apartment-villa
French-style
3Bdrs,fully furn 360 sq.m.sp,
EURO 5000

Valiasre-Bagheferdos
3 Bdrs,fully furn,brand
new,5th fl., 150 sq.m ,indoor
spj,\$1900

Mirdamad-Naft
3 Bdrs,fully furn,5th fl.,200
sq.m, \$ 2000
Close to Paladium Shopping
center
3Bdrs,180 sq.m,fully
furn,lobby,sp,garden,\$2000

VILLA

Elahiyeh
Triplex-800 sq.m built up,1000
sq.m land,Semi-furn,7
Bdrs,spj,\$9000

Zaferaniyeh
Duplex, 4 Bdrs,unfurn,350
sq.m,spj,\$8000

Niavaran
2000 sq.m land,green
garden,500 sq.m built up
area,indoor spj,4Bdrs,fully
furn,triplex,\$15000

Darous
1000 sq.m land,400 sq.m built
up area, flat.4 Bdrs,spj.\$7000

Jordan
850 sq.m land,500 sq.m
built up,5 Bdrs,spj,furn/
unfurn,duplex,\$7000



Mr. Shahin

Nobody does it better

09121081212

Since: 1987

مالکین محترم املاک مسکونی و اداری شما را
جهت اجاره به خارجی نیازمندیم

Tel: 22723121

tehranfirstchoice@gmail.com

**We give service with a
difference...We care!**
✓Long & Short term rentals
✓Purchase Properties

**FURNISHED - UNFURNISHED
Villa-Apartment-Office-
Building**

OFFICE

From 50 to 8000 sq.m available
With all facilities in different
areas
Jordan
100 sq.m,3
rooms,parking,brand new
3rd fl.,\$1700

Valiasre
150 sq.m brand new, all
facilities,5th fl.,\$2300

Vozara
250 sq.m,all facilities
8th fl.,\$4000

Mirdamad-Naft
120 sq.m,6th fl., \$1700

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

FOR: EMBASSY/COMPANY

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

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

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

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

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

Tehran to host major crafts exhibit

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 3rd Fajr handicrafts festival, which brings together works from all over Iran, will be held at the Iranian Artists Forum in downtown Tehran from February 1 to 12.

Organized by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, the event will showcase woodwork, illuminated manuscript, miniature, textile printing, enamel, leatherwork, calligraphy, metalwork, mirrorwork, and marquetry, among others.



It will also feature potteries, ceramics, personal ornamentation, rugs and kilim carpets.

A select of handicrafts are due for completion, whose winners will be announced on February 6, CHHTO Deputy Director Pouya Mahmoudian said, Fars reported.

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

EU air traffic passengers benefit as completed SESAR deployment projects reach the 100th milestone

Air traffic passengers across Europe are benefitting after the number of completed modernization aviation projects being deployed by SESAR Deployment Manager (SDM) and supported by all operational stakeholders, reached the 100th milestone.

The total number of fully completed air traffic modernization projects now stands at 105 - the first 100 representing an investment of 403 million euros - with a further 225 ongoing and 19 more planned, bringing new operational efficiencies as well as environmental and capacity benefits to Europe's aviation industry.

Nicolas Warinko, General Manager, SESAR Deployment Manager, said: "These expected results indicate that the deployment of SESAR delivers actual contributions to the performance of aviation in Europe.

"The modernization projects not only provide operational solutions to meet the growing capacity demand, but also make air travel in Europe more cost effective, greener and safer for all EU passengers and citizens.

"And this is just the result of the first 100 completed projects, the aviation industry is - with another 225 projects ongoing and 19 planned - clearly boosting ATM modernization."

(Source: Travel Daily News)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Archaeological Site of Mystras

Mystras, the 'wonder of the Morea', lies in the southeast of the Peloponnese. The town developed down the hillside from the fortress built in 1249 by the prince of Achaia, William II of Villehardouin, at the top of a 620 m high hill overlooking Sparta, Greece.

The Franks surrendered the castle to the Byzantines in 1262, it was the center of Byzantine power in southern Greece, first as the base of the military governor and from 1348 as the seat of the Despotate of Morea.



Captured by the Turks in 1460, it was occupied thereafter by them and the Venetians. After 1834 the inhabitants of Mystras gradually started to move to the modern town of Sparta leaving only the breath-taking medieval ruins, standing in a beautiful landscape.

Mystras, as the center of Byzantine power, quickly attracted inhabitants and institutions; the bishopric was transferred there from Sparta, with its cathedral, the Metropolis or church of Hagios Demetrios, built after 1264.

Many monasteries were founded there, including those of the Brontochion and the monastery of Christos Zoodotes (Christ the Giver of Life). Under the Despots, Mystras reached its zenith with the building of churches, outstanding examples of Late Byzantine church architecture, such as Hagioi Theodoroi (1290-1295), the Hodegetria (c. 1310), the Hagia Sophia (1350-1365), the Peribleptos (3rd quarter of the 14th century), the Evangelistria (late 14th – early 15th century) and the Pantanassa (c. 1430).

The city was a major piece on the political chessboard of the time and was developed and beautified as befitted its role as a centre of power and culture. The city's complex history is clearly evident in its fortifications, palaces, churches, convents, houses, streets and public squares.

(Source: UNESCO)

A peek into Iranian art and architecture under Sassanids

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — In many ways, Iran under Sassanian rule witnessed tremendous achievements of Persian civilization. Experts say that during Sassanid era (224–651 CE), the art and architecture of the nation experienced a general renaissance.

Rock-carved bas-reliefs are widely deemed as the most impressive and best-known works of Sassanians, of which about thirty are known from the first two centuries of Sassanian rule. The largest number is in Fars, in the majestic silent valley of Naqsh-e Rostam, in the small bay of rocks at Naqsh-e Rajab, on the steep inclines of a gorge at Bishapur. There are also other examples across the country.

In 2018, UNESCO added "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region", which is an ensemble of Sassanian historical cities in southern Iran, to its World Heritage list. The property comprises eight archaeological sites, including fortified structures, palaces and city plans in Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, and Sarvestan, all located in modern Fars province.

UNESCO says that the archaeological landscape reflects the optimized utilization of natural topography and bears witness to the influence of Achaemenid and Parthian cultural traditions and of Roman art, which had a significant impact on the architecture of the Islamic era.

In that era, crafts such as metalwork and gem-engraving grew highly sophisticated, as scholarship was encouraged by the state; many works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the official

language of the Sassanians.

Among the most distinctive products of Sassanian art, according to Iran Chamber Society, are the plaques of molded and carved stucco which covered the crude masonry of brick or rubble.

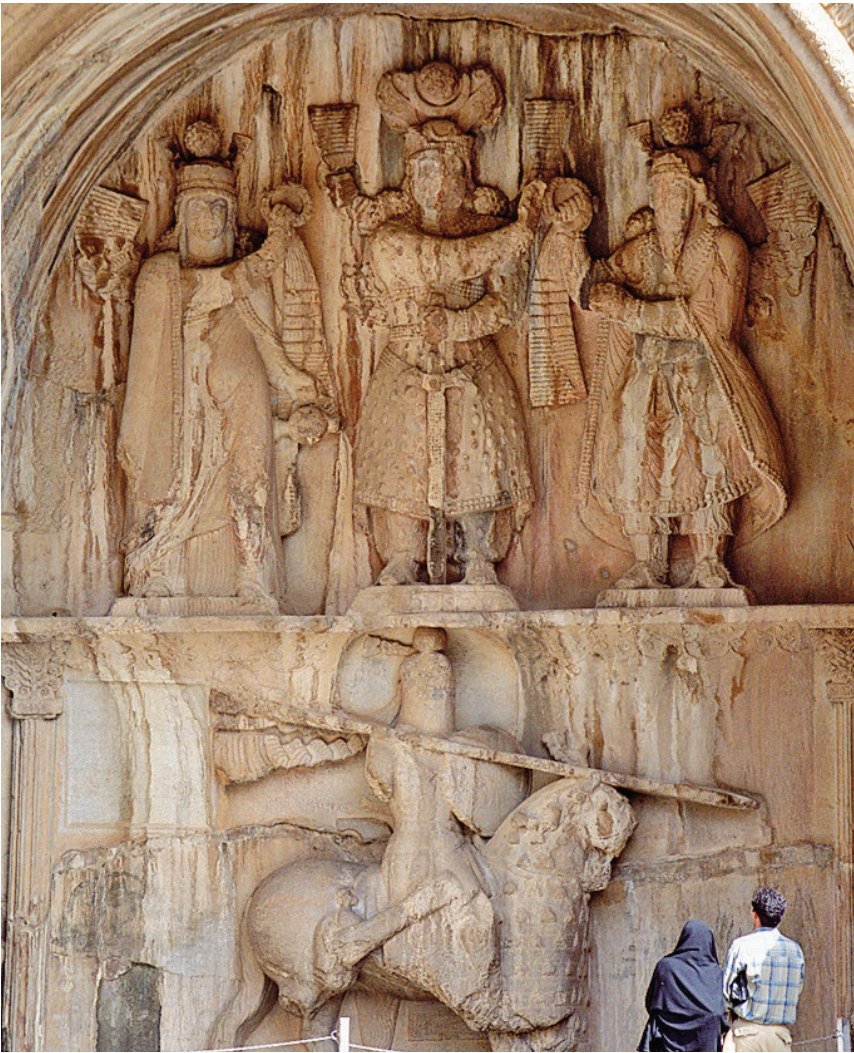
However, excavations in villas surrounding the royal palace of Ctesiphon showed that rich stucco decoration was used only in the principal hall and perhaps in the room directly adjoining it, while other rooms had merely a covering of plain gypsum plaster.

Of all the material remains of the era, only coins constitute a continuous chronological sequence throughout the whole period of the dynasty. Such Sassanian coins have the name of the king for whom they were struck inscribed in Pehlevi, which permits scholars to date them quite closely.

The legendary wealth of the Sassanian court is fully confirmed by the existence of more than one hundred examples of bowls or plates of precious metal known at present. One of the finest examples is the silver plate with partial gilding in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Encyclopedia Britannica states that a revival of Iranian nationalism took place under Sassanid rule. Zoroastrianism became the state religion, and at various times followers of other faiths suffered official persecution. The government was centralized, with provincial officials directly responsible to the throne, and roads, city building, and even agriculture were financed by the government.

At the time of Shapur I (reigned 241–272),



A couple visit Sassanid-era bas-relief carvings at Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah province.

Rock-carved bas-reliefs are widely deemed as the most impressive and best-known works of Sassanians, of which about thirty are known from the first two centuries of Sassanian rule.

the empire stretched from Sogdiana and Iberia (Georgia) in the north to the Mazun region of Arabia in the south; in the east it extended to the Indus River and in the

west to the upper Tigris and Euphrates river valleys.

The dynasty was destroyed by Arab invaders during a span from 637 to 651.

Millennia-old relief unveiled in Shiraz

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A millennia-old bas-relief inscription which has been discovered from Naqsh-e Rostam, a royal necropolis in southern Iran, was officially unveiled in Shiraz on Tuesday, Mehr reported.

The event was attended by tens of local officials, archaeologists, and academia. One of speakers, Wouter Henkelman, a France-based scholar who addressed attendees via video conference, called the discovery as unprecedented occasion over the past half a century.

Henkelman is an associate professor at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), where he is responsible for Elamite and Achaemenid studies.

Named D.N.F., The relief was hidden from view by large amount of algae and sediments for over 2,500 years, the report said.

The discovery is also important in the arena of ancient linguistics, Henkelman said, adding that the inscription con-



A bas-relief carving at Naqsh-e Rostam depicts the triumph of Shapur I over the Roman emperors Valerian and Philip the Arab.

tains valuable information about the archives of Persepolis.

It will add to our discoveries and previous knowledge of the Achaemenids (550–330 BC), he stated.

Meaning "Picture of Rostam", the site is named after mythical Iranian hero which is most celebrated in Shahnameh and Persian mythology. Back in time, natives of the region had erroneously supposed that the carvings below the tombs represent depictions of the mythical hero.

Naqsh-e Rostam embraces four tombs are where Persian Achaemenid kings are laid to rest, believed to be those of Darius II, Artaxerxes I, Darius I and Xerxes I (from left to right facing the cliff), although some historians are still debating this.

Beneath the funerary chambers are dotted with seven Sassanian era (224–651) bas-reliefs cut into the cliff depict vivid scenes of imperial conquests and royal ceremonies; signboards below each relief give a detailed description in English.

Cats in ancient Egypt didn't look the way you think

Our perceptions of the ancient world are shaped by the way surviving relics appear in the present day. The cool white marble beauty we attribute to Classical Greek and Roman statues arises from the long faded lifelike paint these statues once bore.

The bright limestone of Maya pyramids today shines against the surrounding background of deep jungle green, yet these buildings were once painted from top to bottom in deep reds, blues and greens. As for the imposing and regal black cat of ancient Egypt, those cats didn't look the way you think either.

The objects of the ancient world that happen to survive to the present are inevitably the most durable objects. Durability, however, is no guarantee that these objects

are good representations of our ancestors' past behaviors or interests. Circumstantial evidences suggests, for example, that the rulers of the ancient Maya cities kept numerous bark paper books. The humid jungle environs of these cities, however, ensured that those books could not survive in a readable form. Similarly, the durable stone and metal sculptures of ancient Egyptian cats has shaped our assumptions of what those cats looked like.

The iconic image of an Egyptian cat arises from objects such as the leaded bronze statuette from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, pictured below. Numerous statuettes such as this were made during Ancient Egypt's Ptolemaic and Late periods as vessels to hold the mummified remains of domesti-



Cat Killing a Serpent, Tomb of Sennedjem, Egyptian, Facsimile, 19th Dynasty, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (30.4.1) METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

cated cats. The commonality of this form, and the dark coloration of the metal, lends to the popular impression of ancient Egyptian cats as black flurried.

If we turn to the less well-known record of Egyptian tomb paintings, however, we find cats of a distinctly different appearance. The facsimile image below presents a cat with a distinctively tabby coat from the walls of the Tomb of Sennedjem at the site of Deir el-Medina in Upper Egypt. The fantastical nature of the image with the cat decapitating a serpent using a blade is an often-repeated visual reference to The Egyptian Book of the Dead; wherein a cat is depicted defeating the divine enemy of the sun god.

(Source: forbes.com)

What Adam Conover can't travel without

By Nell McShane Wulfhart

The comedian Adam Conover has made a name for himself by upturning cultural norms and assumptions. His myth-busting television show, "Adam Ruins Everything," is in its third season on TruTV.

Mr. Conover's episode on air travel led him to some interesting findings. "I, like so many people, a few years ago got sucked into the frequent flier-mile game," he says. "I started getting credit cards and trying to figure out how to maximize my miles. And now I'm switching to all cash-back because I have recognized what a labyrinthine scam it is. The airlines have devalued all of their miles for economy travelers to such an extent that if you're just the average person going to visit your family a couple times a year on an economy ticket, you're going to earn so few miles it would take you decades to ever earn one of those mystical free first-class flights."

Another thing he learned while researching the episode is the illusion of the so-called Golden Age of flying. "Everyone uses 'Mad Men' as an example. You know: Don Draper taking his elegant cross-country flights, and the stewardess bringing him a neat scotch, and he looks all classy.

"We dispel that image by sharing what flying really looked like back then. In the '60s planes flew a little lower than they do now. In the '30s and the '40s, they flew much lower to the ground. It was a horrible experience. There was a lot

more turbulence and it was a lot more dangerous. People were much more likely to die in a plane crash. But the cabins were also full of the smell of cigarette smoke and fuel fumes because they weren't as good at separating the fuel fumes.

"The main reason that barf bags are on planes today is because the cabins were constantly full of the smell of jet fuel and cigarette smoke, and there was so much more turbulence, so people were just constantly throwing up."

● **Here's what he can't travel without:**

■ **Nintendo switch**

"There is nothing better than getting to just dig in and seriously play a video game for a six-hour flight from New York to L.A. 'Into the Breach' is a wonderful strategy game where you play that you are trying to stop an alien invasion. But of course, 'Zelda: Breath of the Wild' and 'Super Mario Odyssey' are just two of the most superlative games ever made, and so when I have time to completely lose myself in those, it's really, really a joy."

■ **Fidget spinner**

"I find that I have a lot of suppressed energy when I'm on a plane for a long period so when I'm holding a fidget spinner, being able to play with it and just sort of run my hands over it helps me out quite a lot; it helps me relax. I've gotten into an Uber and then said, 'Oh wait, hold on one second,' and run back in to get the fidget spinner because I knew I would need it on the plane."

■ **Drawing materials**

"My domestic partner, Lisa Hanawalt, is a cartoonist and the designer of BoJack Horseman. I've noticed when she's in a situation where she's trying to distract herself with her hands, she just has a sketchbook to draw in, and I started doing that too. Now the problem is that I've run out of stuff to draw on a plane, so I've drawn the back of the head of the person sitting in front of me about five or six times. Those are some of my best pieces. Lisa looks at these and goes, 'Oh my God, you're a very good artist.' Maybe I'll do a gallery show one day of the drawings of the backs of people's heads."

■ **Audiobooks**

"I find that a really restful, relaxing way to spend time on a plane is to listen to an audiobook while drawing. I use the Libby app to check out audiobooks from my public library. Right now, I'm listening to "Evicted," by Matthew Desmond, which is a really incredible set of stories of poverty in Milwaukee, and about the underreported epidemic of eviction that is contributing to the cycle of poverty. The cool thing is, it's the rare piece of nonfiction that isn't just dumping the policy problem on you. It's incredibly, beautifully reported personal accounts of individual families and what their lives are like on a day-to-day basis."

(Source: The New York Times)

For some whales, sonar may provoke suicidal behavior: study

Scientists have long known that some beaked whales beach themselves and die in agony after exposure to naval sonar, and now they know why: the giant sea mammals suffer decompression sickness, just like scuba divers.

Millions of years of evolution have turned whales into perfectly calibrated diving machines that plunge kilometers (miles) below the surface for hours at a stretch, foraging for food in the inky depths.

So how could the ocean's most accomplished deep-sea diver wind up with nitrogen bubbles poisoning its veins, like a scuba novice rising too quickly to the surface?

"In the presence of sonar they are stressed and swim vigorously away from the sound source, changing their diving pattern," lead author Yara Bernaldo de Quiros, a researcher at the Institute of Animal Health at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, told AFP.

■ Animals accumulate nitrogen
The "stress response, in other words, overrides the diving response, which makes the animals accumulate nitrogen," she added. "It's like an adrenalin shot."

Developed in the 1950s to detect submarines, mid-frequency active sonar (MFAS) is used today in naval patrols and exercises, especially by the United States and its



NATO allies. Between 1960 and 2004, 121 of these so-called "atypical" mass strandings took place, with at least 40 closely linked in time and place with naval activities. These were not individual strandings of old or sick animals, nor en masse strandings such the one last November in New

Millions of years of evolution have turned whales into perfectly calibrated diving machines that plunge kilometers (miles) below the surface for hours at a stretch, foraging for food in the inky depths.

Zealand, when more than 200 pilot whales beached themselves together.

Rather, a handful or more beaked whales would wash ashore within a day or two, and no more than few dozen kilometers apart.

The most deadly episode, in 2002, saw 14 stranded over a 36-hour period in the Canary Islands during a NATO naval exercise.

■ Animals on the beach
"Within a few hours of the sonar being deployed, the animals started showing up on the beach," Bernaldo de Quiros said.

Outwardly, the whales showed no signs of disease or damage: they had normal body weight, and no skin lesions or infections.

Starting around 1960, ships began emitting underwater signals in a range of about 5 kilohertz (kHz) which is when the mass beaching of beaked whales began.

Internally, it was another story. Nitrogen gas bubbles filled the veins, and their brains were ravaged by hemorrhaging.

As with altitude sickness, reactions — in humans, and probably in whales — to nitrogen bubbles in the blood vary in type and intensity.

A 2003 study in *Nature* on the possible link between sonar and whale deaths led to Spain banning such naval exercises around the Canary Islands in 2004.

(Source: phys.org)

New measurement of the universe suggests we need to update our physics

For the first time, astronomers have used supermassive black holes from just after the Big Bang to measure the expansion rate of the Universe. Now, we have a bigger mystery on our hands than the answer this effort provided.

It turns out the Universe is growing faster than expected. This could mean that the dark energy thought to drive the acceleration of this expansion, also sometimes interpreted as the cosmological constant described by Albert Einstein, is not so cosmologically constant after all.

The Universe's rate of expansion is called the Hubble Constant, and it's been incredibly tricky to pin down. Every test seems to come up with a different result; recently, data from the Planck satellite that measured the cosmic microwave background set it at 67.4 kilometers (41.9 miles) per second per megaparsec, with less than 1 percent uncertainty.

Other methods typically involve the use of 'standard candles', objects with known luminosity such as cepheid variable stars or Type Ia supernovae, from which distance can be calculated based on their absolute magnitude.

■ Star calculation
Last year a cepheid variable star calculation of the Hubble Constant returned a result of 73.5 kilometers (45.6 miles) per second per megaparsec. So you can see why astronomers keep poking this weird cosmic bear.

But a few years ago, astronomers realized that the distance to another object could be calculated accurately, too. Enter quasars, along with their black holes.

Quasars are among the brightest objects in the Universe. Each is a galaxy that orbits a supermassive black hole actively feeding on material. Its light and radio emissions are caused by material around the black hole, called an accretion disc, which emits intense light and heat from friction as it swirls like water circling a drain.

They also emit X-ray and ultraviolet light; and, as discovered by astronomers Guido Risaliti of Università di Firenze, Italy, and Elisabeta Lusso of Durham



University, UK, the ratio of these two wavelengths produced by a quasar varies depending on the ultraviolet luminosity.

Once this luminosity is known, as calculated from that ratio, the quasar can be used just like any other standard candle.

And that means we can measure farther back into the Universe's history.

■ Earlier epochs
"Using quasars as standard candles has great potential, since we can observe them out to much greater distances from us than Type Ia supernovae, and so use them to probe much earlier epochs in the history of the cosmos," Lusso said.

The researchers compiled UV data on 1,598 quasars from just 1.1 billion to 2.3 billion years after the Big Bang, and used their distances to calculate the expansion rate of the early Universe.

They also cross-checked their results against the Type Ia supernova results that cover the more recent 9 billion years, and found similar results where they overlapped. But, in the early Universe, where only quasars provide measurements, there was a discrepancy between what they observed, and what was predicted based on the standard cosmological model.

"We observed quasars back to just a billion years after the Big Bang, and found that the Universe's expansion rate up to the present day was faster than we expected," said Risaliti.

We don't really know what dark energy is - we can't see it or detect it. It's just the name we give to the unknown repulsive force that seems to be accelerating the Universe's expansion over time.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Prairie strips transform farmland conservation, research team finds

Modern agriculture's large monoculture fields grow a lot of corn and soybeans, planted annually. The outputs from row crops can be measured both in dollars paid in the market and also in non-market costs, known as externalities. Soil, nutrients, groundwater, pollinators, wildlife diversity, and habitat (among other things) can be lost when crop yields are maximized.

A prairie strip is much what it sounds like: a strip of diverse herbaceous vegetation running through a farm's rowcrops. In the American Midwest, chances are the soil that now supports crops was once covered in prairie before cultivation. Prairie plants are a mixture of native grasses, wildflowers, and other stiff-stemmed plants. They have deep roots that draw water and nutrients from far below the surface. They are perennials, returning to grow each spring.

"Research shows that areas of native prairie planted in the right places in a farm field can provide benefits that far outweigh losses from converting a small portion of a crop field to prairie," said Lisa Schulte Moore of Iowa State University.

■ The prairie strips
"For example, when we work with farmers to site prairie strips on areas that were not profitable to farm, we can lower their financial costs while creating a wide variety of benefits." STRIPS showed that converting just 10% of a row-cropped field to prairie strips:

It also leads to greater abundance and diversity of beneficial



insects, pollinators such as bees and monarch butterflies, and birds. Going from zero to 10% prairie provided far more than a 10% increase in the measured benefits.

"Some of these benefits can impact our pocketbooks but are not accounted for by typical financial markets," said Schulte Moore. These include ecological benefits such as flood control, cleaner water, and carbon from the atmosphere stored.

Market benefits also exist: more productive soil in the fields can, in time, translate into better yields, fiber and honey production, forage for livestock, and hunting leases.

The STRIPS research began in Iowa in 2007. Because

of promising scientific results, five years later the researchers began working with farmers to introduce prairie strips onto commercial farms. While the research results have been more variable in these more complicated settings, the findings are encouraging and cooperating farmers are liking what they see.

■ Treatment of weeds
The plantings require a modest investment in site preparation and seed planting. Maintenance tasks include some mowing in the establishment years and spot treatment for weeds. So far, the researchers have not seen competition between the prairie plants and crops that impact yield.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts through the USDA's Farm Service Agency can greatly reduce the cost of establishing prairie strips. Overall, Schulte Moore said, this is one of the most economical best-practice conservation steps farmers can take.

Still, lack of stable financial rewards for establishing and maintaining prairie strips is a barrier to widespread adoption. "Finding ways to return economic value to farmers and farmland owners is crucial," Schulte Moore said. She is now focused on developing marketable products from prairie strips, such as renewable energy sources from prairie biomass. That would help make what is already a solid investment into a can't-lose proposition.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

This AI-powered brain implant can turn thoughts into speech

For the first time, scientists have captured information directly from the brain cortex and used artificial intelligence to reconstruct intelligible speech, opening a path towards direct brain-to-computer interfaces.

Until now, scientists have been able to identify simple things by analyzing people's mind activity from inside of a fMRI brain scanner.

Showing these people photos of famous people or different objects, the computer was able to analyze the fMRI data and recognize what they were looking at. But these scanners are giant machines, which make this method impractical for daily usage.

Last year, neurosurgeon Dr. Ashesh Mehta at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research on Long Island placed a flat array of electrodes on a patient's brain, right over the parts of the brain dedicated to speech and hearing. He was also working on creating a system to enable speech on people with a variety of paralyzing conditions, from spinal cord injuries to ALS.

The team working at Columbia University's Neural Acoustic Processing Lab has been able to solve this challenge by using temporary implants that connect directly to a patient's cortex too.



Nima Mesgarani



According to the researchers, their objective is to create an implant that could be permanent so people that currently use keyboards to talk to others (think the late Stephen Hawking) could synthesize speech on the fly, just by thinking. Like researcher Nima Mesgarani told *New Scientist*, "speech is much faster than we type. We want to let people talk to their families again."

After training the AI by reading 30 minutes of continuous speech to five patients, the AI was then able to decode new words — the digits zero to nine — and synthesize them. Independent listeners were able to recognize three out of every four numbers.

It's not perfect, but it's an amazing feat for a first version. As implants and dedicated AI processors keep increasing in power, it's not hard to imagine a near future in which people could regain full speech abilities by just thinking.

The applications don't stop there. When this finally happens, people would be able to willingly get brain implants to interact with computers using the same technology.

(Source: tomsguide.com)

Curiosity snaps new Mars selfie before setting course for new location

The Curiosity rover has already made history after covering the most ground on another planet and helping scientists reconstruct the geological history of Mars. While it's moved more than 12 miles (almost 20 kilometers), Curiosity has been hanging around the Vera Rubin Ridge for over a year. It's getting ready to move out, but NASA took the time to snap a selfie first.

Curiosity's new selfie shows the rover sitting on the rust-colored terrain, looking at the camera with its "head." What we commonly think of as the rover's head is actually a housing for the Mastcam and ChemCam instruments. The haze on the horizon is thanks to a local dust storm — nothing as severe as the global event that probably doomed the Opportunity rover last year. NASA took the selfie on January 15th, but this is actually a composite of many images like all of Curiosity's selfies.

The image shows Curiosity still looking rather good after more than six years on the red planet. It's a bit dusty, and you can see damage on its wheels from the unexpectedly sharp Martian rocks. Still, NASA expects Curiosity to keep on trucking for years to come.

NASA uses the Mars Hand Lens Imager (MAHLI) to take these photos. It captures true color images at a resolution of 1600 x 1200. The image released by NASA is much larger than that because it's stitched together from 57 different frames. That's why the final image has such amazing detail, and you can't see the MAHLI arm anywhere. NASA just uses all the frames to crop the arm out, making it look like someone stood next to the rover and took a picture.

(Source: extremetech.com)

Study says fluid-inspired material self-heals before your eyes

Engineers have developed a new coating strategy for metal that self-heals within seconds when scratched, scraped or cracked. The novel material could prevent these tiny defects from turning into localized corrosion, which can cause major structures to fail.

It's hard to believe that a tiny crack could take down a gigantic metal structure. But sometimes bridges collapse, pipelines rupture and fuselages detach from airplanes due to hard-to-detect corrosion in tiny cracks, scratches and dents.

A Northwestern University team has developed a new coating strategy for metal that self-heals within seconds when scratched, scraped or cracked. The novel material could prevent these tiny defects from turning into localized corrosion, which can cause major structures to fail.

"Localized corrosion is extremely dangerous," said Jiaxing Huang, who led the research. "It is hard to prevent, hard to predict and hard to detect, but it can lead to catastrophic failure."

When damaged by scratches and cracks, Huang's patent-pending system readily flows and reconnects to rapidly heal right before the eyes. The researchers demonstrated that the material can heal repeatedly -- even after scratching the exact same spot nearly 200 times in a row.

The study was published on Jan. 28 in *Research*, the first Science Partner Journal recently launched by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in collaboration with the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST). Huang is a professor of materials science and engineering in Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Flash flood hits southwestern Iran, villages evacuated

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Heavy rainfalls in northern and eastern parts of the province of Khuzestan, southwestern Iran, have led to devastating flood hitting the region over the past three days leading to evacuation of some villages, Khabaronline reported.

Due to the excessive rain Karun, Karkheh and Dez rivers overflowed their banks and inundated many cities and villages in Ahvaz, Shush, Dasht-e Azadegan, Howeyzeh, Dezful and Shushtar, the report added.

Three levees in cities of Dasht-e Azadegan, Rafi, and Howeyzeh were damaged and breached and the area was flooded. Agricultural lands as well as houses were inundated by flood.

According to the data published by Iran's Meteorological Organization the precipitations of the past few days were unprecedented for the past 40 years in the province.

Forecasts predicted heavy rainfalls for the province on January 26 to 29 so that the water stored behind the dams were released to the rivers in order to stop dams from overflowing, however, old infrastructure and levees didn't stand the flood and villages located in the basins of the rivers were flooded.

Khuzestan province rescue and relief organization deputy director Sadeq Salamat told ISNA news agency that so far some 2,830 families received relief services in the area, levees are being retrofitted and the flood victims are accommodated.

He also explained that villages and cities in Shush, Shushtar, Dasht-e Azadegan, Dezful, and Howeyzeh were evacuated.

According to data released on Wednesday by the National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center since the beginning of summer the province of Khuzestan received 369.2 millimeters of rain while last year's precipitations in the area amounted to 61.6 millimeters.

Euphoria in Isfahan as water flows into Zayanderud

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — While water is released into Zayanderud river, central province of Isfahan, the citizens are exhilarated by seeing the river alive again.

Water has filled the area once again bringing back the glory to the area, and people have gathered around it to take pictures as the river will be alive only for 20 days.

According to Tasnim news agency the water was released from Zayanderud dam on Monday for agricultural purposes.

LEARN ENGLISH

Skiing

A: Welcome ski lovers of all ages! My name is Rick Fields and here with me is the man that needs no introduction, Bob Copeland. B: Thank you, Rick! What a beautiful day here in Aspen, Colorado where the sun is shining, and we've got twelve inches of fresh powder. It doesn't get much better than this.

A: That's right, Bob, but today we have a special treat for our viewers. We're joined here by Ian Roussy, the four-time giant **slalom champion**. And on this special edition of the show, Ian is going to teach us the basics of skiing! So, let's **hit the slopes**! C: Well, first off, let's get those boots on. You're going to want to make sure your boots fit **snugly**. That's right; now **snap them into your bindings**. And you're also going to want a good pair of **goggles** to protect your eyes. It's a bright day today, so there's going to be a lot of **glare** out there on the **slopes**. We don't want you hitting any of those **moguls**!

A: Bob, since you're a beginner skier and might **take a few spills**, it is a good idea to have a good warm pair of dry **ski gloves**.

C: Easy there, Rick! Well, let's head on over to the **chairlift**, and test your skills! All right, we're up here on the bunny hill, so, Bob, why don't you do a few **snow-plow turns**. Gnarly run, Rick! Nice **carving**! You've got some mad skills! That was sick!

A: You want to see **gnarley**? Well, see that **bump** over there, I'm going to **catch some major air**.

C: Butt plant!

B: Ha ha ha! He lost his skis! **Yard sale**!!!

A: Ahem, well. Thanks for joining us here today, I think that about does it.

C: We're off to **grab some freshies**!!!

■ Key vocabulary

slalom: a skiing race where you must go through flags
champion: winner
hit the slopes: start skiing
snugly: fitting very tightly
snap: make something attach by pressing down
binding: a bottom part that attaches the boot to a ski
goggles: a pair of glasses used to protect one's eyes
glare: bright light that is reflected by the snow
slopes: a space on the mountain which is used for skiing
mogul: a bump on a ski hill
take a spill: fall
ski glove: a covering of hands with each finger separated
chairlift: a line of chairs through moving cable that carries people
snow-plow turn: a slow, easy turn where you make a V with the skis
carving: turn on your skis with your edges
gnarley: awesome, cool (used by ski lovers)
bump: small hill
catch some major air: used to describe a skier jumps really high
yard sale: falling so hard that you lose all your ski equipment
grab some freshies: ski on the area that has never been skied before
■ Supplementary vocabulary
lodge: the building that has restaurants and stores on the ski hill
pow: (powder) soft, light snow
avy: (avalanche) lots of snow falling on the mountain
liftie: a person who operates the chairlift
bowl: a steep hill with high sides, shaped like a bowl
(Source: irlanguage.com)

Tehran air pollution incurs annual loss of \$2.8b

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Air pollution brings heavy economic burden amounting to \$2.8 billion for the Iranian capital, Tehran, head of the national working group for air pollution mitigation affiliated to the Department of Environment (DOE) has announced.

Vahid Hosseini made the remarks on the sidelines of the 7th national conference on air and noise pollution management held in Tehran on January 28-29.

The vehicle cycle consisting of manufacturing process to scrapping due to being clunker is the highest contributor to air pollution, as some 70 percent of the emission are generated by mobile sources, he lamented.

The economic consequences of air pollution haunting the metropolis of Tehran equal \$2.8 billion per year, as estimated in 2018, he highlighted.

Referring to a proposal on halting production of the pollutant carbureted-engine motorcycles, he noted that according to the proposal approved by the cabinet since 2016, no license plate for carbureted-engine motorcycle should be issued.

Pointing out that we have fought to stop issuing license for carburetor motorcycles for 2 years, he lamented that while 400,000 motorcycles are produced in a year, 700,000 motorbikes have been given license plate during seven months when the proposal approved till went into effect as of September 2016.



© Tehran Times/ Majid Haghdoust

Vehicle manufacturers are running business enterprises whose only purpose is to earn money, however, serious punishment must be imposed on car manufacturers or any source contributing to pollution, to ensure that they comply with the environmental standards, he explained.

As of the Iranian calendar year 1401 (March 2022), all the vehicles must be Euro 6 compliant to reduce levels of harmful car and van exhaust emissions, Hosseini said, adding, this also might not come efficient, as the only way

to achieve good results is constant monitoring and seriously enforcing the rules.

He went on to say that for instance, in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (March 2013-March 2014), Tehran City Council has approved the proposal to equip the buses with diesel particulate filters, while it has not been yet enforced.

Motorbike owners do not refer to inspection centers to receive quality inspection labels due to no strict law in this regard, he regretted. The low emission zone (LEZ) scheme,

Persian leopard to receive artificial insemination next week

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — For the first time, a Persian leopard will undergo artificial insemination in Tehran Zoological Garden next week.

"The precious female leopard has lost a hand being injured in a hunting trap in Golestan province, who is being kept in the Garden," Mehr quoted Iman Memarian, Tehran Zoological Garden director, as saying on Monday.

Referring to European Endangered Species Programs (EEP), he noted that EEP is a population management program aiming at endangered species reproduction by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA).

"A captive breeding program has been established for the Persian leopard along with the EEP," he added.

For artificial insemination, sperm of a male leopard named 'Rika' is being kept in liquid nitrogen, he said, adding, also a male leopard has been sent to the Garden from Portugal through the EEP, which can help the process.

Memarian went on to say that German experts are lending a hand in implementing the artificial insemination techniques.

In the field of artificial insemination for the Persian leopard, there have been very few successes in only one of the zoos worldwide, which is cooperating with us in this regard, he stated implying that there is hope that we will achieve successful results for the first time in Iran and in the region.

He further highlighted that Tehran Zoological Garden can become a source of Persian leopard gene in the world

in addition to the country, which requires cooperation of all the related organizations.

Responding to the artificial insemination of Persian leopard in Tehran success rate, Memarian noted that while there are only few attempts resulting in successful insemination in the world, we will try hard to achieve the best results using all capacities and facilities.

The Persian leopard is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List; the population is estimated at fewer than 871–1,290 mature individuals and considered declining.

According to the Department of Environment, 156 leopards have been killed in Iran from 2005 to 2014, nearly 20 leopards a year. Studies indicate that currently there are less than 500 leopards nationwide.

The Persian leopard was most likely distributed over the whole Caucasus, except for steppe areas. During surveys conducted between 2001 and 2005 no leopard was recorded in the western part of the Greater Caucasus; it probably survived only at a few sites in the eastern part. The largest population survives in Iran.

Leopards are more abundant in the northern part of the country. During surveys conducted between 2002 and 2011, they were found in 74 protected and non-protected areas, of which 69 percent are located in northern Iran.

They are mainly found in the Alborz and the Zagros mountain ranges and throughout the northwestern region, which crosses these mountain chains. The Hyrcanian forests located in the north and along the Alborz moun-



tain chain are considered as one of the most important habitats for leopards in the country.

Persian leopards are mainly threatened by poaching, depletion of their prey base due to poaching, human disturbances, habitat loss due to deforestation, fire, agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and infrastructure development.

In Iran, primary threats are habitat disturbances followed by illegal hunting and excess of livestock in the leopard habitats. The leopards' chances for survival outside protected areas appear very slim.

In September 2018, three leopards for the first time were spotted at the Bakhtegan national park in Neyriz city located in southern Fars province.

Moreover, In October, a leopard was spotted for the third time within two years in Taleqan, a rural district located in Alborz province, north-central part of the country.

In January 2017, locals took pictures of a leopard in the protected area of Taleqan for the first time, and a year later a leopard footprint was spotted.

Environmental assessment a must for artificial islands in Persian Gulf

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Construction of artificial islands off the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf must undergo environmental impact assessment to avoid negative repercussions on the ecosystem, which requires cooperation of responsible bodies, deputy Department of Environment (DOE) chief for marine affairs has said.

Parvin Farshchi made the remarks on the sidelines of a meeting held on Wednesday to address environmental impacts of artificial island construction and related laws, with representatives from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Staff



of the Armed Forces, Ports & Maritime Organization, and National Institute for Oceanography and Atmospheric Science, in attendance.

She further called on the related organizations to join hand in conducting researches for preventing the Persian Gulf from bearing the man-made islands consequences, insisting on setting up a national committee for environmental impact assessment of marine environment.

"A special working group also must be formed as a subcommittee to prepare researches and scientific documents for identifying how building islands leads to drying up seas," she highlighted.

She also proposed to determine particular areas in the Persian Gulf in order to provide new routes for maritime

transportation.

Artificial island construction brings about many changes in the sea ecosystems, as well as shoreline erosion, change in water currents causing pollution within the islands, and an impact on marine life.

High temperatures in the area also causes high evaporation rates which, coupling with desalination plants that pump extra salt and minerals into the water, increase the overall salinity of the sea. Marine life in the area have to adapt to harsh condition changes in addition to anthropogenic (human) influences like water travel and fishing.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Rare hunter Caracal killed in car crash

A Caracal, an endangered wild cat also called the desert's black-ear, has lost life in a car accident on Shiraz-Kazeroon road, southern Fars province, YJC reported on Sunday. The precious specie has been spotted for the first time in the area, the provincial department of environment (DOE) chief Saeed Mahmoudi said.

کاراکال گربه‌سان کمیاب در تصادف جاده‌ای کشته شد

رئیس محیط زیست استان فارس گفت: گربه سان کمیاب از گونه کاراکال بر اثر تصادف در جاده کازرون تلف شد.

به گزارش گروه اجتماعی باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان، سعید محمودی در ادامه بیان داشت: این نوع گربه سان کمیاب برای نخستین بار است که در منطقه مشاهده شده است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-cracy”

■ **Meaning:** government or power
■ **For example:** It appears to be completely dominated by the **bureaucracy**.

PHRASAL VERB

Mock something up

■ **Meaning:** to make a full-size model of something so that it looks real
■ **For example:** We mocked up a prototype of the new irrigation system.

IDIOM

A tough cookie

■ **Explanation:** someone with a strong and determined character who is not easily intimidated, discouraged or defeated
■ **For example:** I'm not worried about Jason's future - he's a tough cookie!

Maduro accuses Trump of ordering his murder

➔ Venezuela plunged further into turmoil last week after the United States recognized Guaido, 35, as acting president, while Russia, which has lent Caracas an estimated \$17 billion since 2006, continued to back Maduro.

"Donald Trump has without doubt given an order to kill me and has told the government of Colombia and the Colombian mafia to kill me," Maduro told RIA.

Though the Venezuelan was reprising an old allegation that critics scoff at as a smokescreen, there was speculation of military plans after Trump adviser John Bolton appeared Monday with a pad showing the words "5,000 troops to Colombia."

"If something happens to me one day, Donald Trump and Colombian President Ivan Duque will bear responsibility," Maduro said of his right-wing foes.

Despite their increasingly militant opposition to Maduro, whom they regard as a dictator, both Washington and Bogota have repeatedly denied accusations of plots to kill him.

Maduro, who survived what he called an assassination attempt in August last year, said he was well protected, guaranteeing him a long life. He declined to comment on reports Russia sent private military contractors to help guard him.

He also dismissed calls for a snap presidential vote, saying his re-election last year was fair despite widespread allegations of fraud and the barring of two opposition rivals.

"I won 68 percent of the vote," he told RIA. "I won legitimately. ... If the imperialists want a new election, let them wait until 2025."

Despite alleging Trump wanted him dead, Maduro said he was ready to meet him "wherever he wants," but thought the prospect unlikely given what he described as attempts by Trump's advisers to prevent it.

He said Mexico, Uruguay, Bolivia, Russia, the Vatican and several unnamed European countries wanted talks between him and the opposition.

"I am ready to sit at the negotiation table with the opposition for us to talk for the benefit of Venezuela," Maduro was quoted as saying.

Regarding the investigation and possible arrest of Guaido, he said: "As far as I know, this measure has not yet been taken. Let's wait for the internal constitutional and legal processes to see what the results will be. We



won't rush, we'll wait."

Russia calls on Venezuela's opposition to start talks with Maduro

Meanwhile, Russia Wednesday called on the opposition in Venezuela to set aside any pre-conditions it may have and to start talks with President Nicolas Maduro.

The call was issued by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov who said Moscow wanted to help create the conditions for dialogue between the authorities and the opposition.

Lavrov said any international mediation in such talks should be impartial and involve a broad spectrum of countries. Russia was in talks with China and Latin American and European countries to further such dialogue, he said.

Venezuela prosecutor moves on Guaido

Venezuela's chief prosecutor Tuesday asked the country's top court to ban opposition leader Juan Guaido from leaving the country, launching a criminal probe into his anti-government activities while international pressure builds against President Nicolas Maduro. Attorney General Tarek William Saab made his request to the government-stacked Supreme Court, and also asked it to block Guaido's financial accounts.

Saab didn't specify what crimes Guaido is being investigated for, but said that the probe was tied to unrest sparked by his decision to declare himself interim president last week in a direct challenge to Maduro's authority.

The move comes as pressure mounts against Maduro's government from the United States, which earlier in the day handed control over Venezuela's U.S. bank accounts to Guaido. Russia announced it expected Venezuela to have problems paying its debts.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo certified that Guaido, the congressional leader who has declared himself interim president, has authority to take control of bank accounts that Venezuela's government has in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York or any other U.S.-insured banks.

Pompeo said the certification would "help Venezuela's legitimate government safeguard those assets for the benefit of the Venezuelan people." Guaido has been recognized as the nation's rightful leader by two dozen nations that contend the re-election of socialist Maduro was a sham, in part because his strongest opponents were barred from running.

Violent street demonstrations erupted last week when Guaido, during a massive opposition rally in Caracas, declared that he had assumed presidential powers and planned to hold fresh elections, ending Maduro's "dictatorship."

The United States, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador and Paraguay have officially acknowledged Guaido as the legitimate interim head of Venezuela, while countries including Russia and China back Maduro.

Maduro holds the reins of power, with the

armed forces still loyal despite an opposition push to lure their support by proposing amnesty for anybody who supports Guaido's transitional government.

Maduro accuses the United States of leading an open coup to oust him and exploit Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest in the world.

The U.S. Monday hit Venezuela's state-owned oil company with sanctions aiming to increase pressure on Maduro to leave office.

Guaido said in an interview with CNN in Spanish Monday that Venezuela's opposition-controlled congress had approved a measure asking foreign nations to ensure the country's assets weren't "looted" by Maduro.

Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Finance Minister Sergei Storchak told Russian state news agencies Tuesday that "there will probably be problems" for Venezuela in paying its debts. Storchak said Venezuela owed Russia \$3 billion, with repayments twice a year of around \$100 million, with the next due in March.

Russia also has extensive commercial interests in Venezuela, including state oil company Rosneft's partnership with Petroleos de Venezuela SA, which was placed under U.S. sanctions Monday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the Kremlin shared the view of the Venezuelan government that the sanctions were "illegal" and saw them as a tool of unfair competition on part of the United States.

In Spain, state-owned shipbuilder Navantia said that it had called back four Spanish technicians from Venezuela who were readying for final delivery a navy patrol ship sold 14 years ago to the Venezuelan government.

A company spokesman said the recall didn't change the shipbuilder's plan to deliver the vessel, which is called Eternal Commander Hugo Chavez. It is the last of eight similar ships that the former Venezuelan leader bought from Spain in 2005 for \$1.4 billion.

The U.S. State Department, meanwhile, said that Americans shouldn't travel to Venezuela, warning of unrest, the threat of being arbitrarily arrested and of mass demonstrations occurring with little notice.

Opposition leaders have called for anti-government demonstrations this week.

The announcement raises the travel advisory to its highest level, putting Venezuela on a no-travel list that also includes Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and South Sudan.

(Source: agencies)

Yemenis free ill Saudi soldier on humanitarian grounds

Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement has set free an ailing Saudi prisoner on humanitarian grounds, in a move that could boost ongoing UN-led efforts to end the bloody Saudi-led war against the country and broker peace there.

Head of Yemen's National Committee for Prisoners' Affairs, Abdulqader al-Mortadha, said on Tuesday that Ansarullah leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi had ordered the release of the Saudi trooper, identified as Musa al-Awaji, "on compassionate grounds" due to his deteriorating health condition.

The soldier was repatriated by a plane by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), according to the official.

Mortadha highlighted that the United Nations officials in addition to a number of tribal and social figures had approached Saudi authorities over the past two weeks in the hope of securing an urgent exchange of the sick Saudi soldier with a group of wounded Yemeni fighters, but to no avail.

Ansarullah, having witnessed the Saudi regime's utter disregard for the soldier and his worsening condition, decided to free him as a humanitarian gesture, the Yemeni official pointed out.

Ansarullah's move was praised by the United Nations' special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, who expressed hope on Twitter for "more similar humanitarian gestures from the parties" to the conflict in Yemen.

The UN official also said he looked forward to the implementation of a prisoner exchange agreement reached between Yemen's Houthi movement and the Saudi-backed regime of ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi during UN-brokered peace talks in Sweden last month.

The two warring parties have not yet agreed full terms of the prisoner swap deal.

The United Nations is working to facilitate the exchange as well as the implementation of a landmark truce deal, which was signed between the warring sides in Sweden for the main port city of Hudaydah, to set the stage for a new round of negotiations between the two sides.

More Saudi bloodshed

Separately on Tuesday, a civilian lost his life and another sustained injuries when Saudi military aircraft struck al-Mandala area in the Kushar district of Yemen's north-

western province of Hajjah.

Saudi warplanes also launched five airstrikes against an area in the al-Qafilah district of the northwestern Yemeni province of 'Amran. There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Moreover, scores of Saudi-backed militiamen loyal to Hadi were killed and injured when Yemeni army soldiers and allied fighters from Popular Committees targeted them with bombs near al-Sadis military base in Saudi Arabia's southern region of Najran.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating military campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the aim of bringing Hadi's government back to power and crushing Ansarullah.

According to a new report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, the Saudi-led war has so far claimed the lives of around 56,000 Yemenis.

The Saudi-led war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN has already said that a record 22.2 million Yemenis are in dire need of food, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger. According to the world body, Yemen is suffering from the most severe famine in more than 100 years.

A number of Western countries, the US and Britain in particular, are also accused of being complicit in the ongoing aggression as they supply the Riyadh regime with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

Houthi's blast Saudi regime's plundering of Yemeni oil resources

Yemen has denounced exploitation of the country's oil resources by the Riyadh regime in the provinces of Hadhramaut and Mahrah, where troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are present.

The Yemeni Foreign Ministry affiliated with the Houthi Ansarullah movement said in a statement on Tuesday that Saudi Arabia was "desperately attempting" to take advantage of the "ongoing state of insecurity by plundering oil resources and pursuing its illegitimate interests across the region."

The statement further explained that Saudi Arabia was committing a blatant violation of international law by trans-



porting Yemeni oil to the Arabian Sea through a pipeline which extends from the Rub' al-Khali desert to Hadhramaut and Mahrah in the south of the country. It also called on the United Nations and other international organizations to counter through legal mechanisms the Saudi aggression, occupation and looting of Yemeni resources.

Elsewhere in the statement, the ministry demanded that the international community increase pressure on Riyadh and Abu Dhabi authorities to "respect and preserve territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Yemeni nation."

A series of documents obtained by some media outlets in August last year pointed to Saudi Arabia's intention to develop the port, which would extract and export petroleum. In a letter addressed to the kingdom's ambassador to Yemen, a Saudi-based marine construction company, Huta Marine, thanked the official for trusting the company's capabilities by asking it to present a technical and financial proposal for the port's design.

Yemen's southern areas are controlled by Saudi-backed officials of the former Yemeni government. Saudi Arabia has taken control over the provinces' seaports and airports, using them to deploy hundreds of troops in the region.

Experts say the pipeline would allow the kingdom not to be constrained to the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, both strategic choke points that affect its current oil shipping routes.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. warns Israel against keeping up strikes on Syria

The top U.S. intelligence official has warned Israel of the consequences of keeping up its military strikes on Syrian soil, saying the attacks could eventually trigger a response from Iran, which has its military advisors based in the Arab state.

Speaking at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in Washington on Tuesday, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said that Israel's continued aerial assaults against Syria would increase the risk of Iran's retaliation.

"We assess that Iran seeks to avoid a major armed conflict with Israel," Coats said. "However, Israeli strikes that result in Iranian casualties increase the likelihood of Iranian conventional retaliation against Israel."

Coats also raised concerns about "the long-term trajectory of Iranian influence in the region and the risk that conflict will escalate."

He further claimed that Iran pursues "permanent military bases" in Syria and probably wants to maintain a network of "fighters" there despite the Israeli aerial assaults.

The American official was presenting the views of the U.S. Intelligence Community to the congressional committee as part of the annual Worldwide Threat Assessment.

Tehran has been offering military advisory assistance to the Syrian army at the request of the Damascus government. Iran says it is not operating any military bases there.

The Israeli military has on multiple occasions launched air raids against targets inside Syria, some of which it claims belonged to Iranian forces.

Israel — which has been backing the terror groups operating against Damascus — views Iranian advisors in Syria as a threat and has openly pledged to target them until they leave the Arab country.

Earlier this month, the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) responded to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "ridiculous" threat of strikes against Iranian advisors.

Major General Ali Jafari vowed that the Islamic Republic will protect its military advisory mission against the regime's acts of aggression.

Just days ago, Iran's chief military commander raised the possibility of Iran adopting offensive military tactics to protect its interests:

In April 2018, an Israeli airstrike against the T-4 airbase in Syria's Homs Province killed more than a dozen people, reportedly including seven Iranian military advisors.

In May of the same year, Israel conducted its most intensive airstrikes on Syria in decades. According to Russia's Defense Ministry, Israel had used 28 warplanes in its Syria strikes and fired 70 missiles. Both Damascus and Moscow said that the Syrian army had managed to shoot down over half of the missiles.

The Tel Aviv regime, at the time, claimed that its assault was in response to a barrage of 20 rockets that had been fired from Syria at Israeli military outposts in the occupied Golan Heights, and it blamed the rocket attack on Iran.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump says Afghanistan talks 'proceeding well'

Negotiations in Afghanistan are going well, U.S. President Donald Trump said Wednesday, after U.S. officials earlier this week said there had been significant progress in talks to end 17 years of war in the country.

Talks "are proceeding well," Trump wrote on Twitter. He did not address any possible peace accord with the Taliban or the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

On Monday, U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad told the New York Times that the United States and the insurgent group had sketched the outlines of an eventual peace deal. Analysts, however, said there was no sign that the Taliban had agreed to U.S. demands.

A U.S. State Department spokesman said this week the talks had been "positive" but that no agreement had been reached.

The Trump administration has moved toward withdrawals of U.S. forces after years of overseas deployments. A U.S. official said last month that Trump planned to withdraw more than 5,000 of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

But Trump's fellow Republican U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell Tuesday offered legislation urging the United States to keep troops in Afghanistan as well as Syria, although it was uncertain whether it would become law.

(Source: Daily Star)

Theresa May's disastrous dithering

➔ This latest vote means weeks more of theatrical dithering — before, you guessed, another vote. It might be comical if it wasn't so costly. By one estimate, Brexit has already cut 2.3 percent from UK output and is reducing public revenue by some 320 million pounds (\$419 million) a week. The government's farcical no-deal planning has demanded billions more, not to mention the attention of more than 10,000 civil servants. Many businesses have fled, and others are issuing dire warnings. Talk of martial law hasn't helped. All this, remember, is before anything has actually happened.

Perhaps May is hoping that the ticking clock, and the looming disaster of a no-deal exit, will be enough to get a majority back on board with her original bargain, maybe with some cosmetic embellishments. But ponder, for a moment, what that would mean. The prime minister would be asking Parliament to affirm an agreement that it first rejected by a historic margin, that she herself had then ripped up in an effort to run out the clock, and that has no redeeming qualities or benefits of its own. And this, by the way, is her best-case scenario.

Eventually, reality will intrude. The Brexit extremists in May's party should accept that they're in no position to impose their will at this late stage. May should concede that no prime minister could willingly accept a no-deal exit, and that the Brexit countdown must be stopped. Parliament should debate alternatives that the EU could realistically accept. And the government should start planning to give the public another say.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Philippines: Mosque in Zamboanga hit by deadly grenade attack

At least two people have been killed and four others wounded in a grenade attack on a mosque in the southern Philippines, say local officials.

The attack in Zamboanga city took place in the early hours of Wednesday, just days after deadly twin blasts at a Roman Catholic cathedral in the island of Jolo and a vote backing wider Muslim self-rule in Mindanao, the country's

volatile southernmost region.

"A grenade was lobbed inside a mosque killing two persons and wounding another four," regional military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Gerry Besana told AFP news agency of the attack in Zamboanga.

In a statement, President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman, Salvador Panelo, said the attackers are "taunting" the government in its handling of the peace and

order situation in Mindanao.

"Terrorism has once again reared its barbaric and ugly head," Panelo said.

The victims were reportedly sleeping inside the mosque at the time of the attack, which drew immediate condemnation from local officials.

"There is no redeeming such blasphemous murder. It is the highest form of cowardice and obscenity to attack people who at prayer,"

said regional leader Mujiv Hataman.

"We call on people of all faiths... to come together to pray for peace."

The Ulama Council of Zamboanga Peninsula condemned what it called a "devilish, irrational and inhumane act" and urged people to be vigilant.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Conor McGregor banned for six months following post-fight brawl

Conor McGregor and Khabib Nurmagomedov have received back-dated bans for their part in the ugly scenes that followed their fight in Las Vegas in October 2018.

The Irishman was handed a six-month suspension and fined \$50,000, while his opponent Nurmagomedov was banned for nine months and fined \$500,000 by the Nevada Athletic Commission.

The post-fight brawl came after Nurmagomedov defeated the octagon to launch an attack on McGregor's team after defeating the Irishman to maintain his unbeaten 27-0 record last year.

Members of the Russian's team were also involved in a fracas with the beaten McGregor.

Both bans have been back-dated to the night of the fight. McGregor posted two messages on Twitter following the news. "I am thankful for the Nevada Athletic Commission's fair assessment and handling of the brawl incident," he wrote.

"It was not my intention to land the final blow of the night on my opponent's blood relative. It's just how it played out. I look forward to competing again soon. Thank you all."

Moments later, the 30-year-old tweeted another message explaining the incident.

"The final blow of the night UFC 229 in association with McGregor Sports and Entertainment," he wrote.

Meanwhile, Nurmagomedov tweeted "politics forever" as two members of his team were also banned for their involvement in the incident. The Russian's suspension will be reduced by three months if he partakes in an anti-bullying campaign in Nevada.

However, Nurmagomedov's manager Ali Abdelaziz argued his man was not the bully in this situation.

"He bullied all his opponents in the past but on Oct 6 he got humbled and bullied. Justice was served and the bully got bullied. Simple as that," tweeted Abdelaziz, referring to McGregor. *(Source: CNN)*

Forward Wagner leaves Bayern to join China's Tianjin Teda

Bayern Munich forward Sandro Wagner is leaving the German champions with immediate effect and will join China's Tianjin Teda, the Bundesliga club said on Wednesday.

The 31-year-old former Germany international, who is a Bayern Munich youth academy product, had rejoined the Munich club a year ago after spells as Werder Bremen, Hertha Berlin and Hoffenheim among other clubs.

A 2009 European champion with Germany's Under-21 team that included a string of subsequent worlds champions, including current Bayern teammates Mats Hummels, Jerome Boateng and Manuel Neuer, Wagner had a less illustrious career.

He earned his first senior cap for Germany in 2017 but he failed to make the cut for the 2018 World Cup squad, prompting his international retirement.

"Sandro Wagner came to us and asked to be released (from his contract running to 2020)," Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic said in a statement. "He has a very attractive offer from China. We thank Sandro and wish him all the best and lost of success in China."

Wagner spent 11 years in Bayern's junior teams before making his professional debut with the senior team in 2007. He left in 2008 only to return last January.

He has scored 10 goals in his 34 games in all competitions with Bayern but failed to earn regular playing time under current coach Niko Kovac this season.

In his 180 Bundesliga matches for all clubs Wagner has scored a total of 44 goals, winning two Bundesliga titles with Bayern. *(Source: Reuters)*

PSG's Neymar out for 10 weeks and will miss Man Utd Champions League ties



Paris-St-Germain forward Neymar will be out for 10 weeks with a broken metatarsal, which means he will miss both legs of the club's Champions League tie against Manchester United.

The Brazil forward suffered the injury in a 2-0 French Cup victory over Strasbourg on Wednesday, 23 January.

The French champions say they have opted for a "conservative treatment".

PSG travel to Old Trafford for the first leg of their last-16 tie on 12 February, with the return on 6 March.

In a statement, the Ligue 1 side said: "Paris St-Germain gathered together a group of world-renowned medical experts at the Ooredoo Training Centre to carry out a thorough review of the injury to Neymar Jr.'s right foot.

"After detailed analysis by the specialists, a consensus was reached of a conservative treatment of Neymar Jr.'s injury to the fifth right metatarsal."

They also said that Neymar "agreed" with the decision and "is expected to return to the field within 10 weeks".

The club added: "Paris St-Germain sends its strongest support and encouragement to Neymar Jr. to overcome this injury, with the courage and determination that the player has always shown." *(Source: Mirror)*

Sala: Touching tributes to missing footballer during poignant match at Arsenal

On nights like this soccer can be a comfort, acting as a balm during life's tragedies, offering 90-minutes of respite when the emotional fallout is taking its toll, while at the same time providing a reminder of how inconsequential the beautiful game is.

Under the floodlights in north London, Arsenal were the victors, beating Cardiff City 2-1 in the Welsh club's first game since the aircraft carrying record signing Emiliano Sala disappeared from radar last week.

Yet a Cardiff win would have been of little consolation anyway for those red-eyed with grief. After the Premier League match, Cardiff manager Neil Warnock admitted there had been occasions over the last seven days when he did not want to get out of bed.

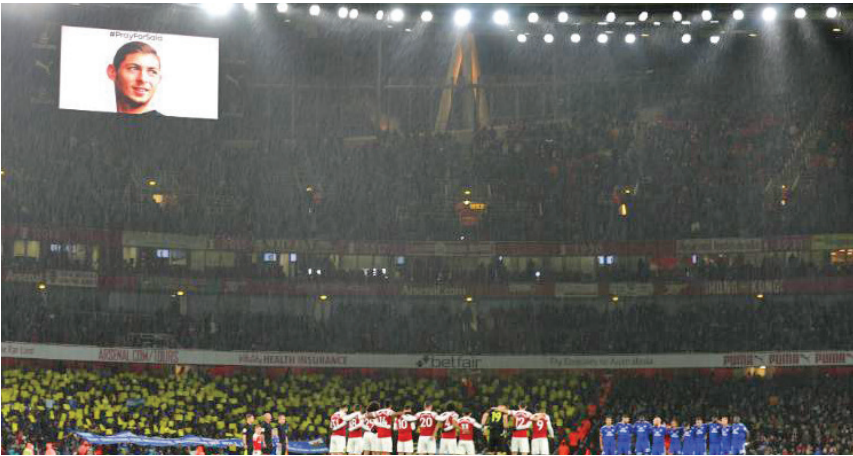
"What's gone on this week is unprecedented, really. I can't explain really how it's been," he told reporters, keeping his gaze on the desk in front of him.

"You've not really wanted to get out of bed because everything was really miserable. Nobody could do anything about it. It's been really difficult.

"I know we've lost a game of football but there are more important things."

There was no escaping the poignancy of the occasion, a match which would likely have been the 28-year-old's first for the club he joined from French club Nantes for \$19.3 million less than a fortnight ago.

Even the sky was weeping as both captains



placed floral tributes on the pitch before the match though, at the request of the family, black armbands were not worn as the Argentine striker has not been confirmed dead.

Instead, Cardiff staff and fans wore yellow daffodils, the national flower of Wales and also of significance to Sala's former club Nantes.

A corner of the Emirates Stadium turned yellow as visiting supporters held aloft daffodil-colored cards prior to kick-off. Argentina flags and Nantes scarves were also raised and, covering the first few rows of the Cardiff section, one banner read: "We never saw you play and never saw you score but Emiliano our

beautiful Bluebird we will love you forever."

A minute's silence grew into applause as both sets of fans paid their respects to Sala and pilot David Ibbotson. Head bowed on the sidelines, Cardiff manager Neil Warnock closed his eyes.

Warnock would later praise the fans. "On a night like tonight you've got to say well done to them," said the Englishman.

Throughout the week managers and players reiterated how futile their profession seemed on such desperately sad occasions like this.

In the matchday programme, Arsenal captain Laurent Koscielny, who played for

France against Germany in the international friendly which was the target of a terrorist attack in November 2015, admitted it was difficult to play under "tragic circumstances."

"You have to be professional, but you also feel the emotion, the sadness around you. There are things far more important than football and you don't know what tomorrow will bring," the Frenchman said.

Speaking publicly Monday for the first time since it emerged that Sala was on board the plane that disappeared near the Channel Islands, Warnock said he had considered retiring during "by far the most difficult week in my career by an absolute mile."

With Warnock revealing that several players had undergone counseling over the last week, Cardiff -- a club in the relegation zone -- still needs time to heal before the focus returns fully to the battle to remain in English football's top flight.

But under the circumstances, Warnock's men performed stoically at the Emirates Stadium and in the first half particularly posed problems to an Arsenal side fresh from an FA Cup defeat by Manchester United.

Bobby Reid went close with a header in the first half and Oumar Niasse had a penalty claim turned down. Arsenal may have dominated possession, but they did not overwhelm the visitors who ended the match with 19 shots on target, though just two were on target. *(Source: CNN)*

Guardiola wary of Man City's difficult run of league fixtures



Pep Guardiola said his Manchester City side have to overcome the "challenge" of a difficult run of fixtures as they seek to get their title defence back on track after a 2-1 loss at Newcastle.

Leaders Liverpool could move seven points clear of the champions if they win at Leicester on Wednesday.

"Next week will be tough with Arsenal, Everton and Chelsea," he said.

"If we want to go up as a club we have to accept that challenge. There are a lot of titles and points to play for."

Jurgen Klopp's Reds appear to have an easier run with matches against West Ham and Bournemouth to follow after their game against the Foxes.

City took the lead after only 24 seconds when Sergio Aguero scored his 17th goal of the season, but that was only one of four efforts they managed on target in the match.

Newcastle hit back in the 66th minute when Salomon Rondon fired home before Matt Ritchie scored the winner from the spot after Fernandinho had fouled Sean Longstaff in the area.

It was the champions' fourth league defeat of the season and Guardiola's men have now conceded as many goals in this campaign as they did in the entirety of the last.

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss added: "I love these players.

"They gave me all the prestige I have in England. I will try to be here to help them. I know how they feel right now and I am beside them, close to them. It is an incredible group of players, group of guys.

"Sometimes things go your way and sometimes they don't - we had won eight games in a row and scored 30 goals without reply."

When asked about his side's display at St James' Park, Guardiola said: "Our game was slow, we didn't commit. They shoot for the first time and it's a goal, the second was a penalty. But congratulations to Newcastle.

"It was not our best night. We lost second balls, we were not aggressive enough, that's why we could not win."

(Source: BBC)

Manchester United proved point with Burnley fightback - Solskjaer



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says his Manchester United team have ticked another box after battling back from 2-0 down to earn a point against Burnley in a 2-2 draw on Tuesday.

A late Paul Pogba penalty and a stoppage-time equaliser from Victor Lindelof ensured Solskjaer's unbeaten start as United boss continued and the Norwegian said afterwards his players had proved a point with the fightback.

"Now you've got your answer can they come back if they go one down or two down," said Solskjaer, who watched his team fall behind in a game for the first time since taking over from Jose Mourinho.

"On the way up here I was stopped so many times by the staff, so many people saying great spirit, fighting spirit and the way they came back was fantastic.

"Of course, happy with a point but we could have got three even at the end but we just ran out of time. We started too late. That's a learning curve."

Solskjaer handed Andreas Pereira his first Premier League start since August and it was the Brazilian who was robbed

of the ball in midfield in the buildup to Burnley's first goal.

The caretaker manager also opted to pick Romelu Lukaku as the striker with in-form Marcus Rashford, who had scored in four straight league games, moved out wide but the 45-year-old was adamant he had picked the right team.

"It was the right decision to make," said Solskjaer.

"We had a couple of niggles and unfortunately he [Pereira] was involved in the first goal but that's the whole team.

"We played our way into trouble there. Instead of starting off with the forward pass we ended up back to the keeper and it's just another thing we have to learn from.

"Rom's done really well against Burnley before. He's a handful and with Anthony [Martial] injured we thought that was the best option with Rashly out there."

"I've been busy all day so I don't know the latest update on that one so just wait and see," he said. *(Source: ESPN)*

Plucky Pelicans shock Rockets, Bucks bounce back in Detroit

The New Orleans Pelicans shrugged off multiple injuries and uncertainty surrounding star Anthony Davis on Tuesday, rallying for a 121-116 NBA victory over the Houston Rockets.

One day after Davis requested a trade, and with five of the team's top six scorers -- Anthony included -- absent because of injury, the Pelicans withstood a 37-point performance from Rockets star James Harden to triumph.

Jahlil Okafor scored 27 points for New Orleans. Jrue Holiday added 19 and Ian Clark chipped in 15 off the bench for a New Orleans team that used its 20th different starting lineup of the season thanks to injuries to Davis, Nikola Mirotic, Julius Randle and Elfrid Payton.

New Orleans took the lead for the first time in the game with 2:06 left in the third quarter on Kenrich Williams' basket -- and they never trailed again.

Holiday played a key role with six blocked shots, helping slow scoring juggernaut Harden just enough to get the job done. Harden notched his 24th straight game of at least 30 points, but his 17 in the fourth quarter weren't enough to turn the tide.

Davis, sidelined by a finger injury, watched from the bench hours after he was fined \$50,000 by the NBA because his agent's public revelation of his desire to be traded violated league rules.

"That's going to play out the way it plays out," Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry said before the game. "I think everything that needed to be said has been said."

Milwaukee's MVP candidate Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 21 points and handed out 11 assists to lead the Bucks



to a 115-105 victory over the Pistons in Detroit.

The Bucks, who lost to Oklahoma City on Sunday, underscored their bounce-back credentials with the win. They are the only NBA team that hasn't lost two in a row at any point this season.

Brook Lopez scored 12 of his 14 points for Milwaukee in the first quarter as foul trouble limited Antetokounmpo. Eric Bledsoe added 20 points, reserve Pat Connaughton scored 16 and Khris Middleton chipped in 15 for the Bucks, who have won seven of eight games and stretched their league-leading record to 36-13.

In Brooklyn, the Nets shook off the fatigue of the second night of a back-to-back, grinding out a 122-117 victory over the Chicago Bulls.

The Nets overcame a nine-point second-half deficit thanks

to strong second-half performances from D'Angelo Russell and Shabazz Napier.

Napier's three-pointer with 5:07 remaining in the third quarter put them up 71-67 and he drained a jump shot to make it 75-70.

Chicago cut the deficit to 107-104 with 2:54 to play, but Joe Harris drained a three and put in a layup as the Nets held on.

Napier scored 17 of his 24 points in the second half, while Russell led all scorers with 30 points.

■ Suns 'robbed'

Rudy Gay's buzzer-beating jump shot lifted the San Antonio Spurs to a 126-124 victory over the lowly Phoenix Suns -- a win that Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said he didn't think his team deserved.

"We had no respect for them or for the game," Popovich said after Phoenix, last in the Western Conference at 11-42, connected on 60 percent of their shots from the field and 44.8 percent from three-point range.

"It was a pathetic performance and Phoenix got robbed," Popovich said.

Devin Booker scored 38 points but it wasn't enough as the Suns endured their ninth straight defeat.

In Orlando, Paul George did his damage early and Dennis Schroder came on late to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 126-117 victory over the Magic.

George scored 31 of his 37 points in the first half and Schroder scored 18 of his 21 in the fourth quarter as Oklahoma City handed the Magic a fourth straight defeat. *(Source: AFP)*

Call in Iran for footballers to be punished over Japan melee

A prominent Iranian politician called for players in the country's national football team to be punished for clashing with their Japanese opponents after losing in the Asian Cup semifinals.

In the dying minutes of Iran's 3-0 defeat to Japan on Monday, striker Sardar Azmoun slapped Japan midfielder Gaku Shibasaki in the face, sparking a melee that also involved his teammates Ehsan Hajsafi and Ramin Rezaeian.

Ali Mollahari, deputy speaker in Iran's parliament, called for them to be disciplined.

"When we're accused of terrorism and violence by America and Israel, the attitude that Messrs. Azmoun, Hajsafi and Rezaeian showed before the eyes of the world was a fatal blow to the Iranian nation and they must be punished," Mollahari wrote on his Instagram account.

"The team that could have been Asia's champions failed due to spiritual, psycho-



logical and ethical weaknesses," added the reformist politician.

Team Melli, as the Iran national team are known, were widely criticized for their performance against Japan on Tuesday.

Vatan-e Emrooz daily published an article about them titled "Parjam," which is a play on the Farsi term for the JCPOA (Barjam) and translates as "the cup is lost".

It described a protest by Iran's players over an edge-of-the-box challenge as "childish" and said it distracted them and opened the way for Japan to score their first goal and gain the momentum that took them to victory.

The Iran Football Federation steered clear of the controversy, however, praising the team's "sincere efforts and endeavor" and thanking outgoing coach Carlos Quieroz of Portugal for his eight-year tenure.

(Source: AFP)

Japan's protector Gonda embraces the responsibility



After a decade waiting in the wings, Shuichi Gonda is Japan's number one goalkeeper as they chase a fifth AFC Asian Cup title, and it's an opportunity he is taking with both hands.

For a decade, Gonda has been Japan's goalkeeping nearly man.

He was part of the AFC Asian Cup-winning squad of 2011, and earned a call up to the FIFA World Cup in Brazil three years later, but didn't appear in either tournament as Eji Kawashima held down the position.

Having made his international debut way back in 2010, the 29-year-old had just five caps to his name coming into UAE 2019, but he has made the position his own, making five appearances and producing four successive clean sheets.

His efforts have helped Japan secure a place in the final against Qatar, and Gonda says he has a duty to perform.

"When it comes to protecting the goal, that's my job," the Sagan Tosu shot-stopper told the AFC.com.

"I feel a sense of responsibility to do that and think I am doing okay in that regard. The most important thing is that everybody is putting their bodies on the line."

One of Gonda's most telling contributions during the campaign was the close range stop he made to deny Iran's Sardar Azmoun in the semi-final in Al Ain.

With the score at 0-0, he denied the Iranian front man with an excellent reflex save using his left leg before half-time,

(Source: the-afc)

Records not history man Ali's priority



After making history by equalling Ali Daei's longstanding record for most goals in an AFC Asian Cup, Qatar striker Almoez Ali immediately turned his attention to Friday's final against Japan.

Ali, who was born four months before Daei set the record in the 1996 edition of the tournament, drew level with the Islamic Republic of Iran legend eight minutes before half time, scoring superbly from the edge of the penalty area to put his side 2-0 up against the United Arab Emirates.

Speaking to the-AFC.com after his side's eventual 4-0 win, the in-form Al Duhail front man expressed his joy, before turning his attention to the tournament decider.

"I wasn't thinking about equalling Ali Daei's record," he said. "No, I just left it to fate, and thankfully I managed to score a goal and bring joy to my parents, the Qatari people and my teammates."

"This is what I was thinking about, to score for the fans and I did it. Now we have to focus on the next match and study Japan very well."

Ali's eighth goal was memorable for its historical significance, but it was also a beauty, as he delivered an inch-perfect curling low drive across Khalid Eisa and in off the bottom of the right upright.

Understandably, it was a goal the pacey hitman was delighted to score, but he insists he remains focused on bigger things.

"Of course, I was really happy with the goal," he said. "It was a beautiful strike, but it means nothing, because our objectives

(Source: the-afc)

5 players who can lead Iran after their AFC Asian Cup disappointment

AFC Asian Cup contenders Iran were given a reality check, after they were dumped out of the competition by Japan. Fans had touted 2019 to be Team Melli's best chance in years to win the entire thing, only to be left down in the end. And with a lot of stars of this generation nearing their end, we take a look at who could lead them in the future; with a view to the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Interesting – one word which perfectly describes Azmoun's international career so far. The 24-year-old striker had announced his retirement post-2018 FIFA World Cup but made a U-turn soon. He then starred for Team Melli in the Asian Cup, where he added four more goals to his international tally, taking it to Twenty-eight in Forty-five appearances.

Looking at those stats, one can summarise that Azmoun has been absolutely lethal for Team Melli. However, there are still concerns about his temperament in big matches, during which he is often accused of 'not turning up'.

Nevertheless, the young striker is yet to hit his peak and still has enough ability to lead Iran from the front for years to come.

#2 Alireza Beiranvand (26; Persepolis)

One of Iran's breakout performers at the 2018 World Cup was goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand. The custodian put on some brave displays to limit heavyweights Portugal and Spain, while also saving a spot-kick from Cristiano Ronaldo.

The 26-year-old kept his good form going into the AFC Asian Cup and managed to keep a clean sheet in five straight games, while also saving a penalty.

It is known that goalkeepers have the most longevity across all positions. By the time the next World and Asian



Cup cycle starts. Beiranvand will be in his prime and will be looking to keep the Iranian goal safe.

#3 Saeid Ezatolahi (22; Reading)

Both Sardar Azmoun and Alireza Beiranvand were a part of Team Melli's AFC Asian Cup squad. However, if one is to look closely, one would find ample talent to lead them through the next decade.

One such talent is 22-year-old midfielder Saeid Ezatolahi.

The youngster currently plays for Reading in the second tier of English football. However, injury concerns have limited him to make just four appearances for the Royals, while also ruling him out of the Asian Cup.

When fit, however, Ezatolahi is a hard-working central midfielder, who even got a thumbs up from Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone for his work ethic. And with Iran's current midfields entering their twilight years, the 22-year-old can be the perfect man to step up.

#4 Ali Alipour (24; Persepolis)

Another talented player who was left out of Iran's AFC Asian Cup was forward Ali Alipour. The 24-year-old had made the initial squad for the tournament but dropped out when the final-23 were announced.

Nevertheless, there is still enough time for Alipour to make his name at the international level; something which has been doing with ease for his club.

The Persepolis man was in stunning form throughout the 2017-18 season and scored Twenty-six goals for his side across all competition. His nineteen goals in the Persian Gulf Pro League were also enough to help him win the Golden Boot, while his four in the AFC Champions League helped Persepolis reach the final.

#5 Omid Noorafkan (21; Charleroi)

The youngest star on the list is 21-year-old midfielder Omid Noorafkan, who recently made the switch to Belgian side Sporting Charleroi.

In 2018, Noorafkan was first brought to attention after website outsideoftheboot.com names him in their 100 players to watch series.

"He boasts great stamina, with great tactical awareness and discipline which is rare for such a young midfielder," stated the website. Big things are expected of the youngster, who after spending half a season with Charleroi, has returned to his previous club Esteghlal on loan. However, he still is on the periphery of the national team and has only been able to muster up one appearance.

However, a change in coach might see a change in fortune for Noorafkan, who had previously captained his national team at the youth level.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Ravshan Irmatov to officiate Asian Cup final

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ravshan Irmatov of Uzbekistan has been chosen to officiate the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 final.

The final match will be held at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi, where Qatar meet Japan.



Irmatov also officiated Iran and Iraq match in Group D, where the neighbors played out a goalless draw.

An international official since 2003, the 42-year-old ref has officiated in three World Cups in a row.

He was also involved in the London 2012 Olympics, the FIFA Club World Cup on three occasions and the Confederations Cup.

Irmatov has been named the Best Referee in Asia in four consecutive years (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014).

Ravshan Irmatov will be assisted by Abduhamidullo Rasulov and Jahongir Saidov. The reserve referee will be Ma Ning of China.

Video assistants will be Paolo Valery (Italy), Muhammad Taki Bin Jahari (Singapore), Christopher Bit (Australia).

Georgian defender Roma Chachua joins Sepidrood Rasht

TASNIM — Georgian defender Roma Chachua has joined Iranian football club Sepidrood Rasht on Tuesday.

The 21-year-old defender is a member of Georgia U-21 football team. Chachua has joined his countryman Luka Nozadze in the Rasht-based football team.

Ali Karimi's Sepidrood sit second bottom of the Iran Professional League (IPL) table.

Furthermore, Sepahan striker Sasan Ansari joined Tractor Sazi on a 2.5-year contract.

Esteghlal striker Jaber Ansari penned an 18-month contract with Paykan.

Iran Hazfi Cup: Damash march into final

IRNA — Damash Gilanian football team defeated Saipa 2-1 and booked a place in the final match of the 2019 Iran Hazfi Cup.

Milad Safshekan gave Damash the lead with a header just 50 seconds into the match.

Sadegh Barani equalized the match in the 35th minute in Rasht's Sardar-e Jangal Stadium.

Substitute Morteza Heydari scored the winner in the 75th minute. Another Rasht-based football team Sepidrood will host Persepolis on Thursday in the competition's Round of 16.

The Hazfi Cup is the Iranian football knockout cup competition, run by the Iranian Football Federation.

Esteghlal are the title-holders and most decorated team with seven titles.

Benoit Huot announces retirement

After more than two decades of Para swimming, Canadian nine-time Paralympic champion Benoit Huot is announcing his retirement from the sport.

"It's time to hang up my Speedo. It was the greatest of honors to represent our country and I'm proud to have been able to fulfil all my competitive dreams. Sport is the most amazing school of life and I had the privilege of being its student for the past 25 years," Huot said.

Born with a malformation in his right leg, commonly called club foot, Huot started swimming at the age of eight. A member of the Canadian National Para Swimming Team since 1998, he is one of the most decorated Paralympic athletes with 20 medals won at five Paralympic Games.

"Benoit is one of the most celebrated Paralympians worldwide but he is so much more than all the accolades and achievements I could list. The reality is that Benoit has transcended sport and will leave a legacy of sportsmanship, courage and dignity," said Swimming Canada CEO Ahmed El-Awadi.

"He was and will always be an ambassador for swimming, the entire Paralympic movement, and an inspiration to anyone who feels they can't do or achieve something. This is not just a retirement but a celebration of Benoit's swimming career, a story which I believe has not reached its end, but is just entering a new chapter," El-Awadi added.

Huot's phenomenal career also included claiming 32 medals at six world championships.

"Throughout his long career as an athlete, Benoit embodied determination and the desire to win, but always carried himself with dignity and class. He was such an incredible ambassador for swimming, for Para sport and for Canada. To our friend, I wish you a happy retirement, to the champion, I say mission accomplished, and to the hero, I say carry on," said Marc-André Fabien, president of the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

A member of the Order of Canada since 2016, Benoit was honoured last year as a Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec. He was also Canada's flagbearer at the Closing Ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, and is a multiple recipient of the "Person with a Disability of the Year" King Clancy Award.

Working as a swimming commentator for ICI Radio-Canada Tele and as a contributor to Les Eclaireurs on ICI Premiere, Huot now intends to continue his mission with youth with disabilities through various initiatives including the Canadian Tire Jumpstart Foundation and the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com
■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Hamshahri No. 3 - ISSN: 1017-94

Tehrantimes79

Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

God has given man intelligence to deliver himself from distress and anxiety.
Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian director to stage “Death and the Maiden” at Fajr festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Sina Rastgu plans to stage Chilean-American playwright Ariel Dorfman’s “Death and the Maiden” during the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran, the organizers have announced. “Death and the Maiden” is about a political activist who is convinced



Members of Iranian director Sina Rastgu’s troupe perform “Death and the Maiden” at Tehran’s Paliz Theater on March 3, 2018. (Honaronline/Sharareh Samei)

that her guest is a man who once tortured her for anti-government measures.

Earlier in 2018, Rastgu staged in Tehran with the same cast, which includes Zahra Behruzmanesh, Mansur Nasiri, Mohammad Mesgari, Mohammad Habibi, and Reza Davudvandi.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from February 11 to 23.

Laurent Chétouane stages “Situation #1” with Iranian performers in Tehran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Berlin-based French choreographer Laurent Chétouane staged the performance “Situation #1” along with a number of Iranian performers at Iranshahr Gallery in Tehran on Wednesday.



Choreographer Laurent Chétouane in an undated photo.

Swedish choreographer Mikael Marklund also collaborated with the troupe in the performance, which will be held today and tomorrow, Iran Theater, a Persian website for theater news, announced.

Mahsa Ranjbarian, Mohsen Khedri, Raheleh Bahrami and Mehraveh Mokhtarian are the Iranian performers, while Amir-Hossein Mashaherifard and Shahab Anusha collaborate in this project.

Chétouane held a choreography workshop during the 20th International Iranian Festival of University Theater in Tehran in April 2017.

He has produced numerous productions in Hamburg, Munich, Weimar, Cologne, Stuttgart, Athens, Oslo, and Zurich.

In addition, France, Belgium, Austria, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, Japan and Russia have hosted many dance performances directed by Chétouane.

Jake Gyllenhaal finds art can kill in “Velvet Buzzsaw”

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Actor Jake Gyllenhaal plays a snooty art critic in Netflix Inc movie “Velvet Buzzsaw,” a satirical thriller that turns bloody when he and others try to profit from the work of a recently deceased artist.

Gyllenhaal portrays Morf Vandewalt, a critic who starts seeing bizarre images in the paintings he is writing about.

“He is a pretty wacky character,” Gyllenhaal told Reuters on the red carpet at the movie’s premiere in Los Angeles.

The film, which debuts on Netflix on Friday, was written and directed by Oscar-nominated screenwriter Dan Gilroy, who also wrote and directed Gyllenhaal’s widely praised 2014 movie “Nightcrawler.”

Fajr Film Festival opens with big nostalgia for “days of snow and coldness”



Left to right, this combination photo shows filmmaker Azizollah Hamidnejad, film editor Abbas Ganjavi, voice actor Khosro Khosroshahi, actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, and graphic designer Ebrahim Haqiqi after receiving their lifetime achievement awards during the opening ceremony of the 37th Fajr Film Festival at the Tehran Theater Complex on January 29, 2019. (Photos by Babak Borzuyeh)

“I asked the minister to deliver a speech, but he said, ‘we should be a listener during the meetings, at which artists are in attendance,’ Zabetian addressed the audience, which broke into loud applause.

The ceremony went on with honoring actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, filmmaker Azizollah Hamidnejad, film editor Abbas Ganjavi, voice actor Khosro Khosroshahi, and graphic designer Ebrahim Haqiqi with lifetime achievement awards.

Farmanara and Kimiai came to the stage to present Ganjavi the award.

In his short speech, Kimiai pointed to his collaboration with Ganjavi in “The Soil”, “The Journey of the Stone”,

“Gavaznha” and several other movies he produced before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and said “He is marvelous. We spent many hard days with each other; days of snow, coldness and SAVAK [the Shah’s intelligence services].”

Farmanara also pointed to an Instagram video that depicts several persons mocking veteran actress Shahla Riahi who is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and asked people to be respectful of their elders and cultural luminaries.

In his acceptance speech, Hamidnejad thanked film critics Hushang Golmakani, Masud Mehrabi, Khosro Dehqan and Hamid Sediqi who acclaimed his 1991 war drama

“Hoor on Fire” and said, “They encourage me to make my next movie.”

Graphic designer Haqiqi said that his collaboration with the Fajr festival began in 1982 when he created a poster for the second edition of the event. He is the designer of the festival’s Simorgh trophy.

Actress Motamed-Arya also criticized certain people, which lash out at cinema and accuse it of laxity, “The Iranian cinema community is a lovely respected family that believes in all values.”

“Our cinema is viewed in the world as the greatest cultural herald, as a result it is increasingly under attack,” she stated.

Voice actor Khosroshahi received his

award from his colleagues Manuchahr Vaalizazdeh, Nasser Mamduh and Manuchehr Esmaeili.

Khosroshahi who has given his voice to film stars such as Alain Delon, Al Pacino and Amitabh Bachchan also lamented that dubbing has always been ignored in Iran and asked the culture ministry to regard the profession.

The organizers also paid tribute to Ezzatollah Entezami, the veteran actor of stage and screen who died in August 2018 at the age of 94, during the opening ceremony.

The Fajr Film Festival will run until February 11.

Theatrical interactions between Iran, France discussed in Tehran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Theater Forum was playing host to a session on Tuesday to discuss the theatrical interactions between Iran and France.

The Tehran-based French writer and actor Jean-Claude Carrière was invited to deliver a speech, but he could not attend the meeting due to his illness.

However, he sent a video recorded at a Tehran hospital, in which he said that he was familiar with Iran by his Iranian wife, Nahal Tajaddod, and Persian poet and mystic Farid ud-Din Attar Neyshaburi’s magnum opus Mantiq at-Tayr (The Conference of the Birds) which has been translated into French.

He said that he wrote his play “The Conference of the Birds” under the influence of the great inspiring work from the Persian classical literature.

The Theater Forum also planned to honor Carrière for his lifetime achievements with a medal but his illness thwarted the plan.

Theater Forum director Shahram Gilabadi said that he along with a number of his colleagues will visit Carrière at the hospital to present him the medal.

Iranian National Commission for UNESCO director Hojjatollah Ayyubi and stage directors Qotbeddin Sadeqi and Mohammadreza Khaki also made speeches.



Theater Forum director Shahram Gilabadi speaks during a session held at the center in Tehran on January 29, 2019 to discuss the theatrical interactions between Iran and France. (ILNA/Mehdi Nasiri)

Oppression and its opponents shape a political Berlinale

BERLIN (Reuters) — Abuse of power, state oppression and the struggle faced by those who seek to challenge it in countries from Russia and Brazil to the United States are key themes in this year’s Berlin Film Festival, for which the final line-up was announced on Tuesday.

This year’s edition of the festival, which has never been shy of broaching sensitive political themes, highlighted Brazilian films in the program that had anticipated the country’s hard swing right in last year’s presidential election.

“Sometimes art has to be political,” said director Dieter Kosslick, who bows out this year after his 18th Berlinale.

“In the case of Brazil we see how films took a seismographic reading of the mood of the country before the current president was elected,” he added.

Brazilian director Wagner Moura’s “Marighella”, screened out of competition, tells the story of writer Carlos Marighella’s resistance to and 1969 death at the hands of a military dictatorship that toppled a democratic government, in a story that uncomfortably echoes President Jair Bolsonaro’s rise.

French director Juliette Binoche, herself a Silver Bear winner, chairs the main competition jury in the festival, which owes its political sensibility to its 1951 birth in a divided city that straddled the front lines of the Cold War.

Squarely in that tradition lies Polish director Agnieszka Holland’s Mr. Jones, telling the story of Welsh journalist Gareth Jones, whose 1930s reports from the Soviet Union exposed the horror of famine in Ukraine, despite governments and rival reporters who tried to silence him.



Berlinale International Film Festival director Dieter Kosslick poses for the media before a news conference to present the program for the upcoming Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, January 29, 2019. (Reuters/Fabrizio Bensch)

China is also strongly represented in the main competition, with Wang Xiaoshuai’s “So Long, My Son” exploring the lives of two couples living through the revolutionary economic changes that have transformed China since the 1980s.

Also screening outside the competition is United States director Adam McKay’s “Vice”, about the reign of Dick Cheney as the U.S.’s most powerful vice-president.

“This is the film you have to see in order to understand the presidency,” said Kosslick, before recommending, to laughs from the audience, a festival screening of Charles Ferguson’s documentary “Watergate - Or How We Learned to Stop an Out of Control President” about the fall of Richard Nixon.

The festival also includes for the first time works produced by the streaming services that are a rising force in the film world, including Spanish director Isabel Coixet’s Netflix production “Elisa y Marcela”, about a woman who disguised herself as a man to marry her lover in 1901.

John Malkovich to play disgraced movie mogul in new Mamet play

LONDON (Reuters) — Actor John Malkovich will take the starring role in a new play by Pulitzer Prize winner David Mamet about a disgraced Hollywood studio head, a story he said was written partly in reaction to the scandal engulfing film producer Harvey Weinstein.

Speaking to BBC Radio on Tuesday, Malkovich described “Bitter Wheat”, which opens in London in the summer, as “a black farce about a very badly behaved movie mogul”, who he said was “not particularly” Weinstein. The producer will go on trial in New York in May on charges of sexually assaulting two women.

“It’s a great deal about that business and a great deal about how people in that business, in positions say as studio heads have behaved really for more or less a century now. So many of them were so notoriously badly behaved,” he said.

“The idea...maybe started as reaction to all the news that came out last year, in particular about Harvey Weinstein but actually about many many people, some of whom were also higher ups in various studios. I think David kind of took the idea from there and went with it.”

More than 70 women, mainly young actresses and others working in film, have accused Weinstein, 66, of sexual misconduct, including assault, dating back decades.

Weinstein, who pleaded not guilty after his arrest last May, has denied all the accusations, saying any sexual encounters were consensual.

The scandal helped kick off the #MeToo movement, in which dozens of powerful men in Hollywood and beyond have been accused of sexual misconduct.

“Of course it might upset people who’ve experienced the kind of treatment that the play contains and shows and describes and



American actor John Malkovich attends a photocall to promote the film “The Casanova Variations” during the 62nd San Sebastian Film Festival in San Sebastian, Spain September 22, 2014. (Reuters/Vincent West)

that we watch but what can I do about that?” Malkovich said.

“I am sure a lot of people will laugh and a lot of people will be upset and a lot of people may not like it. Personally I think it’s a terrific piece of writing.”

Malkovich, most recently seen on screens in Netflix thriller “Bird Box” and on British television as legendary detective Hercule Poirot in “The ABC Murders”, said he met Weinstein when making 1998 drama “Rounders” but “didn’t really have any connection with him”.

In “Bitter Wheat”, the 65-year-old actor will play Barney Fein, described in a press release as “a bloated monster- a studio head, who, like his predecessor, the minotaur, devours the young he has lured to his cave.

“His fall from power to shame is a mythic journey which has been compared to ‘The Odyssey’ by people who claim to have read that book.”

Mamet, known for plays such as “Glengarry Glen Ross”, has written about sexual misconduct before, namely in “Oleanna” about a female student and her professor.