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NIORDC to inaugurate 20 development projects worth €1.6b in 10 days

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) will inaugurate 20 development projects worth €1.6 billion (35 trillion rials, which equals €744.6 million, plus €861 million) during the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution), IRNA reported on Friday.

As announced by the Oil Ministry, the third phase of gas condensate refining unit of Persian Gulf Star Refinery in southern province of Hormozgan,

the project to increase the production capacity of Bandar Abbas Oil Refinery and elevate the quality of its produced gasoline, desulfurization of gasoil produced in Tabriz Refinery, supplying required water for Abadan Refinery from Bahmanshir River, project to organize export operation at Mahshahr Port in southwestern province of Khuzestan, and building Abadan-Ahwaz-Arak-Tehran pipeline are some of the main projects to be inaugurated by NIORDC during the mentioned time.

Iran wants EU to act swiftly as it sets up payment channel with Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry issued a statement of Thursday saying Tehran welcomes the European Union's payments mechanisms to skirt the U.S. sanctions against Iran, yet it sought an immediate implementation of the payment channel.

"Iran calls for full implementation of the European Union's commitments in the

shortest period of time," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said.

On Thursday, France, Germany and Britain officially announced the creation of INSTEX SAS (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges), a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran. **→2**

Lebanon forms new govt., breaks political impasse

Lebanon's presidency has announced the formation of a new national unity government, putting an end to a nine-month stalemate on the political stage, which fueled the country's economic woes.

The new cabinet was unveiled on Thursday during a press conference at the presidential palace in the capital, Beirut,

after rival political factions managed to hammer out their differences over the government line-up.

The new government -- headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri -- includes 30 ministers from most Lebanese political factions, which have been in talks after the country held in May 2018 its first parliamentary elections in nine years. **→13**



EDITORIAL

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There remains ambiguity about the SPV even though it exists

Finally, after months of delay, the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France and Germany announced in a joint statement that they have set up a financing mechanism to skirt American sanctions and keep the 2015 Iran nuclear deal alive.

"France, Germany and the United Kingdom, in accordance with their resolute commitment and continued efforts to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2231, announce the creation of INSTEX SAS (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran," the three foreign ministers said in a joint statement on Thursday in Bucharest, Romania, where European Union foreign ministers met.

The new company, called INSTEX, for Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges, would essentially allow goods to be bartered between Iranian companies and foreign ones without direct financial transactions and the use of the dollar. By avoiding the American banking system and currency, the hope is that European companies and others will feel confident that they can do business with Iran without being subject to the sanctions.

However, it is unclear exactly when the company will become operational, how it will operate, or whether other countries will join.

Moreover, the incredible comments by British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt about the INSTEX add to the severity of the ambiguity surrounding this financial channel.

Hunt said in Bucharest that the registration "is a clear, practical demonstration that we remain firmly committed" to the Iran deal, "for as long as Iran keeps implementing it fully."

A simple, yet basic decoding of the British Foreign Secretary's remarks shows that Europe has been pursuing a purposeful game with Iran in exchange for registering a financial exchange channel. Jeremy Hunter has taken "registration" of the mechanism as a significant step to fulfill Europe's commitments. **→7**

'Warsaw conference unlikely to result in any practical achievements'

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, tells the Tehran Times that the Trump administration has had to walk back from what it initially hoped to do with the Warsaw conference.

Pillar says, "Initially the intention was to make the conference--like much else in the administration's foreign policy--chiefly an anti-Iran exercise. It quickly became apparent that many European governments, including co-host Poland, were uncomfortable with that focus."

He adds, "Faced with the prospect of poor attendance, the Trump administration has more recently downplayed the anti-Iran dimension."

Following is the 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 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 are the goals and the name of the Polish meeting ambiguous and unclear?

A: The Trump administration has had to walk back from what it initially hoped to do with this conference. Initially the intention was to make the conference--like much else in the administration's foreign policy--chiefly an anti-Iran exercise. It quickly became apparent that many European governments, including co-host Poland, were uncomfortable with that focus. The European Union's foreign affairs chief indicated she would not attend. Faced with the prospect of poor attendance, the Trump administration has more recently downplayed the anti-Iran dimension. **→7**

Israel's Story: Lies from top to bottom

By Phillip M. Giraldo

A study by a Toronto-based consulting and research company has revealed that over the past fifty years mainstream reporting about Israel has been distorted to portray the Jewish state in positive terms while ignoring the plight of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. The media study, based on a computer analysis of 50 years of data, found that major U.S. newspapers

have provided consistently skewed, pro-Israel reporting on Israel-Palestine. The slanting in news coverage included subtle manipulations like using word associations favorable to Israel and derogatory to Palestinians as well as persistent publication of stories praising Israel while also avoiding reporting anything supportive of the dispossessed Arab point of view.

The researchers from 416 Labs were able to eval-

uate headlines and articles derived from five major U.S. newspapers: the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal during the time period 1967 to 2017. June 1967 was selected as the starting point to include coverage of the Six Day War and its aftermath, when Israel attacked Jordan, Egypt and Syria to begin its military occupation of Palestinian territory on the West Bank and Gaza. **→7**

SPV is not a magic solution: Ali Vaez

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Ali Vaez, director of the Iran program for International Crisis Group says, that SPV is not a magic solution, and it may take a few months before its success can be truly assessed.

He also adds that there is no relation between delays in launching the SPV and Iran's missile program.

Following is the full 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: The SPV is a complex and technical initiative involving multiple ministries across several

national and European institutions. Ensuring that that the financial, legal and diplomatic components of the mechanism are satisfactorily in place means that some delays inevitably arise.

■ Some believe that SPV won't be launched as long as Iran pursues its missile program. What is your opinion on this matter? **→7**



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Dokhtaran-e Enqelab highlight importance of hijab

A large and public gathering dubbed Dokhtaran-e Enqelab (literally meaning girls of revolution), aiming to promote the importance of hijab was held at Tehran's Imam Hossein square on Thursday.

According to Tasnim news agency, the gathering was attended by 5,000 boys and girls as well as families of iconic martyrs.

This is the second gathering of Dokhtaran-e Enqelab. The first gathering was held in the Iranian calendar month of Tir (June 22-July 22, 2018).



ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

You cannot put lipstick on a pig and make it pretty

It is obvious. Piggish American imperialistic foreign policy under Trump aims to overthrow uncooperative foreign governments and install subservient regimes, often to make way for the plundering of natural resources and to open markets for U.S. corporations, particularly arms makers.

John Bolton declared clearly why the U.S. is going for regime change in Venezuela: OIL. The Trump regime uses every means at its disposal, particularly economic ones, and even if in outrage a country has halted diplomatic relations with the U.S., as Iran has fairly done for decades, that in itself is cause for some kind of attack. The Trump regime is also now threatening European countries over the erection of the SPV for trade with Iran, a move that one would hope thoroughly alienates European governments.

What is happening right now in Venezuela has been in the works, carefully coordinated and planned, for a long time. It's quite remarkable that while the U.S. has been trying to choke and destroy Nicolas Maduro, as it tried to choke Chavez, stealing billions in dollars and gold and impoverishing many, it has the gall, via a blustering Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, to offer \$20 million this month in "humanitarian assistance" to Venezuela at the same time.

That current offer is exactly equivalent in a hospital to taking away every painkiller, every medicine, perhaps even bed linens and food, from an ill patient, and handing that patient a single band aid. What's a mere \$20 million in chump change to a country that can conger fiat dollars at no cost whatsoever?

And those countries, including European ones, that aver from kowtowing to the Trump administration become alleged threats to U.S. "national security", a phrase that has lost specific definition aside from implying that some government elsewhere merely sees things differently than Washington does and is thus deemed a "threat". **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Huge turnout at upcoming rallies to disappoint enemy: cleric

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The interim Friday prayer leader of Tehran says huge turnout at the Bahman 22nd (Feb. 11th) rallies marking the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution will disappoint the enemy more than before.

“God willing, we will see a massive presence of the people with different tastes and ways of thinking in the streets,” Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani said, addressing worshippers in Tehran, Mehr reported.

“The divine tradition is that a nation that is right, but is also weakened and oppressed, will eventually win, because cruelty will not last forever,” the ayatollah remarked.



Zarif scoffs at Trump admin's contradictions on Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday pointed to the confusion within the Trump administration with regard to Iran, saying even U.S. intelligence agencies “contradict” the U.S. president and the warmongers under his rule.

“#ThatAwkwardMoment when @realDonaldTrump’s own intelligence agencies contradict what he, the warmongers in his admin, and the Israelis say about Iran,” Zarif said in a tweet. Zarif added, “He should have listened to the EU, the UN, and former US officials all along.”

The foreign minister’s tweet followed two anti-Iran tweets by President Trump, in which he attacked his intelligent chiefs’ assessment of Iran.



Iran may resume sending pilgrims to Syria

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Qazi Askar, the Leader’s representative in Hajj affairs, says Iran and Syria have reached an initial agreement to resume sending Iranian pilgrims to Syria.

If the necessary facilities are provided, Iran will start sending pilgrims to Syria, he said.

He also hailed the defenders of holy shrines, popular mobilization forces and the Syrian army for their triumph over the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group, ISNA reported.

He added with the return of security to Syria, the countries that were seeking regime change in that country are now trying to outstrip one another in opening their embassies in Damascus.



Zarif tweets out his support for INSTEX

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Thursday tweeted out his support for INSTEX, a new transaction channel that will allow companies to continue trading with Iran despite U.S. sanctions, and voiced Iran’s openness for “constructive engagement” with Europe.

Zarif said, “Iran welcomes #INSTEX—a long overdue 1st step—in E3 implementation of May 2018 commitments to save JCPOA by ensuring dividends for Iranians after US’ illegal reimposition of sanctions. We remain ready for constructive engagement with Europe on equal footing & with mutual respect.”

According to reports, INSTEX will be based in Paris and will be managed by German banking expert Per Fischer.



Tehran welcomes formation of new Lebanese government

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran has welcomed formation of new government in Lebanon, expressing hope it will strengthen friendship among Lebanese parties and prepare the ground for further development of the country.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran congratulates the Lebanese government and nation on the formation of new government, which was an outcome of sympathy and understanding among all Lebanese groups and clans,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Thursday.

This success “shows the will of a nation and its leaders to shape their future within the framework of independence and without any foreign pressure,” he added, according to the Foreign Ministry website.



Armenian PM to visit Iran late February

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will pay an official visit to Iran in February, Armenpress has reported.

“On February 27 I am leaving for Iran on an official visit,” Pashinyan said at a meeting with the Armenian community in Cologne, Germany, on the sidelines of his official visit to the European country.

Iran and Armenia enjoy good relations. President Hassan Rouhani met the Armenian prime minister on the sidelines of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2018.

Ten-Day Dawn celebrations start

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian nation on Friday started celebrating the Ten-Day Dawn to mark the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which toppled the Pahlavi monarchy in 1979.

A series of nationwide ceremonies kicked off at 9:33 a.m. local time (0603 GMT), the time when the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979 after a 15-year exile.

A special ceremony was held at Imam Khomeini’s mausoleum south of Tehran, with a host of senior state and military officials as well as thousands of people from all walks of life in attendance.

There, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Assembly of Experts, delivered a speech. Imam Khomeini, he said, stressed the idea that Islam can rule.

“For forty years the whole world tried to stop us. An Islamic government was Greek to the world and they said Islam was only about prayers and fasting,” Jannati said.

“All world powers believed the Islamic government would be limited, and would collapse after a couple of years,” Ayatollah Jannati remarked.

However, he added, it was clearly revealed that America and all world powers failed in their efforts to oust the Islamic republic establishment.

“World powers imposed eight years of war



Motorcade riding in memory of Imam Khomeini’s arrival the same day 40 years ago, who was so escorted after landing in Mehrabad Airport; Azadi (Freedom) Tower in background. February 1, 2019. Photo: IRIBNEWS

on us [during the 1980s] and we managed to strongly resist the foreign aggression at a time when no one thought we would survive the enemy’s military power,” he stated.

“Today, America is doing whatever it can to destroy the Islamic system.... It urges other countries not to work with Iran. And those intoxicated by the petrodollars have

come to America’s help in order to break the power of Islam,” Ayatollah Jannati said in open reference to the return of sanctions against Iran by the Trump administration and a coalition of the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia against the Islamic Republic.

“They have so far failed to do anything, and will fail in the future, as well,” he added.

Iranian diplomat holds talks with Bulgarian officials

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi met separately with a number of Bulgarian officials on Thursday, discussing expansion of ties between Tehran and Sofia.

He held talks with Bulgarian President’s Secretary on Foreign Affairs Dimitar Arnaudov, Transport Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov and

Vice-President of the National Assembly Veselin Naydenov Mareshki.

Arnaudov expressed hope that the two countries would expand relations in various spheres.

He noted that Bulgaria attaches great importance

to expansion of ties with Iran as a country that plays an important role in the Middle East region.

Zhelyazkov said that Bulgaria prioritizes expansion of cooperation with Iran.

He also voiced his country’s readiness to hold the 19th joint commission of the two countries in near future.

Araqchi started a European tour on Monday by first visiting Austria and Slovakia prior to his trip to Bulgaria.

He met with International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano in Vienna on Monday while in Austria.



Safavi: It is era of Islamic world's power

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader, said on Friday that it is the era in which power of the Islamic world

has been revealed.

“Today, it is the era of the world of Islam’s power. From a cultural point of view, the world of Islam has one God and one Qibla;

and from an economic point of view, the Muslims have 75 percent of the world’s oil and 57 percent of gas reserves,” he said in a conference.

The former IRGC chief also attached great importance to unity among Muslims.

Elsewhere, he said that the world is moving towards multipolarism.

Iran seeks speedy implementation of commitments as EU sets up payment channel

1 → Qassemi urged the EU to take immediate action to implement INSTEX in line with Iran’s economic benefits from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

“The European Union’s act in establishing the mechanisms was very late. It is essential for the European Union to make sure that this action will make up for a part of the U.S. illegal actions,” he insisted.

Despite EU’s political position to save the nuclear deal since the U.S. exited the accord and also its insistence on the need that Iranians take economic benefits from the agreement, “unfortunately so far we have not seen any tangible and concrete move” by the bloc to meet Iran’s economic benefits, Qassemi explained.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Iran is ready to continue “constructive interaction” with Europe based on respecting mutual interests.

■ INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran’

The European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt issued a statement saying the INSTEX will

support legitimate European trade with Iran.

“INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran, focusing initially on the sectors most essential to the Iranian population — such as pharmaceutical, medical devices and agri-food goods. INSTEX aims in the long term to be open to economic operators from third countries who wish to trade with Iran and the E3 continue to explore how to achieve this objective,” the statement said, France Diplomatie reported.

It added that INSTEX will function under the highest international standards with regards to anti-money laundering, combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) and EU and UN sanctions compliance.

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.

According to CNBC, Mogherini said in Bucharest, Romania, at a meeting of the bloc that the EU is “fully behind the full implementation of the Iran nuclear deal.”

A statement from official also said, “The lifting of sanctions is an essential dimension of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehen-

sive Plan of Action), the Iran nuclear deal. The instrument launched today will provide economic operators with the necessary framework to pursue legitimate trade with Iran.”

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas also told reporters that “we’re making clear that we didn’t just talk about keeping the nuclear deal with Iran alive, but now we’re creating a possibility to conduct business transactions.”

According to DW, Maas added, “This is a precondition for us to meet the obligations we entered into in order to demand from Iran that it doesn’t begin military uranium enrichment.”

■ What is INSTEX?

* A “special purpose vehicle” that will allow European businesses to trade with Iran, despite strict U.S. sanctions.

* According to media reports, INSTEX will be based in Paris and will be managed by German banking expert Per Fischer, a former manager at Commerzbank. The UK will head the supervisory board.

* The European side intends to use the channel initially only to sell food, medicine and medical devices in Iran. However, it will be possible to expand it in the future.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told national television it was “a first step taken by the European side ... We hope it will cover all goods and items.”

Iran unveils wide-body drone with jet engine

Iran on Thursday unveiled its first home-made wide-body drone with a jet engine in an exhibition held by Armed Forces in Tehran.

The Iranian experts have omitted hydraulic system in the plane and replaced it with electromechanical operators.

The drone is able to send information obtained by sensors to the automatic pilot system and uses INS/GPS navigation system. The Iranian-made plane also enjoys capabilities to send high-quality images to earth.

The J33 engine has also been replaced with J85 engine which is more powerful and displayed more proper operational capabilities.

The Iranian Armed Forces showcased their latest achievements and products, including new drones and weapons, in “Eqtedar 40” exhibition in Tehran on Wednesday.

Iran’s newly developed drone named Kaman 12 with flight durability of 10 hours, 200km speed, operational radius of 1,000km and capability to carry 100kg of cargos was unveiled in the exhibition.

Other achievements displayed in the exhibition include Akhgar missiles mounted on Iranian drones which can hit targets 30km in distance, Qassed 3 cruise missiles carried by F-4 fighters with the capability to destroy targets



100km in distance, air-based Shahin drones with jamming capability which can be mounted on fighter jets, a new version of Shahed 129 drone with the operational range of 2,000km, flight durability of 24 hours and capability to conduct patrolling and reconnaissance operations and destruction of targets with bombs and missiles, RQ-170 drones, Saeqeh-2 drones, which have already been in missions against the Takfiri terrorists and their leaders in Eastern Euphrates region in Syria, with the capability to carry smart bombs, and Mohajer-6 drones, equipped with home-made Qa'em missiles.

(Source: Fars)

Press TV journalist arrives in Iran after detention in U.S.

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Press TV anchor Marzieh Hashemi, who was jailed in the U.S. without charge for days and later freed amid public outcry, arrived at Tehran’s Imam Khomeini International Airport on Wednesday night and was welcomed by her relatives and colleagues, according to the network’s website.

Hashemi, a 59-year-old American-born Muslim convert who has lived in Iran for years, was detained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at St. Louis Lambert International Airport in Missouri on January 13 while in the U.S. to visit her ill brother and other family members.

The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) World Service, Peyman Jebelli, told reporters at Imam Khomeini Airport that the release of Marzieh Hasehmi marked a victory for freedom of expression and a setback for the U.S.

Jebelli said the U.S., which was seeking to humiliate the Press TV anchor, was itself belittled by all those who stood by her.

He said that support for her was synonymous with support for justice and righteousness.

Hashemi was released on January 23



after some 10 days in detention without a charge at a facility in Washington DC.

A U.S. federal court failed to indict the journalist, who was arrested as a material witness and in an unspecified criminal proceeding, of any crime.

Hashemi’s detention prompted condemnation in the U.S. and abroad, sparking rallies in several countries.

In an address during demonstrations in Washington, Hashemi recounted her ordeal during her time in jail and mistreatment by the American justice system.

While in detention, she was forced to remove her hijab and was only offered non-halal food.

Workers of Venezuela oil industry rally against U.S. sanctions

Workers of a Venezuelan oil giant, which was hit by the United States, have taken to the streets to support President Nicolas Maduro, calling on Washington to keep its “hands off” the oil industry.

Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, who delivered a speech to the crowd, said all masks have been removed from the U.S. President Donald Trump.

Rodriguez said that Trump, his Vice-President Mike Pence and his national security adviser John Bolton, “all without exception, have said they are coming for the oil of Venezuela and what is our response? Yankee hands, off our oil industry!”

In an address to the gathering, Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo said that Venezuelans “have to reject, unilaterally, arbitrary measures of theft of Citgo,” a company which operates three refineries in the U.S.

The Trump administration announced a new round of sanctions against oil firm Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) earlier this week, to funnel income from the country’s main oil exporter into the hands of opposition leader Juan Guaido.

Guaido, who declared himself “interim president” last week, was immediately recognized as Venezuela’s rightful leader by Washington and its allies.

Maduro described the sanctions as “illegal, unilateral, immoral, (and) criminal,” saying Washington intended to steal the company from all Venezuelans.

To support the elected government of Maduro, and denounce what they believe to be a coup d’etat, protesters took to the streets of the capital Caracas on Thursday.

Maduro himself addressed Trump in an English message on Wednesday, urging him not to get involved with Venezuela. “Hands off Venezuela! Donald Trump, hands off Venezuela!” he tweeted.

The Venezuelan president has accused Washington of masterminding a coup against his government.

■ **Catalans support Maduro, Venezuelans**

In a show of solidarity with Venezuelans, people in Catalonia gathered outside



the European Union’s (EU) headquarters in Barcelona on Thursday night.

The rally organizers said it showed support for Maduro and protest “against the coup and internal interference” in the oil-rich country.

Earlier in the day, the European Parliament voted to recognize the self-proclaimed president as Venezuela’s legitimate leader and urged the European Union to follow suit.

The motion urges Brussels to accept Guaido as “legitimate interim president of the country until new free, transparent and credible presidential elections can be called in order to restore democracy.”

■ **Greeks rally in solidarity with Venezuelans**

Elsewhere in Europe, Greeks rallied to express their support for the elected government of Maduro and the Venezuelan people.

Demonstrators marched from central Athens to the parliament and the U.S. embassy, holding flags of Venezuela and chanting anti-EU and anti-U.S. slogans.

The Trump administration, which has

been putting pressure on the government of President Maduro, has put “all options on the table,” including the military option, to remove him from power.

The Lima Group — a 14-country bloc that includes Canada — expressed opposition to any military intervention in Venezuela, though it has already recognized the opposition leader as the president of Venezuela.

The bloc had also refused to recognize Maduro as president before he was sworn in for a second six-year term earlier this month.

The army has remained loyal to the president amid the crisis.

■ **Britain calls for economic pressure against Maduro, refuses to return Venezuelan gold**

Meantime, Britain has expressed support for economic sanctions against Venezuela.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said on Thursday that tightening economic pressure against Venezuelan “kleptocrats” could force President Nicolas Maduro to accept opposition calls for early elections.

Over 20 dead in U.S. polar vortex, frostbite amputations feared

Tens of millions of Americans braved Arctic-like temperatures on Thursday as low as minus 49 Celsius that paralyzed the U.S. Midwest and were blamed for at least 21 deaths.

Warmer-than-normal weather was on the way, but that offered little comfort to vulnerable populations such as the homeless and elderly enduring cold that caused frostbite in minutes and made being outside potentially deadly.

Officials across multiple states linked numerous deaths to the frigid air. The death toll rose from a previous 12 after at least nine more people in Chicago were reported to have died from cold-related injuries, according to Stathis Poulakidas, a doctor at the city’s John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital.

Poulakidas, a trauma specialist, said the hospital had seen about 25 frostbite victims this week. He said the most severe cases risked having fingers and toes amputated.

Among those believed to have died from the cold was University of Iowa student Gerard Belz. The eighteen-year-old was found unresponsive on campus early on Wednesday morning just a short walk from his dorm, according to university officials. Police told a local television station they believed the cold played a factor in his death. The wind chill at the time officers found Belz was minus 46 C, according to the National Weather Service.

Homeless and displaced people were particularly at risk, with Chicago and other cities setting up warming shelters. But many toughed it out in camps or vacant buildings. A 60-year-old woman found dead in an abandoned house in Lorain, Ohio, was believed to have died of hypothermia,



Lorain County Coroner Stephen Evans said.

It has been more than 20 years since a similar blast of frigid air covered a swath of the United States Midwest and Northeast, according to the National Weather Service.

The bitter cold was caused by the mass of air known as the polar vortex drifting south from its usual position over the North Pole.

Homes and businesses used record amounts of natural gas to fight the cold, according to financial data provider Refinitiv. Utilities appealed to consumers to conserve energy

to avoid power outages.

In Detroit, General Motors Co. suspended operations at 11 Michigan plants to cut natural gas consumption. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV canceled a shift on Thursday at two of its plants.

Snow and ice created treacherous travel conditions, with 26 road collisions reported within two hours on Thursday in eastern Iowa’s Johnson County, emergency communications center chief Tom Jones told the Iowa City Press-Citizen.

For the second day in a row, the intense cold and windy conditions forced the U.S. airlines to cancel more than 2,000 flights. Chicago was hardest hit, with O’Hare International Airport experiencing over 700 cancellations, according to the FlightAware tracking site.

Heavy snow hitting Chicago off the Great Lakes was set to begin winding down on Thursday night, the weather service said.

More than 30 record lows were shattered across the Midwest. Cotton, Minnesota, had the lowest national temperature recorded early on Thursday at minus 48 C, before the weather warmed up, the weather service reported.

Temperatures in the Upper Midwest will rebound to well above minus 18 C on Friday, with highs making it into the teens and low 20s F. By Saturday, highs will be in the 30s and even low 40s F, while the central Plains will be in the low 60s F, nearly 20 to 25 degrees above normal, the weather service said.

(Source: Daily Star)

U.S. suspends compliance with INF treaty, may withdraw in 6 months

Germany: Missile treaty dead as Europe frets about arms race

The United States is suspending its compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia on Saturday and will withdraw from the landmark 1987 arms control accord in six months if Moscow does not end its alleged violation of the pact, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday.

Pompeo said that the administration will provide a formal notice to Russia that the U.S. is withdrawing from INF treaty in six months, and if Moscow doesn’t come into compliance, the treaty “will terminate”.

An American withdrawal from pact has been expected for months, and follows repeated accusations by Washington that Moscow is violating the treaty - a charge the Kremlin denies.

Meanwhile, Germany said on Friday that Russia had “de facto invalidated” a landmark Cold War missile reduction treaty which the

U.S. is poised to abandon, with Europe anxious at the prospect of a new arms race.

A U.S. deadline for Russia to come back into compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty expires on Saturday but Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will reportedly announce the pullout as early as Friday.

Western capitals say a new Russian medium-range missile system breaches the terms of the 1987 treaty and puts European cities at risk.

Heiko Maas, the German foreign minister who has shuttled between Moscow and Washington in recent weeks trying to save the INF treaty, said Russia was still in breach.

“We must note that the INF treaty has been violated by the Russian side and that the appeals of the last 60 days for more transparency and more information have

come to nothing,” Maas said as he arrived for talks with fellow European Union foreign ministers in Bucharest.

“A treaty to which two contracting states belong and which has been violated by one side has de facto been invalidated.”

The INF treaty, signed by then U.S. president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, banned ground-launched missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers and ended a dangerous build-up of warheads in Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned of a new arms race if the treaty collapses – a prospect that has alarmed some European nations.

Hungary’s Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said history had taught his country “a very clear lesson.”

“This clear lesson is whenever there was a conflict between east and west, we central

Europeans always lost,” he said.

“We as Hungary I don’t think we have too much leverage in this issue. We can just cross fingers for a more pragmatic cooperation between east and west.”

Pompeo announced in December that the U.S. would start the six-month process to quit the INF if Russia did not withdraw its 9M729 missile system by Feb. 2, using the period to start work on new missiles.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) chief Jens Stoltenberg has said military commanders will begin preparing for “a world without an INF treaty” but insisted the alliance was still committed to arms reduction.

Russia insists the missile system complies with the treaty, and displayed it to foreign military officials and media last week in a bid to allay concerns.

(Source: agencies)

Trump ‘serious’ about Afghan withdrawal: Taliban

The United States President Donald Trump is serious about getting out of Afghanistan, the Taliban told AFP on Friday, outlining the “Islamic system” comprising “all Afghans” that the terrorists group says it hopes to establish under any peace deal.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid spoke to AFP via WhatsApp a day after the U.S. said talks with the terrorists are “on the right path,” fueling speculation of a breakthrough in the 17-year conflict.

The U.S. president’s apparent eagerness to pull troops out has weighed on the negotiations, which culminated with six straight days of meetings in Qatar last week.

“An agreement was reached on a principle framework... which, if implemented, and if the Americans take honest steps and stick to it truthfully, then God willing we are hopeful that the Americans will end the occupation of Afghanistan,” Mujahid said.

“It appears that Trump is serious,” the Taliban spokesman continued. The U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad also spoke this week of a “draft framework” for a deal, though he warned that major hurdles – including any U.S. withdrawal – remain.

Experts have hailed the development as a milestone in the grinding 17-year conflict.

But it has prompted concerns from Afghans and observers who feared foreign troops could withdraw before a lasting peace is reached between the insurgents and the government in Kabul.

The Taliban took over Afghanistan in 1996, imposing Shariah law on the country until they were toppled in the U.S. invasion of 2001. They have since fought an insurgency demanding foreign troops leave and an Islamic state be re-established.

Mujahid said a foreign withdrawal was the first goal.

“Secondly, we want the establishment of an Islamic system,” he continued, a goal they will seek through “negotiations with different political sides, even if they have so far been under the umbrella of the invaders.”

If the democratic government in Kabul will not stand in the way, he added, “then of course there will be no need for war and conflict.”

Mujahid said the insurgents are not seeking to monopolize power. “Inshallah [God willing] all Afghans, including different political sides” can take part, he told AFP.

Such a system would be based on the principle of shura, or council, with Islamic experts making decisions and “representatives of people and scholars” contributing.

Mujahid said the group was “100 percent hopeful” of establishing such a system.

He said the next round of talks with the U.S. will again take place in Doha starting Feb. 25.

The U.S. has said talks will continue, but not confirmed any date.

(Source: AFP)

Israeli attorney general says he can rule on Netanyahu indictment before election

Israel’s attorney general said on Friday there was no legal reason to prevent him from indicting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on corruption charges before an election on April 9 should he decide such a move was warranted.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit said his team was still examining the case materials and intended to make a decision as soon as possible.

Netanyahu is facing possible charges in three graft cases. He denies any wrongdoing and has called the cases a witch-hunt.

He is still the favorite to win the election but opinion polls show one of his toughest challengers, former general Benny Gantz, making gains. Mandelblit said he had informed Netanyahu’s lawyers “there is no impediment to making and publishing a decision, if there is any, to consider filing an indictment in the cases relating to the prime minister, or part of them, subject to a hearing, even before the election date.”

Netanyahu has said he would not bow out of the race if Mandelblit announces his intention to accept police recommendations to indict him. Police say Netanyahu granted regulatory favors to leading telecommunications company Bezeq Telecom Israel in return for more positive coverage on a news website belonging to the firm’s owner.

In a second case, police contend that Netanyahu received expensive gifts from rich friends. A third investigation focuses on suspicions that Netanyahu negotiated a deal with one newspaper for better coverage in return for promises to back legislation that would have limited the circulation of a rival.

(Source: Reuters)

Bahraini court gives death sentence to activist, life terms to nearly two dozen others

A court in Bahrain has sentenced an anti-regime activist to death and passed life imprisonment against nearly two dozen other political dissidents as the ruling House of Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy-handed clampdown on pro-democracy protesters in the Persian Gulf tiny state.

On Thursday, Bahrain’s Fourth High Criminal Court passed the death penalty on a Bahraini national and sentenced 23 other activists to life in prison, the Arabic-language Lualua television network reported.

Furthermore, the court stripped all the activists of their Bahraini citizenship.

Manama has accused all the defendants of launching an alleged bomb attack in the area of the western coastal village of Dumistan back in 2014, which resulted in the death of a security officer, the report further said.

The court also ordered the third and fourth convicts to pay a fine of 200,000 dinars (\$ 530,480) each.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

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

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	160294.9
IFX	1932.04

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,315 rials
GBP	55,134 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$61.30/b
WTI	\$54.02/b
OPEC Basket	\$60.93/b
Gold	\$1,321.20 /oz
Silver	\$16.03/oz
Platinum	\$831.55oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



5000 agricultural research projects underway across Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran’s Agricultural

Research Education and Extension Organization (AREEO) said the organization is conducting 5000 agricultural research projects across the country, IRNA reported.

“Currently, 5000 agricultural research projects are being implemented by this organization with the aim of increasing agricultural production and improving horticulture in the country,” Kazem Khavazi said on the sidelines of Iran’s first national conference on agricultural and environmental sciences.

According to the official, with each project completed and implemented in the agricultural and horticultural sectors, 3.3 billion rials (about \$750,000) will be added to Iranian farmers and beneficiaries’ annual income.

Japan’s economy set to rebound on capex, consumer spending in Q4

Japan’s economy likely rebounded in the fourth quarter led by capital expenditure and consumer spending but weak exports could dampen the momentum, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

Slowing global demand and U.S.-Sino trade frictions have already taken their toll on the trade-reliant economy, and rising external pressures are expected to drag on growth this year.

Gross domestic product (GDP) was seen expanding an annualised 1.4 percent in the October-December quarter, the poll found, after the third quarter shrank 2.5 percent - the most in more than four years as companies slashed spending and business activity was hurt by typhoons and an earthquake.



The expected annualised growth would translate into a 0.4 percent quarter-on-quarter expansion after the economy shrank 0.6 percent in the third quarter, the poll showed.

“The data will likely confirm the economy in the latter half of last year slowed down to be nearly at a standstill,” said Yoshiaki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. “Growth in exports was sluggish because of a slowdown in the overseas economy.”

Capital spending was expected to have grown 1.8 percent in the fourth quarter, bouncing back from a 2.8 percent fall in the third quarter, the poll found.

Private consumption, which accounts for about 60 percent of GDP, likely rose 0.8 percent for the quarter, after it fell 0.2 percent in July-September, it showed.

External demand - or exports minus imports - was seen likely to take 0.4 percentage point off GDP growth in the final quarter of 2018, the poll showed. It would be the biggest subtraction since October-December 2013.

“We believe the economy from January-March continues to lack strength reflecting the external economic slowdown. If uncertainties rise further due to factors such as trade war, it could lead to a slowdown in exports and capital spending,” said Kentaro Arita, senior economist at Mizuho Research Institute.

The Cabinet Office will announce the GDP data on Feb. 14 at 8:50 a.m. Japan time (2350 GMT, Feb. 13).

The poll also showed the nation’s household spending grew 0.8 percent in December from a year earlier, up for the first time in four months.

“In addition to price falls in gasoline and fresh food, winter bonuses seem to have been firm. The recovery trend in consumer spending appears to be intact,” said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

Japan’s current account surplus was expected to have contracted to 429.8 billion yen (\$3.95 billion) in December from 757.2 billion yen in November as its trade surplus narrowed on weak exports to Asia, according to the poll.

The government will announce household spending at 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 8 Friday (2330 GMT on Feb. 7) and will release current account balance data at 8:50 a.m. on the same day.

(Source: Reuters)

SPV: A European mechanism to struggle U.S., gain economic autonomy

By Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh

In their joint statement on that last day of January, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, and British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt introduced the SPV (a special purpose vehicle) also called INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges), the financial mechanism which enables Iran to keep doing business with the rest of the world despite the draconian financial sanctions imposed by the Trump administration.

The instrument, created due to Iran’s full compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran and making exchange of goods between Iranian companies and foreign ones by circumventing the American banking system and currency.

Financed jointly by the E3, registered in France and run by a German banker, the INSTEX is in accordance with E3 resolute commitment and continued efforts to preserve the JCPOA endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2231.

According to the published statement of the E3 foreign ministers, INSTEX aims in the long term to be open to economic operators from third countries who wish to trade with Iran and the E3 continue to explore how to achieve this objective.

SPV’s operationalization follows a step-by-step approach. “The E3 together with INSTEX will continue to work on concrete and operational details to define the way the company will operate. They will also work with Iran to create an effective and transparent corresponding entity that



From left, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas launch the long-awaited special vehicle for Iran trade in Bucharest, Romania, on Jan. 31. (Daniel Mihailescu/AFP/Getty Images)

is required to be able to operationalize INSTEX,” the released joint statement said.

“INSTEX will function under the highest international standards with regards to anti-money laundering, combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) and EU and UN sanctions compliance. In this respect, the E3 expect Iran to swiftly implement all elements of its FATF action plan,” it added.

It is worth noting that, Iranian Parliament voted in favor of the CFT (the convention combatting financing of terrorism) on October 7, however, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill at the time. Iran’s Expediency Council is now

debating the CFT and Palermo Convention as preludes to join the FATF. The issue of its rejection or ratification is presently of the most controversial ones in the country. Some express that joining the CFT will not be in the interests of the Islamic Republic, while others believe the Supreme National Security Council favors FATF. The Guardian Council should vet the bill for compliance with the Constitution.

Although it takes some months to make the SPV operational, the decision can be translated as Europeans’ effort to gain its economic sovereignty by counterweighting U.S. economic power, primacy of dollar in international financial transactions as well

as the U.S. President’s unpredictability and tyrant attitude toward international agreements including the JCPOA.

The idea of setting up the INSTEX was raised on the sidelines of the UN session last September i.e. the instrument has been created almost in four months, which is rather a short period. This can prove Europeans’ full commitment to their made promises to Iran and their full support for the country’s nuclear agreement.

However, the main question would be European companies’ tendency for using the SPV and if they would feel confident to barter goods with Iran with no fear from any probable U.S. punishment.

The U.S. State Department announced on Thursday that “as the president has made clear, entities that continue to engage in sanctionable activity involving Iran risk severe consequences that could include losing access to the U.S. financial system and the ability to do business with the United States or U.S. companies.”

The announcement expresses the U.S. government’s rage, as its hegemony and autocracy over the world is threatened.

For sure, the established instrument would act as a practical vehicle for small and medium-sized European enterprises with the least amount of exposure to the American-governed financial systems but it is to strengthen the international role of euro in financial transactions, and provide the Eurozone an incremental growth of economic power.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said on Thursday that once the payment channel implemented “no danger would be posed to Iran-Europe financial mechanism.”

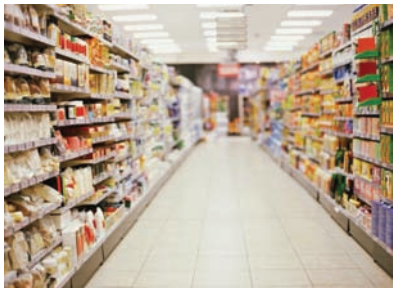
Foodstuff, pharmaceutical exports up 4.6% in 9 months on year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – The value of exports of foodstuff, pharmaceutical and sanitary products in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – September 21, 2018) increased by 4.62 percent compared to the last year’s same period, IRIB reported.

According to Mehdi Sadeghi Niaraki, the director general of the Industry, Mines and Trade Ministry’s Department of Food, Medicine and Health Industries, some \$2.51 billion worth of such commodities were exported in the mentioned timespan.

As reported, 1.7 million tons of foodstuff, pharmaceutical and sanitary products were exported in the said period registering a 6.2 percent rise year on year in terms of weight.

The official noted that dairy and ice cream products, sweets and chocolates, saffron, tomato paste, juices and concentrates, animal feedstock, poultry



and aquaculture, yeast, pasta, wheat flour, potato products, as well as detergents, different types of medicine were the main items exported during the nine-month period.

“Iran is currently exporting foodstuff, pharmaceutical and sanitary products to 16 different countries,” Sadeghi said.

The exports in this sector account for 8.23 percent of the country’s total non-oil exports.

South Pars platform 24A shipped toward installation spot

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Platform 24A, the second platform of phases 22-24 of developing South Pars gas field, was shipped on Thursday to be installed on its designated offshore spot, Farhad Izadjou, the operator of these phases, announced.

While starting operation the platform is planned to produce 500 million cubic feet (14.2 million cubic meters) of gas per day, Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of implementing development phases of South Pars, published on its website.

Phases 22-24 are expected to produce 56 million cubic meters of sour gas, 75,000 billion barrels of gas condensate, and 400 tons of sulfur per day, in addition to 50 million cubic meters of methane, 2,900 tons of LPG and 2,750 tons of ethane.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an



area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran’s territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar’s territorial waters.

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

India government steps up farm support, gives tax relief in pre-election budget

India’s government pledged 750 billion rupees (\$10.56 billion) to support poor farmers and reduced the tax burden for the middle class on Friday, as it looked to rally support from voters with the final budget before a general election.

Heading into polls that must be held by May, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is facing discontent over depressed farm incomes and doubts over whether his policies are creating enough jobs.

And with opinion polls suggesting that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could lose its parliamentary majority, the government delivered a budget to shore up support in the countryside, where two-thirds of Indians live, and among the urban, salary-earning middle class.

The interim budget for 2019/2020 offered direct cash support of 6,000 rupees to 120 million poor farmers and allocated more funds for a rural jobs guarantee scheme and rural development, like building roads and homes.

Vying with an opposition that has also trumpeted budget-straining populist measures to support from poorer voters, the government said it would launch a pension scheme for workers in the unorganized sector, which employs some 420 million people.

The budget proposals also reduced the burden for the lower middle class, by exempting people earning up to 500,000 rupees from income tax from an earlier cap of 250,000 rupees.

Still, the measures announced on Friday were aimed at putting money into pockets quickly.

“This is not just an interim budget, this is a vehicle for the developmental transformation of the nation,” Acting Finance Minister Piyush Goyal told



the lower house of parliament, as BJP lawmakers thumped their desks and chanted “Modi, Modi”.

“India is solidly back on track and marching towards growth and prosperity,” said Goyal, who delivered the budget in place of Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who was in the United States for medical treatment.

India was expected to expand 7.2 percent this fiscal year, Goyal said, keeping its slot as one of the world’s fastest growing major economies.

But a report in the Business Standard daily the previous day belied the government bullishness over the economy. It said that the government has been withholding an official survey that showed India’s unemployment rate at its highest in decades.

Garima Kapoor, an economist at Elara Capital investment bank in Mumbai, said the budget favored farmers, older voters, workers in the unorganized sector, small and medium sized businesses and middle

class families.

“The budget is clearly farm-focused, with the elections in mind,” Kapoor said.

The interim budget for 2019/20 allocated 600 billion rupees for a rural jobs program and 190 billion for building of roads in the countryside.

Slippage

The big giveaways resulted in fiscal slippage, for a government that has been seeking to drag down its deficit.

The budget would put the fiscal deficit for the year ending on March 31 at 3.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), slightly higher than the targeted 3.3 percent.

Goyal set a deficit target of 3.4 percent for 2019/20, instead of the earlier target of 3.1 percent, but he went onto project the deficit would come down to 3 percent in both of the following two years.

“Overall, the government presented an expansionary budget and prioritized populism over fiscal prudence,” analysts at investment bank Nomura said in a note,

calling it an election budget.

India’s fiscal slippage also drew a warning from credit rating agency Moody’s Investors Service.

“Taken together, it doesn’t really bode well for their medium-term fiscal consolidation targets,” said Gene Fang, associate managing director at Moody’s sovereign risk group. “From that perspective we would say, on balance, it’s credit negative.”

But Fang said the budget announcements did not change the rating agency’s stance on India. Moody’s rates India at “Baa2” with a “stable” outlook.

Analysts were skeptical about the government’s ability to even meet its upwardly revised fiscal deficit targets for the ongoing and upcoming fiscal year, noting that the government’s revenue projections, especially from the goods and services tax (GST) seem optimistic.

“Their revenue estimates seem to be optimistic, particularly on the GST front, which the government is budgeting at about 18 percent growth rate,” said Shashank Mendiratta an economist with IBM in New Delhi, adding that forecast looked “very aggressive.”

India’s bond yields spiked amid worries over the fiscal slippage and the government’s borrowing plans. The benchmark 10-year bond yield rose 14 basis points to 7.62 percent, while the rupee traded at 71.26 against the U.S. dollar, about 17 paise weaker than its close on Thursday.

The country’s stock markets gained, however, on expectations that the budget would boost consumption. The broader NSE index closed up 0.6 percent at 10893.65.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil prices buoyed by trade talk hopes, but pressured by weak China data

Oil prices edged up on Friday amid hopes the United States and China could soon settle their trade disputes, although data from China stoked concerns over an economic slowdown that could dent demand for fuel.

International Brent crude oil futures were at \$61.06 per barrel at 0755 GMT, 22 cents, or 0.4 percent, above their last close.

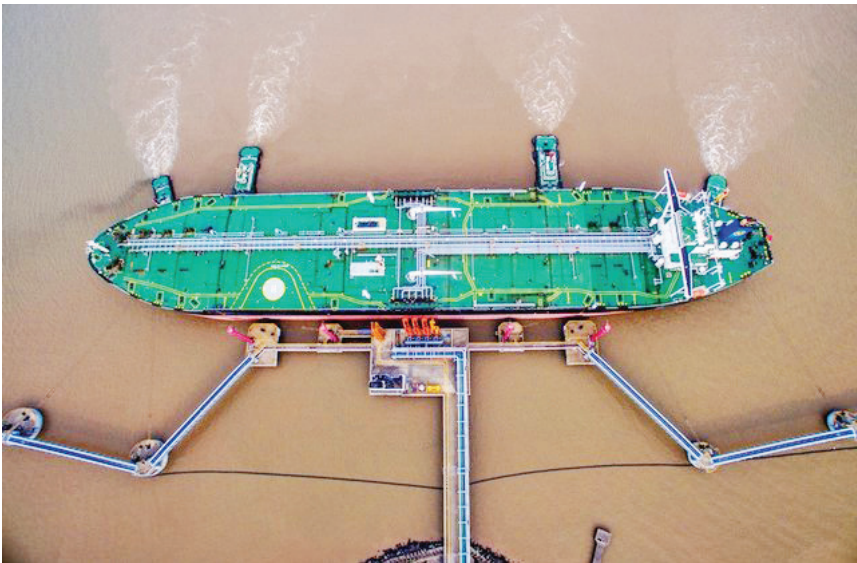
U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures were at \$53.86 per barrel, up 7 cents from their last settlement.

Oil prices were supported as U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday he would meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping soon to try to seal a comprehensive trade deal.

But crude markets were weighed down by a survey on Friday that showed China's factory activity shrank by the most in almost three years in January amid slumping orders, reinforcing fears a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy is deepening.

With China's industry a key consumer of fuels like diesel, such a slowdown would also likely hit fuel demand.

Despite these concerns, traders said oil markets overall are being supported by supply



cuts from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which according to a Reuters poll pumped 30.98 million barrels

per day (bpd) in January, down 890,000 bpd from December.

In Venezuela, meanwhile, U.S. sanctions

imposed on state oil firm PDVSA this week are keeping tankers stuck at ports as American refineries that rely on Venezuelan feedstock cut back operations.

"The latest U.S. sanctions could directly halt around 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Venezuelan exports to the U.S.," Citi bank said.

Much Venezuelan crude oil is rated as heavy and requires the light petroleum naphtha, much of it supplied from the United States, for dilution before export to refineries.

"An additional 350,000 bpd of Venezuelan oil output is at risk due to the lack of U.S. dilutents, a result of the U.S. product exports ban with immediate effect," Citi said.

Some relief especially to U.S. refineries may come in the form of Canadian heavy crude, despite infrastructure constraints between the two countries.

"The Alberta government announced it was increasing the oil production curtailment limit for February and March to 3.63 million bpd, which translates in restoring 75,000 bpd of the 325,000 bpd cut announced in December," U.S. investment bank Jefferies said on Friday.

(Source: Reuters)

The next big threat for oil comes from China

There is a widespread concern in the world regarding China's decelerating economic growth. The slowdown, if it continues, threatens economic activity almost everywhere. Growth in Germany, for example, has already cooled due to its exports of high-quality machinery to China dropping precipitously.

Those in the oil market also worry about China. The country's economic growth has been a key driver of global crude oil consumption. Indeed, China accounts for one-third of the International Energy Agency's projected 2019 increase in world oil use.

Weak Chinese economic growth is not the end of the oil market's prospective ills, however. Few recognize the additional trouble on tap from the Chinese independent refiners affectionally known as "teapots." The danger occurs because lower oil demand growth in China comes just when independent refining capacity there is rising. The capacity growth has been financed primarily by debt, most likely supplied by China's alternative lenders. As demand slows, these refiners will turn to international markets, dumping products in Singapore, the Americas, or Europe to earn hard cash. In doing so, they could plunge the global refining industry into a serious recession and drive crude prices down sharply.

This will not be the first time that refineries in Asia caused a crisis in the oil sector. In 1997, Korean refiners did the same during the Asian financial collapse. That incident is described in the December 1997 Oil Market Intelligence (OMI). The report begins by noting that Korean refiners had begun to seek exports markets before the crisis hit "mostly to employ 620,000 b/d of new refining capacity that came on stream since late 1966." The effort intensified as domestic consumption collapsed:

But once the won started its second descent

in two years—it dropped over 94% against the dollar between July 1 and December 10 [1997], much of it in early December—the push to export became more desperate because the five big refiners could not recoup in domestic product prices the staggering dollar price of crude oil feedstock. ("Economic Crisis Spills Over onto Oil Markets," Oil Market Intelligence, December 1997, p. 11.)

The article noted that Korean refiners were trying to sell products to China, Taiwan, and Japan. It added that Korea's exports to China rose fourfold between January and October, while its share of the Chinese gasoil import market went from seven to twenty-six percent. The Asian refining center in Singapore lost market share, falling from seventy-five to twenty-six percent.

The OMI report also observed ominously that "shippers and traders report that Korean refiners are lowering prices to meet their need to expand that share."

The gasoil market suffered significantly. The OMI editors explained that Korea's use was declining (consumption dropped one hundred fifty thousand barrels per day, or thirty-three percent, in December 1997 from December 1996), causing refiners to push gasoil to China. Those sales pressured margins at refineries in Singapore. The editors added, "If its [Korea's] five refiners can keep importing crude oil—and the government is now talking of using foreign exchange reserves to finance crude purchases and overcome private credit squeezes—it is likely to keep pumping out the product to its neighbors."

Looking back twenty years, one sees this is what happened. Figure 1 traces the price of gasoil and premium gasoline in Singapore by month from January 1997 to December 1999. Spot gasoil prices plunged from a peak of \$32.50 per barrel in December 1996 to a low of \$13.80 in

October 1998. Distillate cracks measured against spot Dubai crude dropped from \$9 per barrel in December 1996 to zero in 1999.

Arbitrage carried the impact of the Korean fire sale across the globe. Gasoil prices fell fifty-eight percent in Singapore from December 1996 to October 1998. In the U.S. Gulf Coast market, they declined fifty-eight percent from December 1996 to February 1999. In Europe, the decline was fifty-one percent.

Korea's fire sale of products precipitated a crude price decrease. As I have written often, product prices often lead crude prices. This was the case in the Asian crisis. Energy Intelligence Group data show that the netback on Dubai crude at Singapore declined from \$23 per barrel in December 1996 to \$9 in February 1999. Spot crude prices followed, as did prices for export contracts linked to spot crude prices.

Chinese independent refiners may be emulating the action of Korean refiners in 1997 and 1998. The Wall Street Journal warned on January 23 that the economic slowdown in China could curb Chinese gasoline consumption, which would "mean a flood of exports to the rest of Asia." The WSJ author, Kevin Kingsbury, added that regional refining margins could be pressured.

Kingsbury explained that the economic slowdown would reduce growth in China's oil consumption as refining capacity there increased:

Nomura forecasts demand growth of 0.5% this year, slowing from an estimated 4% last year. At the same time, Chinese refineries will increase production capacity by some 6%, according to Fitch Solutions.

He also noted that export quotas for gasoline, jet fuel, and fuel oil rose thirty-five percent last year. Further increases are expected for 2019 "so Chinese refiners can maintain production."

In this regard, a January 24 report from

Bloomberg is concerning. In it, Jack Wittels wrote that "a fleet of giant newly built oil tankers is gearing up to ship diesel out of East Asia." Five new tankers are positioned off China's coast, each with a capacity of two million barrels. Two additional tankers will shortly join the "armada." Four of the parked vessels are already loaded or loading. The products will likely move to Europe, where margins are high.

These will not be the last shipments from China. In past economic downturns, the decrease in petroleum product consumption has lagged the falloff in economic activity. For example, the December 1997 OMI began its discussion of problems in Asia with this observation: "a few short months ago it seemed that Asia's economic woes were unlikely to affect oil demand in a major way, and that the financial crisis could be contained in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines." The article then continued ruefully, "Neither proposition looks valid anymore."

The increased exports from China will reduce refining margins across the globe just as margins are being squeezed by a gasoline surplus and as refiners get ready to meet the IMO 2020 standard. This situation could have serious impacts on U.S. and European refiners. Profits could come under intense pressure, particularly at firms that have been boosting product exports from the United States to Europe and the Americas.

Attention must stay riveted on China for the rest of 2019. The volume of product exports from its refineries will keep rising if its economy continues to falter, as many believe it will. The country's problems, and problems for the world refining industry, will be compounded if the United States and China cannot resolve their trade war.

(Source: oilprice.com)

OPEC oil output drops on Saudi cut, outages and sanctions

OPEC oil supply has fallen in January by the largest amount in two years, a Reuters survey found, as Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies over-delivered on the group's supply-cutting pact while Iran, Libya and Venezuela registered involuntary declines.

The 14-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has pumped 30.98 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, the survey showed on Thursday, down 890,000 bpd from December and the largest month-on-month drop since January 2017.

The survey suggests OPEC is almost three quarters of the way in delivering supply cuts that started on Jan. 1 in an effort to avert a glut, even though the group's second-largest producer Iraq and some smaller members pumped above agreed levels.

An OPEC official said he hoped more members would deliver on their pledges and that the drop in supply so far was acceptable, calling it a "good start".

Crude oil has risen to \$62 a barrel after a dip below \$50 in December, boosted by the Saudi cuts, a host of involuntary curbs in other OPEC countries and the prospect of lower supply from Venezuela after U.S. President Donald Trump this week imposed sanctions on its oil industry.



OPEC, Russia and other non-members - an alliance known as OPEC+ - agreed in December to reduce supply by 1.2 million bpd from Jan. 1. OPEC's share of the cut is 800,000 bpd, to be delivered by 11 members - all except Iran, Libya and Venezuela.

In January the 11 OPEC members bound by the supply-limiting agreement achieved 70 percent of the pledged cuts, the survey found. Further declines in Iran, Libya and Venezuela boosted the total OPEC decline to 890,000 bpd.

The latest OPEC+ deal came months after they had agreed to pump more oil, which in turn partially unwound their original supply-limiting accord that took effect in 2017.

■ Saudi cut

The biggest drop in supply came from Saudi Arabia, OPEC's biggest oil producer, which pumped 350,000 bpd less than in December, the survey showed.

Saudi supply in November had hit a record-high 11 million bpd, after Trump demanded more be pumped to curb rising prices and make up for losses from Iran. The kingdom rapidly changed course as prices slid on the prospect of oversupply in 2019.

The second- and third-biggest drops occurred in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, which like Saudi delivered a larger cut than required under the deal, the survey found.

Of the three OPEC members exempted from making voluntary cuts, Libyan production fell the most as unrest kept the country's biggest oilfield, Sharara, offline for a month.

Output from Iran declined further as U.S. sanctions discouraged companies from buying its oil. Iran has managed to maintain crude exports of as much as 1 million bpd, helped by sanctions waivers and its efforts to keep selling crude.

Production in Venezuela, once a top-three OPEC producer but whose output has been sliding amid the country's economic collapse, posted a further drop in January, the survey found.

The U.S. sanctions imposed on state oil firm PDVSA this week are keeping tankers stuck at ports and expected to accelerate the supply drop in February.

Among countries showing lower compliance, Iraq reduced output in January but pumped more than its target, as did Nigeria and Algeria. Gabon kept output steady.

The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consulting firms.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. oil clinches best January gain on record

US oil prices recorded their sharpest January gain on record, turning a page from a dismal end to 2018 when prices plunged into a bear market.

West Texas Intermediate, the US benchmark, swiftly crumbled after hitting a four-year high in October, pressured by traders' concerns that strong US production and weakening fuel demand would help spark a global oversupply.

Prices have since recovered, coinciding with output cuts by OPEC and Russia that took effect on January 1. Also, this week, the US placed sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned PDVSA, a move that could disrupt supplies.

WTI edged 0.8 per cent lower to \$53.79 a barrel on Thursday, but clinched its best January on records back to 1983 with a monthly gain of more than 18 per cent. It was also WTI's best month overall since April 2016.

However, WTI remains 29 per cent below its October high of around \$76 a barrel.

Brent, the international marker, fell 0.4 per cent to \$61.89 a barrel on Thursday but also registered its best month since April 2016, gaining 15 per cent in January.

Traders are keeping tabs on the Chinese economy. Optimism over US-China trade talks supported oil's January rally, but signs of an economic slowdown in China have driven worries that fuel demand is on the decline. Negotiations between the US and China continued this week in Washington, and President Donald Trump said no final deal would materialize until he meets with Chinese president Xi Jinping.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iraq state oil company to drill 40 wells in Majnoon field

Iraq's Basra Oil Co. has agreed a deal with state-run Iraq Drilling Co. to drill 40 new oil wells in the giant southern Majnoon field, the Oil Ministry said on Thursday. The deal will help boost output from the Majnoon oilfield to 450,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2021, the ministry said in a statement.

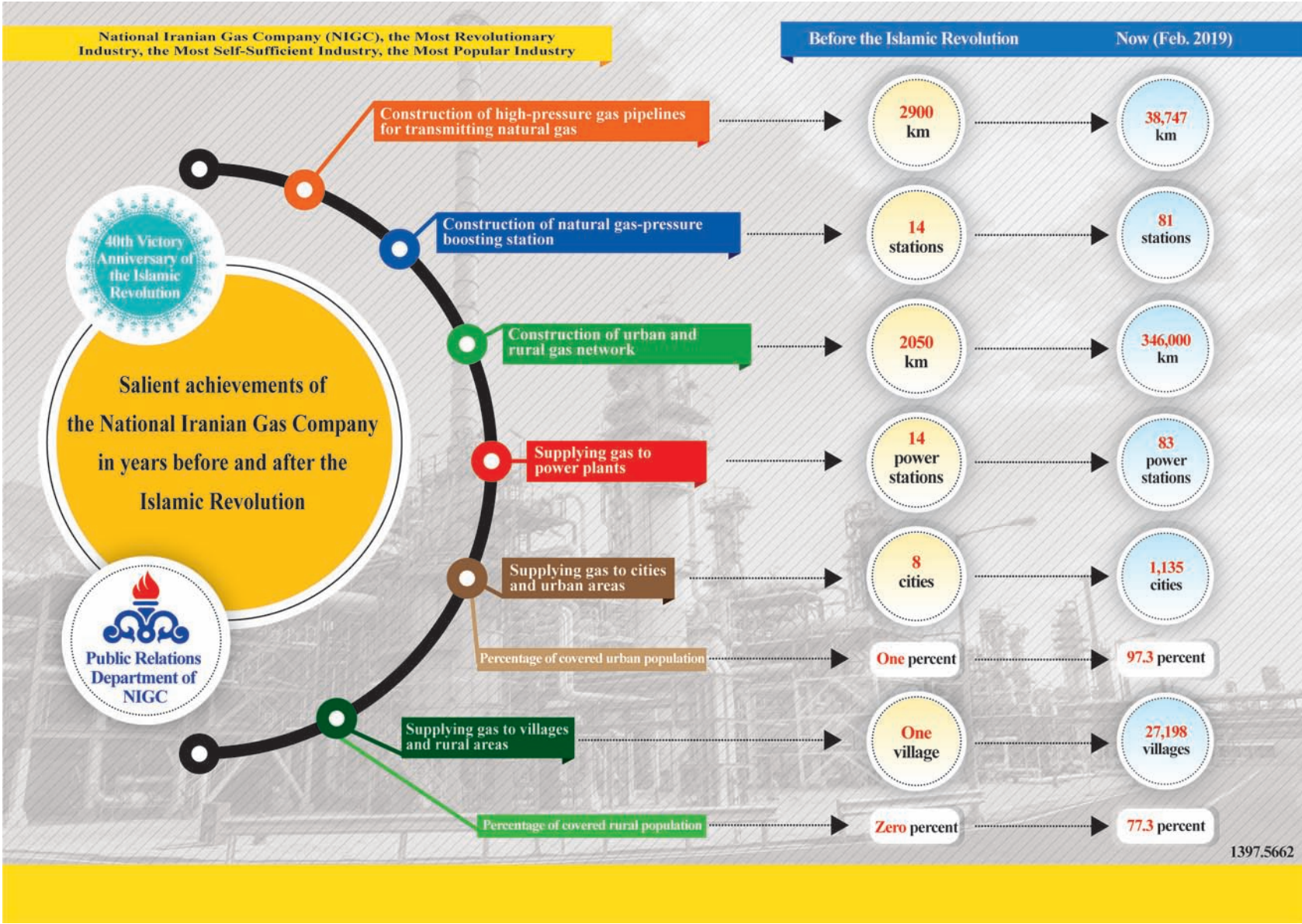
Majnoon is now producing around 240,000 bpd, according to oilfield officials.

The new wells are in addition to the 40 that Iraq and US company Schlumberger Ltd. agreed on Dec. 19 to drill in Majnoon.

Royal Dutch Shell exited Majnoon last year, handing operations to state-run Basra Oil.

Iraq, the second-largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, is pumping below its maximum capacity of nearly 5 million bpd in line with an agreement among OPEC and other exporters to curtail global supply.

(Source: Arab News)



The voter suppression state

If it is your goal to keep people of color from the polls, you can once again look to Texas for guidance.



By Mimi Swartz

For those of you keeping track of the “As Texas goes, so goes the nation” notion, I have either very good or very bad news.

The state that gave you two recent mediocre-to-crummy Republican presidents (who are starting to look downright Lincoln-esque compared to you-know-who), gerrymandering in the guise of redistricting (thanks a lot, Tom DeLay) and a profound if misguided antipathy to government in general is now surging ahead in a new field: voter suppression.

As someone who loves Texas with a triple shot of ambivalence, I take no pleasure in spreading this news. But if it is your goal to keep people of color from the polls — some Republican leaders come to mind — it’s time once again to look to Texas for guidance.

Our state officials in their infinite wisdom last week announced that they hoped to excise 95,000 people from voter rolls because they didn’t seem to be citizens. Our secretary of state, David Whitley, insisted that, with the help of the Department of Public Safety, he had been able to compile a list of those supposedly illegally registered. It was even suggested that 58,000 of those folks had actually already voted, a felony in these parts.

This finding was heralded in a tweet by our attorney general, Ken Paxton, as an all-caps “Voter Fraud Alert.” Paxton, you may or may not know, is himself under indictment for securities fraud.

The state, which as yet cannot take anyone off the voter rolls, turned to county officials, who can. They are supposed to hunt those miscreants down by sending notices demanding they appear at voter registrars’ offices with proof of citizenship (birth certificate, passport, etc.) within 30 days. Otherwise, they would be stricken from the rolls and, presumably, ICE would be pounding on their doors soon after.

■ Appalling narrative

Among many who seized on this appalling narrative was President Trump, who tweeted: “These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. All over the country, especially in California, voter fraud is rampant. Must be stopped!”

Well, yes, someone had to be stopped here in Texas, and the narrative was appalling, but not for the stated reasons. Within 24 hours, various groups devoted to voting rights had put on their thinking caps — they don’t give them out at the Statehouse — and were noting a few problems with the list.

Like, some of this “research” was 25 years old, during which time a lot of people holding driver’s licenses could have become naturalized citizens who, at least so far, are allowed to vote in Texas. In other words, state leaders were not experts in data compilation, a finding that should surprise no one. As our former governor and the current secretary of energy Rick Perry would say, “Whoops.”

Within a few days, Harris County (which includes Houston) had found that 60 percent of the 30,000 people on the DPS’s list should never have been there in the first place, because they had become citizens in the last quarter-century or so.

The League of United Latin American Citizens also filed suit against Mr. Whitley and Mr. Paxton, claiming a violation of the voting rights act, and declared the whole mess a “witch hunt” intended to scare Latinos away from the ballot box.

Ignorance or venality? Hard to say. Stupidity is always a good bet, but Texans are already trying to exercise their civic duty with one of the nation’s strictest voter identification laws in effect — regular people already need to show a government-issued ID to vote here. Then, too, the convoluted rules for running third-party voter registration drives here would send Rube Goldberg to bed with a blinding migraine.

There is one simple fact fomenting all this hysteria, of course:

■ The Hispanic population

According to census estimates, the state’s Hispanic population grew to 11.2 million in 2017, from 9.7 million in 2010. The population of white Texans grew by only about half a million people, to 11.9 million, during the same period. By 2022, the state is guesstimated to be majority Latino. (By 2050 our booming population — with all our Latinos — is supposed to surpass California’s.) This may or may not mean that Texas will turn blue around the same time, though the anti-immigrant/build the wall bias of state and national leaders who know better might be helping that process along. On the other hand, maybe our leadership plans to just deport them all.

Those numbers could certainly explain the weirdness of the last few days. A weak, diminished Republican leadership, not to mention its far-right backers, is more terrifying to our leaders in Austin and their far-right backers than the return of Barack Obama.

But I’m not sure Texas Democrats are exploiting this opportunity to the fullest. Yes, they profit politically and financially from demonizing the opposition (who, let’s face it, deserve it). While all the hand-wringing and lawsuit-bringing is helpful, why not use the state’s latest boneheaded move as an opportunity to call for real reform?

What if the Democrats agreed that, O.K., maybe voter fraud could be a terrible problem here? Maybe we should invest more time and money into registering real voters? Maybe we could use state funds to update our outdated voting machines, so nobody — like those danged Russians — could interfere with our elections? And why not move away from identity politics to something bigger?

(Source: NYT)

Who is really ‘wrecking’ Europe?

The ‘nationalist onslaught’ is a symptom, not a cause of Europe’s crisis.

By Mark LeVine

So wrote 30 leading intellectuals in the Guardian last week - including an assortment of Nobel laureates and other literary prize winners and a sprinkle of philosophers - as the threat of Brexit and the May European Parliament elections loom on the horizon.

Europe indeed appears to be in bad shape. An Italian-Austrian-Hungarian-Polish axis of xenophobic populism is coalescing in the heart of the continent, Swedish Democrats are threatening to derail what’s left of the quintessential European liberal welfare state in the north, and a powerful far right is tearing apart the centrist German political establishment. To the west, Brexit UK and Trumpian U.S. are a cause of much anxiety, to the east, scheming Russia and an increasingly authoritarian Turkey are a constant source of tension. And from the south, millions of forced migrants are on the move seeking safe haven on European shores.

So who can blame Europe’s most creative writers for worrying deeply about the future of humanity’s most important political experiment since the Russian, if not the French, revolution?

But what precisely is the idea of Europe that is “coming apart before our eyes”? What is the “cause” from which so many are “deserting”, the “national soul” and “lost identity” whose failing conditions the authors believe have fed the “rising, swelling, insistent tide” of illiberal, anti-European sentiments threatening the continent’s future?

■ What is Europe?

It’s too much to ask a manifesto-like polemic to provide a monograph’s worth of historical analysis. But acknowledging and accounting for Europe’s bastardized, highly problematic history is, in fact, a sine qua non for moving towards the liberal Imaginarium the signatories seek to enable.

Laying aside the evident elision in the text between Europe and the EU (which isn’t mentioned in the manifesto though it’s clearly the idea more in danger today), even the origin of the word points to a core problem faced by “European patriots” such as the signatories.

Did Europe arise from the idea of “eruba”, the Akkadian/Mesopotamian term for the western horizon or the Phoenician “erub” meaning evening or west? And did the Ancient Greeks adopt it into the myth about Phoenician princess Europa of Sidon (modern-day Lebanon), who was kidnapped by Zeus and brought to Crete? Or did they come up with the word combining “eurus” (broad) and “opt” (eye)?

Although various uses of the word can be found as far back as the Roman Empire and became more common with the Reformation, it was Napoleon who first imagined a politically “United States of Europe” with one overarching identity and set of laws and culture.

In the centuries before and after Napoleon’s grand imperial vision, millions would die fighting over precisely who had a legitimate right to define European identity. That definition was never arrived to.

Europe has always had fluid frontiers. On its eastern flank, the Russian and Ot-



Europe has always had fluid frontiers. On its eastern flank, the Russian and Ottoman Empire were both a core part of the political geography of Europe and its most dangerous “other”. To the south, the Mediterranean Sea was never a wide enough barrier to serve as a definite and impenetrable border that would establish with certainty the identity of the inhabitants on its southern shores.

toman Empire were both a core part of the political geography of Europe and its most dangerous “other”. To the south, the Mediterranean Sea was never a wide enough barrier to serve as a definite and impenetrable border that would establish with certainty the identity of the inhabitants on its southern shores.

By the early 20th century, well over a million poor Europeans wound up in North Africa, with cities like Tunis, Tripoli and Alexandria becoming home to hundreds of thousands of Italians, Greeks, French, Maltese and other migrants from the north.

At the same time, both France and Italy offered at some point full citizenship to colonized Algerians and Libyans (“Muslim Italians” as Benito Mussolini would say) in return for supporting continued metropolitan rule.

Indeed, Europe’s colonial past is also completely absent from the discourse of the manifesto, even though the “idea” of Europe has always been inseparable from the nearly half millennium of inhumanly brutal, massively exploitative and often genocidal imperialism, colonialism and slavery.

In this context, it’s tellingly ironic that when the Italian deputy prime minister, Luigi di Maio, wanted to blame France for the migrant crisis that has sent untold tens of thousands of Africans towards Italy’s shores, he accused the French government of “taking the lead” in “never stop(ing) colonizing tens of African states” and “impoverishing Africa.”

“Africans should be in Africa,” he continued, “not at the bottom of the Mediterranean.” Of course, Italy was no less brutal in its own colonial wars and rule in Africa (nor were any other European colonial powers).

Ultimately, Europe is both deeply and implicately related (to borrow a sadly underused concept from Israeli geographer Yuval Portugali) to its Muslim and African neighbors and could not have become the bastion of liberal and Enlightenment ideals the present manifesto’s signatories rightly strive for without the massive violence perpetrated or supported by European states during the last half millennium.

■ The corrupt authoritarian regimes

More to the current point, the financial and broader corporate elites of every EU member state have benefited greatly from the policies of neoliberal “openness”, “export-led-growth” and “foreign investment” imposed on the very countries that currently threaten to flood it with refugees, often with the support of brutal and corrupt authoritarian regimes that enriched themselves mightily in the process.

None of this is mentioned in the manifesto, even though the policies at the root of the political “wreckage” across Europe today lie in neoliberal policies, which, in fact, have been visited directly upon European populations as well. Indeed, neoliberalism in the Euro-American contexts can be well understood as the application of colonial

ideologies and policies to metropolitan populations.

Here it’s not surprising that Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the disgraced former head of the IMF, which along with the World Bank helped lay the groundwork for so much of the misery that pushed millions to flee towards Europe from Africa and Western Asia, said, “Europe is not about borders, Europe is an idea.” Were it not for one brave hotel maid in New York, one could imagine Strauss-Kahn proudly adding his name to this document (indeed, one of the primary signatories, Bernard Henri-Levy, publicly defended his friend when news of abuses first became public).

Even without him, it’s clear that IMF/World Bank policies that have devastated Europe’s former colonial hinterlands are, today, increasing precarity and insecurity among large segments of the populations of the European countries under greatest risk of turning against the EU.

One doesn’t need to be a Marxist to understand that the present wave of hypernationalism and xenophobia in Europe have economic roots that must be addressed if the imagination of Europe as a space of liberal freedom and prosperity is to stand a chance of being preserved, never mind achieved in practice.

■ Signatories of the manifesto

Sadly, but not surprisingly, when the signatories of this manifesto talk about the need to “make a clean break” with the conviction that the European idea could defend itself, they seem blind to the direct line leading from the tear gas and beatings of activists at the first great anti-neoliberal protests in Prague at the September 2000 IMF meetings, and the even more extreme violence and killing at the G8 meeting in Genoa the following summer, to the rise of the extreme right today.

If any of the signatories were on the front lines of these conveniently forgotten struggles for a different post-Cold War world and European order, they seem to have forgotten that when it mattered most, European leaders viciously turned on the very people who were struggling to preserve the idea of Europe the signatories endorse.

And so when Salman Rushdie, Bernard Henri-Levy, Leila Slimani, Herta Mueller and the other signers warn that “Europe is being attacked by false prophesiers ...,” let’s remember that Tony Blair belongs in the same circle of Dante’s Hell as Victor Orban, that the “wreckers” of their - and most of our - beloved European idea are neoliberals as much as they’re neopopulists or neofascists, and that the “new battle for civilization” in which they’ve asked us to choose sides is, in fact, a battle to create a culture that is far more radical, and will take far more sacrifice than, the liberal order whose demise they so regret.

Europe and the world don’t need “patriots”, they need revolutionaries with the ability to turn words, music, art and knowledge into weapons in the struggle to create a Europe, and a world, whose contours and character most of us, including the signers of the manifesto, have barely begun to outline.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

Heading toward a bad solution to the Afghan riddle

By Gary Anderson

Ambassador Ryan Crocker is one of America’s foremost experts on Afghanistan and he is worried about the current state of negotiations between the Taliban and U.S. representatives regarding a ceasefire in the Afghan conflict. He believes that we are heading toward a bad agreement, and we would do well to heed his misgivings. That doesn’t mean that we should break off negotiations, but it does mean that we should be careful about how we proceed, and that the Congress should be part of any peace agreement.

The ambassador is concerned with two things based on some hard experiences in foreign affairs in the past 50 years. First, during the Paris Peace talks that eventually ended American involvement in Vietnam, it was generally recognized that the North Vietnamese would resume the war against the South Vietnamese once the Americans were safely gone. That is exactly what happened.

In fairness to President Nixon and his chief negotiator, Henry Kissinger, they believed that they retained the option to use air and naval power to punish the North if it blatantly resumed offensive operations.

What Nixon’s team did not anticipate was the full impact of Watergate. Once Nixon was forced out of office and the Democrats took control of Congress in 1974, they refused to fund any military action against Hanoi when fighting resumed in 1975. This doomed South Vietnam. Mr. Crocker is also concerned that putting a timeline on American withdrawal — such as the one President Obama placed on Iraq — will give us no further leverage over the Taliban; that would be tragic.

■ Concerns are legitimate

The ambassador’s second concern is that any agreement that does not protect the gains made by Afghan women will be an unconscionable sell out of half of Afghanistan’s population. Both concerns are legitimate, and the American negotiators should recognize them.

Regarding bad faith on the part of the Taliban, we should assume that it is a given. Anyone who believes that the Taliban



have abandoned their goal of regaining control of the whole country is gullible at best. Congress sold South Vietnam down the river in 1975 and its members were never held accountable. This Congress should pass a resolution vowing to authorize renewed U.S. military action if and when the Taliban violate any peace agreement.

For years, Congress has abrogated its war powers responsibility while whining that successive presidents have overstepped their national security authority. This is an opportunity for our congressional representatives to do

their jobs for once.

Ambassador Crocker has also expressed concern that the Taliban will overrun the whole country when the Americans leave. I think he’s wrong there. The government is strong in the urban areas and those that can be reached by the limited road network. If the war resumes post-cease fire, the current stalemate will continue.

However, we can — and should — continue to train and equip the security forces; this can be done remotely. It is very feasible to airlift entire Afghan battalions to the United States to train in rotations at the National Training Center at Fort Polk Louisiana. Quite frankly, we should have done this years ago. It is difficult to properly train an army while it is engaged in combat. Congress can and should provide such funding, which would be much cheaper than having American trainers in Afghanistan.

■ Negotiated settlement

In addition, Congress should demand that the Afghan government be part of any negotiated settlement. The notion that the majority of the Afghan people do not support the government is pure Taliban propaganda.

Finally, any agreement should — at a minimum — allow women and others to leave Taliban-controlled territory if they so desire. Final American withdrawal should be contingent on a period when passage of lines is allowed for those who want to leave Taliban-controlled territory to do so. Conversely, those Afghans who want to live under the kind of Sharia law that the Taliban impose on the territory that they control should also be able to cross the lines.

We have to be realistic enough to understand that many Afghan women are perfectly happy living in the 14th century and will want to stay put. Thousands of years of tribal customs and centuries of Islamic conservatism die hard. The best outcome would be one where people have a choice of how they want to live.

It is probably too much to hope that the Afghan Civil War will end with a peace as enduring as those in El Salvador or Rwanda, but it is worth a try.

(Source: The Washington Times)

Israel's Story: Lies from top to bottom

1 → No one should be surprised by media bias in favor of Israel given the dominance of Jewish owners and editors in the major media, but the study just might have gone one step farther and noted, as did Congressman Paul Findley in his book *They Dare to Speak Out* back in 1985, that much of the bias stems from the overseas correspondents covering the Middle East for the U.S. and European media also being overwhelmingly Jewish. And a review of the Israel-philias might have gone back even further in time to the foundation of the state in 1948 to find similar favorable coverage.

Shaping the favorable perception of Israel has also involved the efforts of Zionist-dominated Hollywood movies and television to portray Jewish heroism while also at the same time ignoring the Zionist terrorism directed against both the indigenous Palestinian population and the British Mandate authorities prior to Israel's statehood. The movie *Exodus* shaped many Americans' perceptions of what had occurred in the Middle East, while the steady stream of films related to the so-called holocaust, which ignore the many problems with that standard narrative, perpetuate Jewish suffering and victimhood.

In truth, no one should believe any country's creation narrative, which, since the time of Virgil's *Aeneid*, has been intended to present an idealized portrait that is largely fact-free. Nationalists will inevitably distort the tale to reflect their own vision of what their homeland represents and how it came to be, but Israel's story is unusual in that it is packed with lies from start to finish. Even before the creation of a Jewish state, Zionists encouraged Jewish emigration from Europe to the then Turkish-controlled Palestine. They coined the expression "a land without people for people without a land," a flat out lie as Palestine was fully inhabited by Muslim and Christian Palestinian Arabs plus a small Jewish minority. This expression has been more recently replaced with another one, i.e. how Israel "made the desert bloom," as if the land were not being cultivated before large numbers of Jews arrived, making it another lie. And it is, by the way, an expression favored by Zionist presidential aspirant Kamala Harris, a prime example of "progressive except for Israel."

Israel was founded as a product of terrorism, some would say the "first modern" style terrorism, to include bombings of non-military targets and random massacres of civilians. In a notorious attack on the village of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, more than two hundred Palestinians may have been slaughtered by Jewish terrorists affiliated with the Irgun and Lehi groups. The exact count of the victims is unknown because a subsequent Zionist clean-up team systematically destroyed many of the bodies.

Given the turmoil in Palestine and the agitation by British Jews, the U.K. was eager to cut its losses, and Harry Truman, a U.S. president who benefited from Jewish financial and political support in his reelection bid, was equally willing to support the creation of a Jewish state as a quid pro quo. Even though Jews were a distinct minority in the new Israel-Palestine, they obtained nearly half of the land in spite of the United Nations mandate that the rights of the indigenous population should not be compromised by the new arrivals.

But the new arrivals from Europe and America disagreed with that even-handed approach. They assassinated the U.N. mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, who had himself saved many Jews in Nazi occupied Europe, and started to attack their Arab neighbors, intentionally driving 700,000 from their homes and killing many in the process. By that act of terror and a subsequent war fought against its neighbors, Israel obtained more land before the green line was eventually established as part of a 1949 Armistice Agreement managed by the U.N. to divide Israel from the West Bank and Gaza, which were under the jurisdiction of Jordan and Egypt respectively.

And then there came the miraculous Six Day War of June 1967, regarding which glowing media accounts described how Israel was attacked by Jordan, Syria and Egypt simultaneously but fought back hard and won a decisive victory, occupying in the process the parts of Jerusalem it did not already control as well as the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza. The only problem with that story is that Israel started the war, attacking and destroying the Arab air forces without a declaration of war while their planes were on the ground. Denied air cover, the Arab ground forces could not win.

Israel also included in its Six Day War triumph the attempted sinking of the American intelligence gathering ship the U.S.S. *Liberty*, which was in international waters when it was attacked on June 8th. Thirty-four crewmen were killed



and 171 wounded in the only attack on a U.S. Naval vessel in peace time that was never fully investigated by the Pentagon due to President Lyndon B. Johnson's unwillingness to offend American Jews. The Israelis and their apologists have claimed the attack was a case of either "fog of war" or "a mistake," both of which were completely self-serving lies exposed by compelling National Security Agency collected evidence that has surfaced recently. And, by the way, the Israelis continue to receive military assistance from Washington in spite of the killing of American servicemen, \$3.8 billion per annum guaranteed for the next ten years plus special appropriations as needed.

Even when the Israelis are clearly telling lies, much of the media and chattering class has been willing to forgive them their trespasses no matter what they do or say. The whopper level lies about Israel are that it is a democracy and America's best friend and ally. It is neither. It has more than 50 laws that discriminate against Arabs, is now self-defined as a "Jewish state," and it has recently legalized banning non-Jews from residential areas and towns. It also occupies Palestinian territories where the original inhabitants have no rights but martial law. And the Jewish state has never been an American ally in practical terms as it is under no obligation to support Washington under any circumstances even though a U.S. Air Force general has declared that his troops are prepared to die for Israel.

Some other recent lies include the propagation of a narrative that the Palestinians do not exist as a people, that Palestine has never been a country and therefore should never become one, and that there is no peace in the Middle East because the Arabs have never accepted the generous offers made by the Israelis to settle problems with the Palestinians, who are, by the way, solely responsible for their unfortunate situation since the expanding Israeli settlements on their land are no obstacle to peace. All lies.

And another big lie concerns how Israel spies on the United States. Israel is the number one "friendly" country when it comes to stealing American secrets, both commercial and military. When Jonathan Pollard stole more U.S. classified information than any spy in history, Israel's friends rushed to explain that it was all a mistake, that Pollard was just a one-off oddball. And the Israel government agreed to return what he had stolen but did not do so and instead used it to barter with America's then enemy the Soviet Union in a deal to permit Jews to emigrate.

Another espionage related development which produced a whole battery of Israeli lies and evasions relates to 9/11, where Mossad almost certainly had at a minimum inside knowledge regarding what was about to occur through their illegal massive spying program inside the United States. Remember the cheering Israeli movers in New Jersey as the

twin towers went down? Or the hundreds of "art students" selling their work all across the U.S., which was both a scam and part of an espionage network?

More recent lies include repeated assertions that the Iranians have a secret nuclear program, which will produce a bomb in "six months," something Benjamin Netanyahu has been promising since 1993. And those wily Persians are also developing ballistic missiles that can be used to attack Europe and America, a particularly dangerous lie as it has been picked up and repeated ad nauseam by the buffoonish triumvirate in Washington consisting of Bolton, Pompeo and Pence, which passes for the deep thinking in U.S. foreign policy these days. That allegation could easily lead to United States involvement in a war fought for Israel that it might reasonably avoid as it is not threatened by Iran and has no vital interests supportive of going to war against it.

But the greatest lie of all is the current claim that anti-Semitism is surging all around the world, requiring still more protection of and deference to diaspora Jews as well as to the state of Israel. It is based on a fundamental lie, that criticism of Israel is ipso facto anti-Semitic and ignores the fact that the pushback is based overwhelmingly on how Israel and Netanyahu behave. Israel, whatever its pretensions, is a country and Judaism is a religion. It is in fact particularly dangerous, and damaging to the religion, to combine the two deliberately as is being done by Netanyahu and the many American Jews who are serial apologists for Israel.

Indeed, Israel and its partisans are now using lies to change the way the public views the issue of anti-Semitism and are willing to do so by legislating to enforce how people think, to include the use of legal sanctions consisting of fines and imprisonment to silence critics. If legislation currently in congress is ever implemented fully, it will be the death of freedom of speech in the U.S. That such nonsense has gained currency at all is due to the Israeli corruption of both America's government and its news media, which is not a lie, but the absolute truth that you won't find discussed anywhere in your newspaper or on television reporting.

This trend to criminalize criticism of Israel has led Jewish groups and some governments to work together to promulgate "hate crime" statutes and other legal barriers to protect the Israeli wrongdoing. But Israel is not and should not be protected against criticism. It is a country that behaves very badly, and, one might add, dangerously, not only to its neighbors but also to the world as it has the potential in its hands to escalate its involvement in Syria to initiate a nuclear conflagration between the U.S. and Russia. Israel's lies should be recognized for what they are and it should be boycotted and sanctioned until it comes to its senses or, if it does not, it should be completely shunned.

(Source: globalresearch)

You cannot put lipstick on a pig and make it pretty

1 → Many countries, many European ones, many in Latin America, even Canada now and some in East Asia like Australia, have become mere slaves to the "empire", slaves to U.S. hegemonic pretensions, and all the while the U.S. government has the gall to designate itself the leader of the "free world" which in fact is a world that in many lands has mostly relinquished sovereignty because of U.S. threats real or implied.

It is not just foreigners, including Iran and its people, who have been under some kind of onerous attack. So have many Americans, too, by their own government.

Trump, for example, shut down segments of the U.S. government, depriving almost a million federal workers of salaries for over a month, while demanding billions of dollars for a wall (like Israel's wall snaking through the West Bank) along the border with Mexico to keep out Latinos looking for a better life and this largely because the U.S. literally has made life difficult for them in their home countries, which has including propping up right wing governments that also have become slaves to U.S. imperium while the U.S. offers personal benefits to their narrow cliques of "leaders".

No doubt it would seem to the U.S.-designated "president" of Venezuela Juan Guaido (who was never elected in a country that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter says has the fairest electoral system anywhere) that he has "benefitted", because otherwise he is of such little merit that this political wanker would otherwise be a perennial non-entity.



And internally, Trump has minimal relative popularity now along with the U.S. Congress where the very first piece of legislation under consideration in the U.S. Senate in this new session post midterm elections has nada to do with aiding the American people, but rather with breaching the U.S. Constitutional amendment guaranteeing the long cherished right to free speech by making it a crime, with punishments, to support efforts, even with speech, championing the basic human rights of Palestinians -- all at the behest of arguably the most criminal country on earth, Likud Israel. If this weren't happening, it would be unbelievable that it ever could happen. Simply put, the U.S. government has drift-

ed towards becoming a bare-faced fascist enterprise, one not much better than what Nazi Germany was if one can be so bold to speak the truth.

But also consider that the U.S. government has become a virtual slave itself, and to whom is important. With regard to foreign policy in the Middle East, it has become a slave to the Zionists and oligarchic Zionist American billionaires who have literally purchased influence in Washington from politicians whose primary concern is staying in office and having the financial wherewithal to do so. Israel is preparing in time to annex the West Bank, all of it, and moreover, it is demanding -- and has support among some

members of the U.S. Congress for the full and permanent annexation of the Syrian Golan.

This alone breaches many covenants of international law, the very "rules-based order" the U.S. claims to have tried to maintain. But the extant alleged "rules" apparently are not "rules" at all, because rules imply something fixed and well honored. The "rules" seem now to have no meaning because they can be modified whimsically to suit the illegal, in this case Israeli, demands of the moment.

What is interesting, and maybe particularly for Iranians, is that some of the very bravest U.S. politicians now happen to be female Muslims elected in November to the U.S. Congress for the first time. Democrats Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, who along with non-Muslim Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, are not shy about speaking truth, as they see it, to power. And despite the fact that they are under some attack themselves for doing so on both sides of the aisle in Congress, they are opening up heretofore unrealized domains of discourse on many important issues in Washington and beyond, and not just on the matter of destructive U.S. foreign policies.

But even more importantly, among the American people, if not among the long-trenched politicians, they are gaining some traction and admiration from Americans generally for their bravery. On that note there is reason for some optimism, however faint, in an ambience that would shock even British writer George Orwell, who long ago imagined a future totalitarian world bereft of individual freedoms.

There remains ambiguity about the SPV even though it exists



1 → In addition, while basically no further action has been taken in the process, the British Foreign Secretary refers to the mechanism as a "practical step" in maintaining a nuclear deal with Iran.

Such an approach was also apparent in the German Foreign Minister's Heiko-Maas and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian perspectives.

In the midst of the European media hype in relation to the SPV there are misleading signs that we must also be noted.

The other issue is Europe's level of commitment to the financial mechanism. As the European authorities have emphasized, the channel will first focus on addressing the immediate economic needs of Tehran. However, the primary objective of defining and regulating this economic mechanism is to sell a certain amount of Iranian oil to Europe (in Euros) and create a supportive umbrella for small and medium-sized European companies for economic cooperation and trade with Iran.

The European authorities have not yet set a definite time for the operation of the SPV. Thus, it would seem to make sense to doubt Europe's full commitment to the SPV. Also, the registration of the SPV, rather than being a "starting point" for Europe's commitment to the JCPOA, is a "point of ambiguity." We hope that the diplomatic system of our country takes heed of this apparent ambiguity.

'Warsaw Conference unlikely to result in any practical achievements'

1 → 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 conference, whatever the European attendance may turn out to be, is unlikely to have any effect on the JCPOA one way or another. The European governments see the conference mainly as a rhetorical exercise that the Trump administration will try to use to promote its favorite themes, rather than being a serious attempt to reach new international agreements or devise strategy toward existing agreements.

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: Most of the governments sending senior leaders to the conference will do so with the intention of not simply applauding the U.S. government's themes. They will try to keep the focus broad and not let the conference just turn into an anti-Iran exercise. Presumably the British foreign minister is attending with that intention. The SPV faces significant challenges, but this conference is not one of them.

Whether Warsaw's Conference will have a practical achievement against Iran?

A: This conference is unlikely to result in any practical achievements on anything. Productive international conferences require much more preliminary work and more indication of a consensus on key issues than one sees with this conference.

SPV is not a magic solution: Ali Vaez

1 → A: I don't think that's necessarily the case. It's certainly true that many European governments have serious concerns regarding Iran's missile program. However, they also believe that the JCPOA should be supported as long as Iran remains in compliance, which is why they've developed the SPV in parallel.

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

A: Facilitating trade in food and medicine will be the initial emphasis of the SPV, in part because those are sectors which are exempted by U.S. sanctions. It's also possible that, if the channel proves successful, its scope could be expanded over time.

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: Europe has been quite consistent and unified in its view that as long as Iran remains part of the nuclear deal, it will do what it can to facilitate trade. That three key European powers - France, the UK and Germany - have devoted considerable efforts to putting the SPV together is no small feat. However, it's important to bear in mind that the SPV is not a magic solution, and it may take a few months before its success can be truly assessed.



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Charity foundation supports treatment of infertile couples

HEALTH TEHRAN — Barekat Charity Foundation, affiliated to Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam also known as Setad-e Ejraiy-e Farman-e Hazrat-e Emam, has financially supported 4,552 infertile couples in rural areas to receive necessary treatments, Ana news agency reported on Wednesday.

In recent years, the government has been taking measures to encourage families to have more children. However, economic infrastructure should be provided for families to resolve the aging population problem.

In 2014, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei outlined general policies of the country's population plans, stressing the need for making comprehensive plans to promote the country's economic, social and cultural situations based on the new population policies.

In order to implement population policies, the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam has designed a scheme to address infertility in underprivileged areas since the year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016), the report said.



So far some 225 billion rials (nearly \$5.4 million) has been allocated to the scheme. Moreover, in addition to infertility treatment costs the hospital birth costs are covered by the Barekat insurance.

So that Barekat insurance company has provided financial aids to infertile couples in underdeveloped areas for three years.

So far some 9,619 couples suffering infertility have been identified in rural areas of which 4,552 are referred to fertility centers.

Intrauterine insemination (IUI), a fertility treatment that involves placing sperm inside a woman's uterus to facilitate fertilization, In vitro fertilization (IVF), a process of fertilization where an egg is combined with sperm outside the body, in vitro ("in glass"), intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), an in vitro fertilization procedure in which a single sperm cell is injected directly into the cytoplasm of an egg, as well as medications, etc. to treat infertility are offered to these couples.

So far some 225 billion rials (nearly \$5.4 million) has been allocated to the scheme. Moreover, in addition to infertility treatment costs the hospital birth costs are covered by the Barekat insurance, the report highlighted.

Infertile couples can refer to Barekat insurance agents in local centers in all provinces nationwide to use the services free of charge.

Social media companies need 'legal duty of care' to protect young users

Facebook, Youtube and other social media giants should have a "legal duty of care" to ensure they act to protect the mental health and well-being of younger users, MPs have concluded.

The UK government has also been told to examine legislation which would ensure firms share data which can help identify and protect those at risk from the negative impact of such sites.

A report by the Commons Science and Technology Committee said the current loose "patchwork" of regulation has resulted in a "standards lottery" that could not ensure the safety of young internet users.

The sites are disrupting young users' sleep patterns, distorting their body image and leaving them exposed to bullying, grooming and sexting, the report said.

The committee also recommended that the Government set itself the "ambitious" target of halving online reports of child sexual exploitation and abuse within two years and eliminating it in four years.

"Worryingly, social media companies – who have a clear responsibility towards particularly young users – seem to be in no rush to share vital data with academics that could help tackle the very real harms our young people face in the virtual world," said the committee's chair Norman Lamb.

The report called on the Government to use its upcoming Online Harms White Paper to put legislation and regulation in place.

"We concluded that self-regulation will no longer suffice," it said. "We must see an independent, statutory regulator established as soon as possible, one which has the full support of the Government to take strong and effective actions against companies who do not comply."

A spokesman for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which has worked on the white paper with the Home Office, said: "We have heard calls for an Internet Regulator and to place a statutory 'duty of care' on platforms, and are seriously considering all options.

"Social media companies clearly need to do more to ensure they are not promoting harmful content to vulnerable people. Our forthcoming white paper will set out their responsibilities, how they should be met and what should happen if they are not."

Earlier this week, new Facebook head of global affairs Sir Nick Clegg acknowledged that government had a place in regulating social networks.

Andy Burrows, associate head of child safety online at the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) charity, said social media sites had been allowed to operate in a "Wild West" environment for too long.

"It's hugely significant that the committee is endorsing the NSPCC's proposal for a legal duty of care to be imposed on these tech companies," he said. "This must include an independent statutory regulator with enforcement powers that can impose strong sanctions on platforms that fail to keep children safe."

(Source: The Independent)

Is breakfast always a good idea?

Breakfast may be the most important meal of the day, but eating it won't help you lose weight, research suggests.

Those who ate breakfast consumed 260 more calories per day and gained 1lb more than those who skipped it, a review of previous studies found.

But experts say a healthy breakfast can be a good source of calcium and fiber.

It has also been shown to improve concentration and attention levels, particularly in children.

Breakfast gives you energy, stops you snacking later in the day and supplies essential nutrients - so we are told.

Its reputation as the nutritional backstop to our day stems from observational studies showing a positive link between people eating breakfast and having a healthy weight.

But this new Australian research in the BMJ, which reviewed the results of 13 separate trials on breakfast eating, weight change and energy intake, found little evidence for those views.

The findings of the Monash University research team suggest that skipping breakfast might in fact be a good way



to reduce total daily calorie intake.

They found that breakfast eaters consumed more calories overall and breakfast skippers did not have a greater appetite in the afternoon.

And they say caution is needed when recommending breakfast for weight loss in adults - because it could have the opposite effect.

However, the researchers added that there were limi-

tations to their study.

The participants in the studies were only followed for short periods - from between two and 16 weeks - and the difference in calorie intake between breakfast eaters and skippers was small.

The researchers concluded that working out the long-term effect of skipping or adding breakfast to diets still needed more research.

■ Calcium and fiber boost

Prof Kevin Whelan, dietetics expert and head of King's College London's nutritional sciences department, says we should not get too hung up on calorie intake first thing in the morning.

"This study does not say breakfast is bad for the health," he said.

"Breakfast is important for nutrient intake, such as cereals and milk which are good for calcium and fiber."

But the BMJ research did not look at this aspect of breakfast. "We are not talking about breakfast being the cause of obesity," he said.

(Source: BBC)

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Iran, Afghanistan seek to boost telecom cooperation

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi and his Afghan counterpart Shahzad Gul Aryoubi discussed ways to expand relations in the field of telecommunication.

Iran and Afghanistan have a common language and have several communalities, Azari Jahromi said during a meeting with Aryoubi in Tehran on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

“We can strength friendship between the two countries with a good historical background,” he said.



Iran's Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi (r) and his Afghan counterpart Shahzad Gul Aryoubi pose for a photo during a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday.

He pointed to Afghan migrants in Iran who can benefit from telecommunication services in order to have relationship with their families through internet and phone calls through improvement of telecommunication.

There are several fields of cooperation between the two countries, which can be expanded, he said.

During the meeting, Aryoubi said that several private companies were introduced to him for further cooperation during his sojourn in Iran.

“I have also visited Telecommunications Infrastructure Company which was a great chance to get acquainted with talented human resources,” he said.

He said that Afghanistan is eager to boost ties in different fields of technology and telecommunication with Iran.

Aryoubi officially invited Azari Jahromi to his country in order to develop telecommunication relations between Iran and Afghanistan.

Biotech can save up to \$300m annually: official

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Development of biotechnology can save \$200-300 million annually in coming years, Mostafa Qanei, secretary of biotech development center (BioDC) at science and technology vice-presidency said, Tasnim reported on Tuesday.

The center plans to support innovative and technological ideas of young generation with venture capital model, he said.

Qanei elaborated on the role of professional human resources in biotechnology, by which, Iran can replace imported products with domestically-made ones.

Actually while biotech medicine has no such cost for the government, it even boosts the national economy, he said.

Last week it was announced that BioDC aims to support the production of 30 new biologic drugs in the country.

In July 2018, Qanei announced that Iran has developed 13 methods of pharmaceutical technology in less than one year.

Scubalike technology could suck carbon dioxide from smokestacks

The technology that allows submariners to breathe underwater could someday allow the rest of us to breathe cooler air. Researchers have found a way to suck planet-warming carbon dioxide (CO2) from industrial smokestacks using a chemical technique similar to one scuba divers and submarines use to “rebreathe” CO2-rich exhalations.

The team’s technique “has tremendous potential,” says Kristin Bowman-James, a chemist at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

The advance relies on a class of organic chemicals called bis (imino guanidines), or BIGs. These chemicals were first discovered more than a century ago, but researchers recently found that they’re really good at binding to negatively charged ions, says Radu Custelcean, a chemist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. He and his colleagues harness that binding ability to capture CO2.

First, the team dissolves a particular BIG in water, where the substance helps break down H2O molecules into positively charged protons (H+) and negatively charged hydroxide (OH–) ions. The BIG molecules snatch free-floating protons and take on a positive charge. Those BIG ions then react with negatively charged bicarbonate (HCO3–) ions that form when CO2-rich gas bubbles through the solution, Custelcean says. Because the resulting substance doesn’t readily dissolve, it crystallizes and can be separated from the solution.

When a gas mixture rich in carbon dioxide bubbles through a solution of a particular organic chemical, the planet-warming gas is captured in tiny crystals (which turn the solution a whitish color). NEIL J. WILLIAMS

Those crystals can then be heated to drive off CO2 so it can be collected and stored, rather than emitted to the atmosphere, Custelcean says. The team’s lab tests suggest that process can occur at the relatively low temperature of 120°C. So, the researchers report today in Chem, capturing and recovering CO2 from industrial exhaust using their technique takes about 24% less energy than a process commonly used in smokestack “scrubbers.” Once CO2 has been driven from the crystals, the BIG can be redissolved in the solution, making it available to capture even more CO2.

The particular BIG used by Custelcean’s team sits at what Amar Flood, an organic chemist at Indiana University in Bloomington who was not involved with the work, calls a “magic sweet spot.” Its affinity for bicarbonate ions allows the crystal-forming reaction to readily occur, but the weak hydrogen bonding within the crystal also makes it relatively easy to recover the CO2.

(Source: sciencemag.org)

Iranian smart agricultural meteorology yearns for maximum harvest yields

By Setareh Behroozi

A new wave of young farmers and entrepreneurs are revolutionizing the agriculture industry. The new generation is graduated, and aware of new techniques and wants to develop new products. New farmers can be more dynamic, take advantage of new technologies and open new markets.

One can witness changes started to occur in agriculture. The new generation has a more business-oriented approach becoming real entrepreneurs. Some applications and devices are developed that trigger alerts to allow preventive actions before the crop is harmed.

An Iranian agricultural meteorology start-up is launched to ensure maximum harvest yields through weather monitoring across the farmlands and fields.

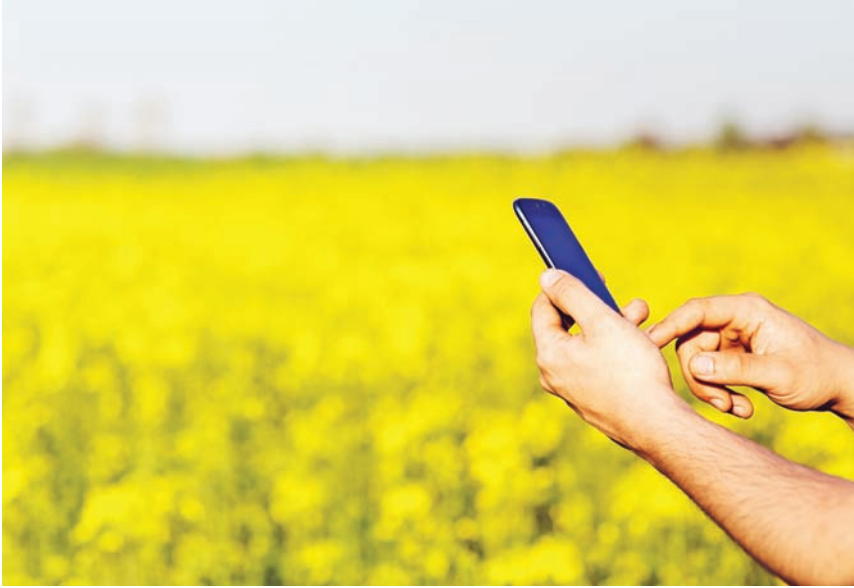
The startup team began its activities two years ago aimed to decrease effects and impacts of weather and climate on crops and increase the quality and quantity of crops with weather monitoring, the CEO and founder of smart agricultural meteorology startup Seyyed Mehdi Al-e Yaqub told the Tehran Times.

The meteorite impact lead to a striking figure for damaged crops or decrease in agricultural products, he lamented.

“Even if we can save only one percent more crops with the startup, it can be beneficial for living of several people as well as the national economy,” he explained.

The startup’s application provide a service for farmer users according to the type of his or her crop and location with an accurate weather predictions in rural area, he said.

The data is provided by the satellite data and some post-processing of weather forecasts and we use some numerical



The startup provides web panel for the owners of industrial agriculture while the farmers with less than five-hectare fields can use the app, which provide them with necessary information with very simple user interface.

processing like artificial neural network (ANN) and artificial intelligence (AI) for long range weather forecast and fewer usage of hardware, he explained.

He said that the startup is very successful in long range weather forecast and working on probability of precipitation (POP) for long-term predictions.

The application provides necessary information in appropriate time in agriculture

cycle of planting, growing and harvesting and the new stage programming, he said.

“For the owners of industrial agriculture, we provide web panels while for farmers with less than five-hectare fields, we develop an application, which provide them with necessary information with very simple user interface.

“We also provide SMS and voice messages for those farmers who do not have smart-

Herbal processing industries are supported: VP

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The vice president for science and technology, Sourena Sattari, has said activities of herbal processing industries are supported, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

“We support every technology which boosts herbal medicine ecosystem and manufactures biotechnological products,” he said.

He said that the main problem related to herbal medicine is the processing industry not harvesting of medicinal plants.

A good ecosystem is the solution in which startups are formed, the money cannot solve the problem by itself, he explained.

The government is responsible for infrastructures and

support the activities in the field of herbal medicine, he said.

The establishment of knowledge-based companies and science and technology parks at the universities changed them to centers for job and wealth creation, he said.

According to the World Health Organization, traditional herbal medicines are naturally occurring, plant-derived substances with minimal or no industrial processing that have been used to treat illness within local or regional healing practices. Traditional herbal medicines are getting significant attention in global health debates.

Global herbal market size is estimated approximately \$72 billion which is predicted to reach \$7 trillion by 2050. Medicinal plants are used in various industries which are worth around \$80 billion.



‘Mind reading’ technology poses ethical questions

Imagine not being able to speak your mind, not even to ask for a glass of water. Now scientists have revealed technology that could one day speak it for you.

Researchers at Columbia University in New York have developed a “vocoder” that could eventually decipher, purely from brain activity, what a person wants to say and channel it through a speech synthesizer. The aim is to give an artificial voice to patients who, through injury or disease, have lost their own. The research is at an extremely early stage but, according to project leader Nima Mesgarani, “with the right technology, these people’s thoughts could be decoded and understood by any listener”.

The technology might one day be right, but there is no guarantee that user intent will stay benign. While brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) are primarily designed to help the sick, they have the potential to be misused on the healthy. As the interest in “mind-reading technologies expands, we should turn our own grey matter to the overlooked ethical issue of neural privacy.

The Columbia research is one of several projects aiming to uncover how internal thought becomes action. Early attempts focused on using the power of thought to move a cursor across a computer screen. In 2017, scientists in Beijing progressed

further down the mind-reading road: they were able to tell, crudely, what people were looking at, simply by analysing neural signals.

All work on the same principle: every human utterance, perception and action, has its beginnings in the messy crossfire of brain signals. The goal of a BCI is to detect the signals, decode them using algorithms, and then send relevant commands to a device that acts on the patient’s behalf. The proxy might be an artificial voice, or a prosthetic limb.

Current projects target patients with conditions such as paralysis or neurological diseases. The same techniques, however, offer a means of invading someone’s mind — and breaching the final frontier of personal privacy.

Imagine such power in the hands of the unscrupulous. Advertisers might spot the potential for mind-reading technology to gauge consumer delight and disgust, all the better to snare the valuable commodity of attention. Employers may wish to more accurately measure compliance and dissent among the company faithful.

We should not dismiss such dystopian projections as fanciful: technology has an unfortunate habit of serving unintended causes. Courses in “neuromarketing”, which uses techniques from neuroscience to deduce consumer preferences, already



exist. Some employers are surgically inserting RFID chips — the technology used in contactless payment cards — in their underlings. The chips allow employees access to buildings and computers, but they also could permit unprecedented granularity in workplace surveillance.

Eran Klein, a neurologist and philosopher, and Katherine Pratt, a graduate student from the University of Washington, are among those who have sounded the alarm. In a 2017 article for The Conversation, they argued that the ethical issues raised by BCI deserved special attention: “Should we be able to keep our neural signals private? That is, should neural security be a human right?”

One focus of concern is a well-studied electroencephalography signal called P300. This “aha” spike, distinctive for each person, is generated when the brain registers something worth paying attention to, such as a familiar face

phone or are not able to use them,” he said.

Many farmers may not use smartphone, however, there is always a family member who have smartphone but using SMS and voice message sometimes work more than apps, he said.

“The startup is starting operations, however, we face some challenges for deploying sensors in the regions due to sanctions and following economic problems.

“Now we are ready to deploy our sensors and modules in two pilot locations, one is for private sector’s gardening complex in Buin Zahra, near Qazvin and another is a state-run organization in Qomroud rural district in Qom Province, which will be operated until the end of February,” he explained.

He said that although they do not run their application yet, there received positive feedbacks from farmers who they negotiated with in different parts of Iran about the utilization of their app.

Visitors at ELECOMP 2018 welcomed the startup, which deals with problems that they face with, he explained

The 24th Iran International Exhibition of Electronics, Computer & E-commerce (ELECOMP 2018) was held from July 28 to 31 in Tehran.

According to Statista, the global market size of smart agriculture is expected to grow from approximately 9.58 billion U.S. dollars in 2017 to 23.14 billion U.S. dollars by 2022 suitable to their local conditions.

Smart farming types include precision crop farming, livestock monitoring and management, indoor farming, aquaculture, and others (forestry and orchids).

The smart farming market encompasses a wide array of solutions such as hardware systems, software, and services.

in a crowd, a discordant note in a piece of music — or a PIN number. Once the anomaly is revealed, it takes about 300 milliseconds for the brain to notice it, hence the name of the signal. It forms the basis of “brain fingerprinting”, a highly contentious technique that purports to identify, for example, whether a suspect recognises a weapon or a crime scene.

While mind-reading technologies may be cumbersome for now, requiring the use of brain-scanning machines or wire-riddled caps, as well as explicit consent, things can change. Next-generation devices might acquire the capacity for covert detection. Who would bet against the rise of neuroscamming?

Neural privacy may become an asset to be traded, in the same way that we give up digital privacy to use online services. In a future threatened by automation, it could also become the cost of keeping a job. Reports emerged last year that some employees in China were having their emotions and moods monitored using “mind-reading” helmets.

Such are the dual consequences of brain-computer interfaces: a porthole that allows needy patients to connect with the outside world can become a peephole for voyeurs looking in the opposite direction.

(Source: Financial Times)

Technology must complement, not replace, the human element

Entrepreneurs who keep up with and make use of technology as they evolve, will maintain a healthy growth trajectory in 2019, according to Jenny Retief, chief executive of Riversands Incubation Hub.

“Things move fast in the world of small business. Change in technology is probably the biggest single driver of disruption in this sector.

“New technologies make it possible to deliver at far lower cost, and to overcome geographic constraints. This creates many opportunities, but it can be a threat if competitors embrace it and you aren’t.

“The increasing access to technology and tools that your customers probably have will raise their expectations of you, especially your accessibility,” says Retief.

A customer-centric ethos is the core thinking of sustainable SMEs. “Customers will go where their needs are met, and where the experience of doing business is easy, enjoyable and comfortable, for your most tech-



savvy customers.

“The human element is important - the quality delivery which made your customers love you. Technology must complement, not replace that,” says Retief.

■ Retief offers these tips to future proof your business:

- Be clear about your definition of success. What does doing better look like for your organization?
- Actively drive and embrace change. Be the catalyst of, rather than reactor to, change.
- Make it safe for your staff and you to get it wrong when trying new things.
- Empower your team to make decisions fast within whatever policy frame is needed to manage risk.
- Position your business to quickly identify whether your innovation is making things better or not. Having key measures in place that you track regularly will help you to rapidly detect unintended consequences.
- Keep your customers and partners front and centre in your thinking.

(Source: Independent Online)

Research team demonstrates fractal light from lasers

Fractal patterns are common in nature, including in the geometric patterns of a tortoise shell, the structure of a snail shell, the leaves of a succulent plant that repeat to create an intricate pattern, and the frost pattern on a car's windshield in winter.

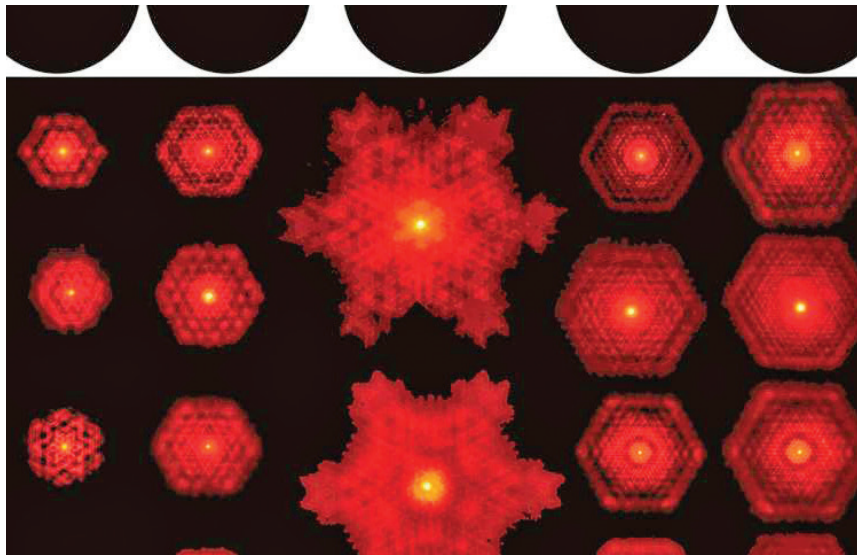
Fractals have the distinctive feature of a repeating geometry with structure at multiple scales, and are found everywhere, from Romanesco broccoli to ferns, and even at larger scales such as salt flats, mountains, coastlines and clouds. The shapes of trees and mountains are also self-similar, such that a branch looks like a small tree and a rocky outcrop like a small mountain.

For the past two decades, scientists have predicted that fractal light could be created with a laser. With its highly polished spherical mirrors, a laser is almost the precise opposite of nature, and so it came as a surprise when, in 1998, researchers predicted fractal light beams emitted from a class of lasers. Now, a team from South Africa and Scotland have demonstrated that fractal light can be created from a laser, verifying the prediction of two decades.

■ The fractal light

Reporting this month in *Physical Review A*, the team provides the first experimental evidence for fractal light from simple lasers and adds a new prediction: that the fractal pattern should exist in 3-D and not just 2-D, as previously thought.

Nature creates such "patterns within patterns" by many recursions of a simple



rule, for example, to produce a snowflake. Computer programs also make fractals by looping through the rule repeatedly, famously producing the abstract Mandelbrot set. The light inside lasers also cycles back and forth, bouncing between the mirrors

on each pass, which can be set to image the light into itself on each round trip. This looks just like a recursive loop, repeating a simple rule over and over. The imaging means that each time the light returns to the image plane, it is a smaller (or larger)

Now, a team from South Africa and Scotland have demonstrated that fractal light can be created from a laser, verifying the prediction of two decades.

version of what it was: a pattern within a pattern within a pattern.

Fractals have applications in imaging, networks, antennas and even medicine. The team expects that the discovery of fractal forms of light that can be engineered directly from a laser should open new applications and technologies based on these exotic states of structured light.

■ Fascinating phenomenon

"Fractals are a truly fascinating phenomenon linked to what is known as chaos," says Professor Andrew Forbes from the University of the Witwatersrand, who led the project together with Professor Johannes Courtial of the University of Glasgow. "In the popular science world, chaos is known as the 'Butterfly Effect,' where a small change in one place makes a big change somewhere else — for example, a butterfly beating its wings in Asia causes a hurricane in the USA. This has been proven to be true."

In explaining the fractal light discovery, Forbes explains that his team realized the importance of where to look for fractals in a laser. "Look at the wrong place inside the laser and you see just a smeared-out blob of light. Look in the right place, where the imaging happens, and you see fractals."

The project combined theoretical expertise from the Glasgow team with experimental validation in South Africa by Wits and CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) researchers.

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

Antarctic meltwater streams shed light on longstanding hydrological mystery

In one of the coldest, driest places on Earth, CU Boulder scientists have developed a possible answer to a longstanding mystery about the chemistry of streamflow, which may have broad implications for watersheds and water quality around the world.

The new study conducted in Antarctica's arid McMurdo Dry Valleys (MDV) region examined the nearly ubiquitous phenomenon that streams in all climates, regardless of their flow rate, tend to maintain a remarkably consistent concentration of dissolved minerals as they move through the landscape. In other words, moving water retains its chemical makeup regardless of whether it's going fast or slow.

Antarctica's dry, pristine conditions offer a streamlined — if far-flung — natural laboratory to test out why that's the case.

■ The glacial melt

The "MDV region provides ideal hydrological study conditions," said Adam Wlostowski, lead author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher in CU Boulder's Institute for Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR). "Here, we only have one source of water — glacial melt — and no deep groundwater, with permafrost acting as a physical barrier for the stream. By limiting the number of variables, we can learn a great deal."

The research, detailed in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, examined seven different streams in the Taylor Valley, where meltwater flows to ice-covered lake basins in just hours or weeks, compared to months or years in the Rocky Mountain region. As such, Antarctic streams have precious little opportunity to stagnate in the landscape.

"We expected the water at the stream outlets to look like the water at the head of glacier due to limited interactions with minerals," Wlostowski said. "And we thought



that as the flow went up, the concentration would decrease. That did not turn out to be true. There was little to no variation even with flow change."

The results suggest that high levels of chemical weathering — the process by which solid minerals dissolve, much like rock salt in a puddle of warm water — are the primary mechanism for this streamflow phenomenon.

■ Antarctic polar desert

"These Antarctic polar desert streams host some of the most rapid chemical weathering rates in the world because their beds are made up of fresh sediments that see water for only 6-10 weeks per year," said Michael Gooseff, a professor in CU Boulder's Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering. "This is another important lesson we have learned about this ecosystem that is transferable to other parts of the world."

The study underscores the value of long-term data collection, Wlostowski said, which makes the study of hydrological phenomena possible. In this case, he and his colleagues drew on more than 20 years of streamflow observations collected by the National Science Foundation's McMurdo Dry Valleys Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) Project, which has funded and supported CU Boulder students and faculty for over two decades. (Source: [eurekaalert.org](#))

Research says California coast massive starfish die-off caused by global warming

Infectious wasting disease is killing sea stars along the Pacific Coast of North America and scientists believe, global warming is to blame.

A new report reveals that the rising ocean temperature has made sea stars more susceptible to the disease. In just a few years, it has devastated what once was a large population of sunflower sea stars in the area.

"At one time plentiful in nearshore waters, the sunflower sea stars right now cannot be found off the California coast and are rare into Alaska," stated Drew Harvell, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Cornell University and co-lead author of the report published in the journal *Science Advances*.

"Numbers of the sea stars have stayed so low in the past three years, we consider them endangered in the southern part of their range, and we don't have data for northern Alaska."

■ Sea star populations

Harvell and his team said that the wasting disease has caused mass mortality of multiple sea stars species from Mexico to Alaska since 2013. Sea star populations in the East Coast were also affected.

The sea star wasting syndrome is a general description for symptoms that are found in sea stars. When a sea star is infected, lesions appear in the ectoderm. This is followed by the decay of tissue surrounding the lesions, eventually leading to fragmentation of the body and then death.

According to researchers, the disease progresses rapidly. The infected sea star can die within only a few days.

The "heat wave in the oceans — a product of increasing atmospheric



temperatures — is exacerbating the sea star wasting disease," added Harvell. "It's a lethal disease, and when you add a higher temperature to that, it kills faster, causing a bigger impact."

Pycnopodia helianthoides, most commonly known as sunflower sea stars, can grow to about 39 inches or 1 meter from arm tip to arm tip. They are some of the largest sea stars in the North Pacific.

■ In a diet of crabs

They survive in a diet of crabs, snails, sea cucumbers, dead or dying squid, and sea urchins.

With the disappearance of sunflower sea stars in the Pacific Coast, scientists see a boom in the population of sea urchins, which eat kelp.

The disappearance of kelp forests, which house a variety of underwater species, can vastly affect biodiversity in the region.

Joseph Gaydos, director of the SeaDoc Society at University of California, Davis and a senior author of the study, added that California, Washington, and parts of British Columbia in Canada rely on the sunflower sea stars to keep the sea urchin population.

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

Earth's largest extinction event likely took plants first

New evidence from the cliffsides of Australia suggests that Earth's largest extinction event — a volcanic cataclysm occurring roughly 252 million years ago — extinguished plant life long before many animal counterparts.

Little life could endure the Earth-spanning cataclysm known as the Great Dying, but plants may have suffered its wrath long before many animal counterparts, says new research led by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

About 252 million years ago, with the planet's continental crust mashed into the supercontinent called Pangaea, volcanoes in modern-day Siberia began erupting. Spewing carbon and methane into the atmosphere for roughly 2 million years, the eruption helped extinguish about 96 percent of oceanic life and 70 percent of land-based vertebrates — the largest extinction event in Earth's history.

Yet the new study suggests that a byproduct of the eruption — nickel — may have driven some Australian plant life to extinction nearly 400,000 years before most marine species perished.

"That's big news," said lead author Christopher Fielding, professor of Earth and atmospheric sciences. "People have hinted at that, but nobody's previously pinned it down. Now we have a timeline."

The researchers reached the conclusion by studying fossilized pollen, the chemical composition and age of rock, and the layering of sediment on the southeastern cliffsides of Australia. There they discovered surprisingly high concentrations of nickel in the Sydney Basin's mud-rock — surprising because there are no local sources of the element.

Tracy Frank, professor and chair of Earth and atmospheric sciences, said the finding points to the eruption of lava through nickel deposits in Siberia. That volcanism could have converted the nickel into an aerosol that drifted thousands of miles southward before descending on, and poisoning, much of the plant life there. Similar spikes in nickel have been recorded in other parts of the world, she said.

"So it was a combination of circumstances," Fielding said. "And that's a recurring theme through all five of the major mass extinctions in Earth's history."

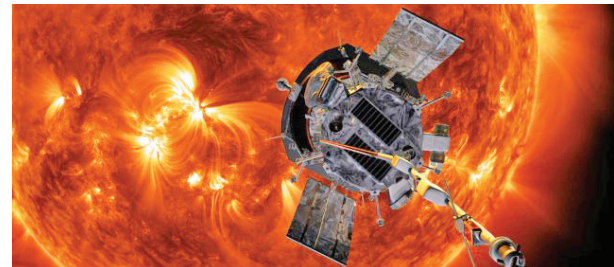
(Source: [sciencedaily.com](#))

Solar probe begins its second orbit of the sun, says NASA

NASA's Parker solar surveyor became a record-setter at the beginning of its mission when it took the title of fastest spacecraft in history from the wildly successful New Horizons probe. It made history again a few weeks later by flying through the sun's corona and beaming back data. Now, NASA reports that Parker has completed a full orbit of the sun, and it's diving back for another pass.

Parker entered full operational status on Jan. 1 with all systems operating normally. It has started relaying mountains of data via the Deep Space network — NASA says it has collected more than 17 gigabytes so far. Parker has collected so much data that it'll take several more months to get all of it sent back. The data dump from the first orbit should be done just in time for Parker to dive into the sun's corona again.

In preparation for the upcoming solar pass, NASA is busily clearing space on the probe's internal solid state drives. As data makes it back to Earth, NASA deletes the corresponding files on Parker. The spacecraft is also getting new navigational information, which NASA transmits one month at a time.



NASA says it expects Parker to reach perihelion (the closest approach to the sun) on Apr. 4. This will be the second of 24 planned orbits that promise to advance our understanding of the sun. Parker's mission has been in the works for years. NASA has long wanted to study the sun's corona, but the technology to protect a probe was beyond our abilities until just recently. You'd probably expect the surface of the sun to be hotter than the space around it, but that's not the case.

Parker has a 4.5-inch carbon composite foam heat shield sandwiched between two carbon fiber sheets. NASA wasn't sure how well it would perform until Parker was inside the corona, but now the agency believes Parker will have no trouble completing all 24 orbits without becoming a ball of molten metal.

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

We need to act before it's too late, as risks of advanced AI are real: team says

This type of artificial intelligence (AI) is referred to as Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) — non-human systems that can perform a specific task. We encounter this type on a daily basis, and its use is growing rapidly.

But while many impressive capabilities have been demonstrated, we're also beginning to see problems. The worst case involved a self-driving test car that hit a pedestrian in March. The pedestrian died and the incident is still under investigation.

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) will have advanced computational powers and human level intelligence. AGI systems will be able to learn, solve problems, adapt and self-improve.

Importantly, their rate of improvement could be exponential as they become far more advanced than their human creators. The introduction of AGI could quickly bring about Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI).

While fully functioning AGI systems do not yet exist, it has been estimated that they will be with us anywhere between 2029 and the end of the century.

What appears almost certain is that they will arrive eventually. When they do, there is a great and natural concern that we won't be able to control them.

Some of the more powerful applications include curing disease, solving complex global challenges such as climate change and food security, and initiating a worldwide technology boom.

But a failure to implement appropriate controls could lead to catastrophic consequences.

Despite what we see in Hollywood movies, existential threats are not likely to involve killer robots.

It is here that the science of human-machine systems — known as Human Factors and Ergonomics — will come to the fore.

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

Very dolphin, whale and seal in this study was contaminated with microplastics

A team analyzed a total of 50 animals across 10 species for their research, which was published in the journal *Scientific Reports*. Microplastics were defined in the study as fragments measuring up to 5 millimeters (0.2 inches).

The samples used in the study were taken from 50 animals by members of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme and the Cetacean Strandings Investigation Program. Both projects are based in the UK.

Of the plastics found in the sea creatures, 84 percent were synthetic fibers, which generally originate from products such as clothing and fishing nets. The remaining contaminants were what the scientists described as fragments, likely to come from food and drink packaging.

The animals that died of an infection contained marginally higher levels of microplastics than those that perished from different causes. However, it was unclear whether microplastics were a contributing factor to infections, wrote the authors, who are from the University of Exeter and Plymouth Marine Laboratory.

■ Single animal of all species

Brendan Godley, a professor of conservation science at the University of



Exeter, told *Newsweek* the study "highlights the magnitude of plastic pollution. We expected to find plastics but were somewhat surprised when we found fibers in every single animal of all species."

However, he said the team were relieved that the plastics appeared to pass through the animals, as they contained 5.5 particles on average, which is considered relatively low.

In a statement, Penelope Lindeque, head of the marine plastics research group at Plymouth Marine Laboratory, said: "We don't yet know the effects of these particles on marine mammals. Their small size means they

may easily be expelled, but while microplastics are unlikely to be the main threat to these species, we are still concerned by the impact of the bacteria, viruses and contaminants carried on the plastic."

Godley said the work could be expanded upon in future research, using a larger sample of animals and across a range of geographic locations.

"I am particularly concerned for filter-feeding whales," he said. Past research has suggested that these animals, which ingest hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of water each day in order to feed off plankton, are at particular risk from ocean pollution.

IRCS offering volunteer treatment services in villages

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is offering volunteer treatment services in 432 villages in underprivileged areas nationwide, Mohammad Nasiri, an IRCS official has said.



On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (February 11) volunteer doctors and specialists including general practitioners, neurologists, cardiologists, gynecologists, orthopedists, ophthalmologist, otolaryngologists, dentists, general surgeons, and immunologists are dispatched to various villages in all 31 provinces, Nasiri said, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

The volunteer doctors are providing the residents of the underdeveloped areas with free of charge treatment services as well as medications, Nasiri concluded.

In late November 2018, some 36 volunteer dentists have offered free of charge dental care services in underprivileged villages of Rigan county, southeastern province of Kerman.

LEARN ENGLISH

Baking a Cake

A: Ok, so are you ready to learn how to **bake** a cake?
B: Almost, let me just put my **apron** on.
A: Ok, so the first thing we are going to do is **preheat** the oven, that way we have it at the **desired** temperature once we finish preparing everything. Set it to three hundred and seventy five degrees Fahrenheit.
B: Got it.
A: No we are gonna make the **batter**. Take some butter and sugar and mix it lightly until you have a nice **consistency**. Then add some vanilla **extract** and eggs and continue mixing.
B: Do I have to use a **whisk** or can I use the electric mixer?
A: Go ahead and use the mixer, but put it on medium speed. I'm gonna **sift** the flour and baking powder separately and then we can mix it with milk and the rest of the ingredients.
B: Ok, so now we need a baking pan right?
A: Yeah, but **grease** and flour it first so the cake won't stick to it when it bakes.
B: Done. So how long do we bake it for?
A: We can leave it in there for about twenty five minutes. Then we let it cool for ten minutes before we remove the cake from the pan.
B: Wow! This was a lot easier than I thought!

■ **Key vocabulary**
bake: to cook something using dry heat, in an oven
apron: a piece of clothing that covers the front part of your clothes and is tied around your waist, worn to keep your clothes clean, especially while cooking
preheat: to heat an oven to a particular temperature before it is used to cook something
desired: intended
batter: a mixture of flour, eggs, milk etc., used in cooking and for making bread, cakes etc.
consistency: how thick, smooth etc. a substance is
extract: a substance obtained from something by using a special process
whisk: a small kitchen tool made of curved pieces of wire, used for mixing air into eggs, cream etc.
sift: to put flour, sugar etc. through a sieve or similar container in order to remove large pieces
grease: to put butter, grease etc. on a pan etc. to prevent food from sticking to it
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
fry: to cook something in hot fat or oil, or to be cooked in hot fat or oil
boil: to cook something in boiling water
bake : to cook something using dry heat, in an oven
roast : to cook something, such as meat, in an oven or over a fire, or to cook in this way
microwave: to cook something in a microwave oven
grill/broil: if you grill something, or if it grills, you cook it by putting it on a flat metal frame with bars across it, above or below strong direct heat
steam: to cook something in steam
simmer: to boil gently, or to cook something slowly by boiling it gently
poach: to gently cook food, especially fish, in a small amount of boiling water, milk etc.
stir-fry: to cook small pieces of food quickly by moving them around continuously in very hot oil
sauté: to cook something in a little hot oil or fat
chargrill: grill (food, typically meat or fish) quickly at a very high heat
raw: not cooked
rare: used about meat that has been cooked for a short time
well-done: used about meat that has been cooked for a long time
cookbook: a book that tells you how to prepare and cook food
culinary: relating to cooking

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one chance.

97% of Iran affected by long-term drought: expert

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Based on the data collected over the past decade approximately 97 percent of the country is affected by long-term drought, director of the national drought warning and monitoring center, Sadeq Ziaieian, has said.

Some 12.7 percent of the country is hit by extremely severe drought, 53.6 percent of the country is affected by severe drought while 24.8 percent of the country is facing moderate drought and 5.9 percent of the country is withstanding mild drought, ISNA news agency quoted Ziaieian as saying on Wednesday.

He went on to say that extremely severe long-term drought has had negative effects on 14.2 percent of the country's total population, severe long-term drought has hit 47 percent of the country's population, 30.7 percent of the country's population is affected by moderate long-term drought and 5.1 percent of the population is stricken with mild drought.

Over a one year period ending on January 20 nearly 72.2 percent of the country's total population have been negatively affected by drought, he said, adding that 22.7 percent of the country's population is struggling with mild drought, 17.7 percent of the population is affected by moderate drought, 13 percent of the population is stricken with severe drought and 28.7 percent of the population is hit by extremely severe drought.

In the same period 19 percent of the country is affected by extremely severe drought, 10.5 percent is facing severe drought, 23.3 percent is suffering moderate drought and



Over the coming months the country will receive normal precipitations, however, regarding climate change in long-term precipitation amounts will drop, so that national plans to provide the country with sustainable water resources and taking measures to adopt to water scarcity specially in southeastern regions of the country is a must.

20.9 percent is experiencing mild drought, he highlighted.

Iman Babaeian, caretaker director of the Climatological Research Institute, also told

‘Energy Ministry should set an agenda for dredging rivers’

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Ministry of Energy should set an agenda for dredging rivers, Ismail Najjar, head of the National Disaster Management Organization has said.

Dredging is the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of lakes, rivers, harbors, and other water bodies. It is a routine necessity in waterways around the world because sedimentation—the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream—gradually fills channels and harbors.

Major rivers are stretching over 147,000 kilometers and unfortunately only 10 kilometers of the rivers are dredged, Najjar regretted.

Most importantly dredging must be seriously undertaken in the province of Khuzestan, Najjar highlighted, adding that levees also need constant maintenance to prevent floods, ISNBA reported on Thursday.

He made the remarks over his visit to flood stricken province of Khuzestan on Wednesday.

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 few days leading to evacuation of 35 villages.

Due to the excessive rain Karun, Karkheh and Dez rivers overflow their banks and inundated many cities and villages in Ahvaz, Shush, Dasht-e Azadegan, Howeyzeh, Dezful and Shushtar. 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 U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration dredging often is focused on maintaining or increasing the depth of navigation channels, anchorages, or berthing areas to ensure the safe passage of boats and ships. Vessels require a certain amount of water in order to float and not touch bottom.

Dredging is also performed to reduce the exposure of fish, wildlife, and people to contaminants and to prevent the spread of contaminants to other areas of the water body. This environmental dredging is often necessary because sediments in and around cities and industrial areas are frequently contaminated with a variety of pollutants.

Moreover dredging increases the channel depth and therefore increase a channel's capacity for carrying water and help in preventing floods.

U.S. residents warned not to take deep breaths as Polar Vortex brings extreme cold

People in the parts of the U.S. are being warned to stay indoors as some of the coldest weather in a generation hits.

At least eight people have died as freezing temperatures hit the U.S. The weather system – known as a Polar Vortex – has seen a blast of Arctic air sweeping through the upper Midwest of the country, with the wind chill making it feel like -46C.

Temperatures have plunged as low as -32C in North Da-

kota with wind chills as low as -52C in Minnesota.

Schools have been closed and flights cancelled due to severity of cold. In Iowa, residents are being urged to protect their lungs by avoiding taking deep breaths and talking as little as possible when outside.

Leon Whitener is from St Louis City Fire Department in Missouri. He's working with other authorities to keep rough

sleepers safe and warm.

"It is a tough situation for us to be in," he said.

"We know that these temperatures are very dangerous and yet a lot of our homeless are comfortable where they are.

"They don't understand the challenges sometimes with these really cold temperatures."

(Source: News talk)



EU moves to ban microplastics equivalent to ‘six times Great Pacific Garbage Patch’

The EU is planning to ban 90 per cent of microplastics that are added to products, including cosmetics, detergents and paints.

Every year Europe releases a quantity of microplastics equivalent to six times the waste floating in the famous “Great Pacific Garbage Patch”.

Under the new draft laws proposed by the European Chemicals Agency (Echa), 400,000 tons of plastic pollution would be cut in the space of two decades.

Tiny fragments of plastic have been viewed as a significant threat to sea creatures as they wash off and find their way into marine ecosystems.

Microplastics have been found everywhere from deep ocean trenches to Arctic sea ice, and once they enter the environment, these pollutants can persist for thousands of years.

The UK implemented a more limited ban on microplastics last year, covering personal care products including face washes and toothpastes.

Echa say the measures, which are expected to come into law by 2020, are more comprehensive in their coverage of unnecessary plastics in consumer items.

"The EU is rapidly becoming a leader in the global culture shift away from wasteful plastic," said Elise Vitali, chemicals policy officer for the European Environmental Bureau.

"Microplastic is one of those vast but largely invisible problems; a menace all

around and in us.

"It was fed by irresponsible firms, such as those making personal care products that decided to swap out natural ingredients like ground almond, coconut shell and olive seed for plastic microbeads."

The proposed ban is part of the EU plastics strategy that saw Europe introduce expansive bans on single-use plastic including plates, cutlery, straws and cotton buds by 2021.

A spokesperson from Echa said whether or not the new regulations will extend to the UK depend on the outcome of Brexit, and are "an unknown for now".

NGOs welcomed the new move, although they said it granted too long a period for sectors to comply with the ban. Most products will be given between two and six years to phase out the plastic fragments.

The proposal will now undergo consultation before facing a vote at the beginning of 2020.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Brain science center to open in Tehran’s Book Garden

A center for brain science for students, aiming to promote scientific study of the brain, will be opened in Book Garden, northern Tehran, in the month of Bahman (January 21-February 19), IRNA reported on Tuesday. Secretary for Cognitive Sciences Technologies Council Kamal Kharrazi explained that the project to set up the center requires 12 billion rials (nearly \$285,000).

The budget is allocated by the Vice presidency for Science and Technology, Tehran Municipality as well as the Cognitive Sciences Technologies Council, he said.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“basi-, baso-”

■ **Meaning**: bottom or base
■ **For example**: This page provides some *basic* information.

PHRASAL VERB

Sneak up

■ **Meaning**: to come near someone very quietly, so that they do not see you until you reach them
■ **For example**: I wish you wouldn't sneak up on me like that!

IDIOM

Gain ground

■ **Explanation**: to make progress or obtain more success, popularity, importance, or acceptance
■ **For example**: No one thought our fast food chain would do well in such a saturated market, but we've started gaining ground!

گشایش مرکز علم مغز در باغ کتاب تهران

به گزارش روز پنج شنبه خبرگزاری ایرنا مرکز علم مغز که با محوریت ترویج علم مغزبرای دانش آموزان طراحی شده است، بهمن ماه سال جاری در محل باغ کتاب تهران افتتاح خواهد شد.

کمال خرازی دبیر ستاد علوم و فناوری های شناختی گفت: در پروژه مرکز علم مغز نزدیک به یک میلیارد و دویست میلیون تومان هزینه خواهد شد.

وی همچنین گفت: هزینه این مرکز هم که نزدیک به یک میلیارد و دویست میلیون تومان در نظر گرفته شده است از سوی ستاد علوم شناختی، شهرداری و معاونت علمی و فناوری پرداخت می شود.

Lebanon forms new govt., breaks political impasse

➔ According to a statement by Lebanon's presidency, Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil from Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal party (Hope Movement/?arakat Amal), and Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, who leads President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM/at-Tayy'r al-Wa'an? al-Horr/Aounist party), have retained their positions in the new cabinet.

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has chosen Jamil Jabak as the new health minister, despite the fact that he is not a member of the movement.

Govt. work can no longer wait

Speaking following the announcement, Hariri voiced alarm about the country's economic and financial challenges, saying the time for dealing with problems with "painkillers" is over.

"The time of treatment with painkillers is over. No one can put their head in the sand anymore. Matters are as clear as the sun. All the problems are known and the causes of the corruption and waste and administrative deficiency are also known," the prime minister said.



"Lebanese are living in concern about the economic situation," Hariri said, adding that the government's work could not wait.

Since the May 2015 election, the last

Hariri government, which has been appointed in 2016, has been in office in a caretaker capacity.

That election saw Hariri lose over a third of his MPs (Members of Parliament); how-

ever, but kept his status as the leading Sunni Muslim, which enabled him to return as prime minister, a position reserved for his sect under Lebanese law.

The Hezbollah resistance movement and its political allies secured over half the seats.

Economy high on agenda

The Lebanese finance minister seems to be facing a tough job as his country currently has the fifth highest public-debt burden in the world, at 150% of gross domestic product (GDP).

The long-running political dispute dealt a blow to the country's plans for fiscal and structural reforms needed to unlock \$11 billion in grants and loans.

The new cabinet is now expected to introduce reforms aimed at dealing with corruption and fixing its ailing electricity sector.

At the presidential palace, Hariri said the country should urgently begin to "invest in economic and social solutions."

Reforms and cooperation among political factions are key to resolving the economic problems, he said.

(Source: Press TV)

Israeli forces brutally assault Palestinian father, force son to watch: Israeli paper

Israeli forces have brutally beaten two handcuffed and blindfolded Palestinians, a father and his son, then removed the blindfold from the son's eyes and forced him to watch his father being beaten up, Haaretz reports.

The soldiers slapped, punched and bludgeoned on January 8 the two detainees and then took the blindfold off of the son's eyes to make him watch them abuse his father until his ribs and nose were broken, the newspaper reported.

The two had been arrested under the pretext of helping gunmen involved in a December shooting which killed two Israeli soldiers.

The soldiers made "calls of joy and boasting" during the violence which inflicted heavy injuries to the detainees, the report said.

On Wednesday, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in central Tel Aviv to urge a probe into a fatal shooting which killed an Israeli of Ethiopian descent.

Police shot dead Yehuda Biadga, a 24-year-old mentally unstable man on January 18, triggering protests by the Ethiopian Jews living in the occupied lands.

One of the protesters said she joined the rallies because "there is racism everywhere" and that she felt like she did not belong to the entity.

Demonstrations turned ugly as some protesters hurled rocks and bottles at police officers. Some people from the two sides were injured and at least nine protesters were arrested.

Apart from Israeli soldiers, settlers engage in provocative, violent, and sometimes deadly actions against Palestinians on a regular basis.

Since 2015, the occupied territories have been the scene of heightened tensions due to Israeli measures which Pal-

estinians view as a bid to change the status of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in al-Quds (Jerusalem).

The United States President Donald Trump's recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and relocation of the U.S. embassy to the occupied city has fanned the flames of the tensions.

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

Hamas won't be part of any new puppet Palestinian govt.

Meantime, the deputy head of the Hamas political bureau, Mousa Abu Marzouk, says the resistance movement will not take part in any puppet Palestinian government in Ramallah, noting such a government will be "devoid of any national legacy and would strive to promote division" just like its predecessors.

Marzouk, in a post published on his official Twitter page on Wednesday, said officials from the Ramallah-based Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) would not invite Hamas to participate in such a Palestinian government in the first place, emphasizing that the movement would turn down such an offer even if it were made.

He asserted that a new government in Ramallah would work on realizing Trump's "deal of the century."

The so-called deal, a back channel plan to allegedly reach a peace settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, was proposed by the U.S. administration in September 2018. Although the plan has not been released, leaks signal it will consist of the same tried and failed ideas.

While little is known about the controversial deal, leaks



have suggested that it regards East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israeli territory, whereas Palestinians view the eastern sector of the occupied city as the capital of their future state.

Palestinians also believe that the U.S.-drafted plan calls for keeping borders and security under Israeli control, while it keeps Israeli settlements' final borders to be discussed in later negotiations.

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami al-Hamdallah officially submitted his resignation and that of his unity government to President Mahmoud Abbas on January 29, casting doubt on the prospects of reconciliation efforts with Hamas.

Abbas had been facing pressure from his ruling Fatah movement over the past few weeks to remove Hamdallah from power, and establish a new government comprised of representatives from PLO factions in addition to independent figures.

(Source: Press TV)

Syria's UN envoy: Anti-Damascus sanctions amount to 'economic terrorism'

Syria's UN envoy: Anti-Damascus sanctions amount to 'economic terrorism'

Syria's mission to the United Nations has vehemently condemned the economic sanctions targeting the country, saying they blight the lives of ordinary Syrians.

"The unilateral, coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people represent an economic terrorism that are largely affecting the lives of the Syrians and hindering the delivery of their daily basic needs," the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported, citing the country's UN Ambassador Bashar al-Ja'afari as saying on Wednesday.

Ja'afari, who was addressing a UN Security Council (UNSC) session focusing on the situation in the country, said that since foreign-backed militancy broke out in 2011, Damascus "had spared no efforts to fulfill its duty in meeting the humanitarian requirements of the Syrians, who have suffered from this war."

The Syrian government, the envoy said, was prepared to boost its cooperation with the UN and its member states to both improve the humanitarian situation and pave the way for the return of those who had fled war.

The United States and its Western and regional supporters stand accused of supporting the foreign-backed war that has killed hundreds of thousands in the country, but has now been mostly contained thanks to Damascus and its allies' counter-terrorism efforts.

Washington has, meanwhile, been imposing sanctions on hundreds of companies and individuals, whom it accuses of involvement in developing chemical munitions. Damascus surrendered its stockpile of chemical weapons in a process monitored by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2013, and has repeatedly asserted that it has never deployed such weapons.

The European Union (EU) has also slapped Syria with an oil embargo, placed restrictions on certain investments in the country, frozen the assets of the Syrian Central Bank across the bloc, and imposed bans on dozens of companies linked to the government of

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The EU voted last May in favor of extending the bans until June 1, 2019.

Foreign forces back terrorism

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ja'afari expressed satisfaction with the "positive" meetings and "frank" dialog with the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and other officials.

He, however, asserted that the Syrian people's suffering would not cease "if the reasons behind this suffering are not treated, mainly the presence of terrorism."

The envoy called for ending the illegitimate presence of the United States, French, Turkish, and British troops on the Syrian territory, saying those are "supporting terrorism and obstructing the humanitarian work," SANA said.

Back in April, officials from a coalition of Arab and Kurdish militants operating in northeastern Syria said the U.S., Britain and France were setting up new outposts in northeastern Syria, despite a lack of permission from Damascus to have military presence in sovereign Syrian territory.

Turkey has also a military presence in northern Syria and has already launched two cross-border operations there, namely "Euphrates Shield" in August 2016 and "Olive Branch" in January 2018 with the declared aim of eradicating the presence of Kurdish militants and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists near Turkey's borders.

Foreign intelligence informing White Helmets

Separately, he said the White Helmets, a Western-backed so-called aid group, had "made many fabrications by instructions from Western intelligence" about alleged use of chemical substances in Syria for some permanent members of the UNSC to provide pretext for launching acts of aggression against the country.

The U.S., Britain, and France have, in the past, used allegations of deployments of chemical agents to launch attacks against the Syrian military's defenses and other targets with the purported goal of paralyzing the Syrian government's capability to produce



chemicals.

The U.S. President Donald Trump ordered a missile strike against Shayrat Airbase in Syria's Homs Province on April 7, 2017. He claimed back then that the airfield had been the origin of a suspected sarin gas attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib on April 4, 2017.

On April 14, 2018, the U.S., Britain, and France also launched more than 100 missiles against what they said were Syrian chemical weapons facilities in response to an alleged chemical weapons attack in a Damascus suburb a week earlier.

White Helmets preparing to film false flag chemical attacks in Idlib: Russia

Moreover, Russia has warned that members of the so-called White Helmets civil defense group are making preparations to film scenes of staged chemical attacks in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib in a bid to implicate Syrian government forces and invent pretexts for possible acts of aggression on army troops.

Speaking during a press briefing in the Russian capital Moscow on Thursday, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said there were reports that the Western-backed group, which has been repeatedly accused of cooperating with Takfiri terrorists and staging false flag gas attacks, has installed cameras and related equipment in several hospitals across Idlib to film the purported

victims of fake chemical attacks.

"Tensions around the Idlib de-escalation zone are not on the decline," Zakharova pointed out, adding, "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militants, who are running the show there, do not only shell nearby settlements on a daily basis, but are also actively beefing up their presence near the contact line with Syrian government forces."

The diplomat also expressed deep concern over incoming reports that the terrorists "have not abandoned efforts to stage a chemical attack against civilians."

Zakharova concluded that Moscow has urged Washington to withdraw its troops from Syria as soon as possible, calling for the return of all Syrian territories to Damascus control.

Cold kills dozens of children at refugee camp in Syria: UN

Elsewhere, the UN says nearly 30 internally displaced Syrian children have lost their lives because of freezing temperatures and lack of basic needs at a refugee camp in northeastern Syria over the past two months.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said in a statement on Thursday that children and newborns died in a teeming camp in Hasakeh, mainly due to hypothermia.

"At least 29 children and newborns are reported to have died over the past eight weeks, mainly from hypothermia, while travelling to the camp or shortly after arrival," the statement read.

The UN health agency also expressed extreme concern over the conditions of those who make it to al-Hol, where lies the main camp for people displaced by the fighting against the ISIL terrorist group and other foreign-sponsored outfits.

The UN body appealed for unhindered access to the camp, saying the situation has become "critical" for 33,000 people, mainly women and children, now living there in bitterly cold winter conditions.

According to the WHO, about 23,000 people, mainly women and children fleeing hostilities in rural areas of the neighboring Dayr al-Zawr, have reached the camp over the past two months.

(Source: agencies)

We are losing a generation of children in Yemen: UNICEF

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has expressed concern about the humanitarian conditions of Yemeni children, warning about the formation of a "lost generation".

More than half a million children have been forced to leave their homes in the past six months, most of which have fled a major Saudi regime-led military onslaught on Yemen's port city of Hudaydah during July and August, said the Yemen director of UNICEF, Meritxell Relano, on Thursday.

Facing no access to education and withstanding an increased risk of disease and hunger, Relano highlighted some of the conflict's long-term effects on the children.

"Without education they will not be able to find jobs... a generation that is not educated has a very bleak future," said the UNICEF director.

"We are losing a generation - many children are losing on their education, and displacement makes it worse."

The Save the Children charity reports that despite an ongoing ceasefire in Hudaydah, thousands of families are still fleeing the city in fear of a renewed Saudi siege. Many are struggling to afford basic items like food, fuel and medicine.

"Children forced to flee their homes often have to live in unsanitary and cramped conditions in camps or host communities with little access to clean drinking water or nutritious food," said Save the Children spokesman Bhanu Bhatnagar.

Bhatnagar added that children are specifically vulnerable towards malnutrition, diarrhea, cholera, and diphtheria -- a serious bacterial infection that spreads as easily as a common cold. As much as 89 percent of Yemen's diphtheria deaths are related to children who are under 14.

The House of Saud regime and its allies unleashed the deadly military aggression against Yemen in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall the country's former Riyadh-allied regime.

Yemen's Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, which runs state affairs in Sana'a in the absence of an effective government, has been defending the nation against the Saudi regime aggression.

In June last year, the Saudi regime-led coalition launched an offensive on Hudaydah despite international warnings that it would compound the country's humanitarian crisis.

Hudaydah is known to be the point of entry for 80 percent of the country's commercial imports and nearly all UN-supervised humanitarian aid.

The Saudi regime-led offensive has destroyed Yemen's infrastructure and led to famine in the import-dependent state.

(Source: Press TV)

Sexual assault at U.S. military academies rise 50%

The number of sexual assaults at the U.S. military academies rose by nearly 50 percent over the past two years, despite extensive efforts to combat the abuse epidemic, according to a new report by the Pentagon.

There had been 747 instances of unwanted sexual contact in 2018, compared to 507 in 2016 and more than half of the incidents involved alcohol, the U.S. Defense Department said on Thursday in its annual report on sex violence.

The Pentagon survey said that 16.5 percent of female cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2018, compared to 10.2 percent in 2016.

The number of reported assaults increased from 29 to 32 at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; and dipped slightly from 22 to 21 at the Air Force Academy, near Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Sexual assault in the U.S. military has long been a massive problem and is largely under-reported. The issue came under renewed scrutiny two years ago after a scandal involving Marines sharing nude photos of women online came to light.

The new report comes amid an ongoing wave of revelations about sexual harassment in the U.S., which has toppled a number of powerful men in the media, politics, business and the Catholic Church.

Suicide deaths among active duty U.S. troops highest in years

Meantime, the number of U.S. military active-duty troops who killed themselves in 2018 was highest in the past six years, official data shows.

With the U.S. Army refusing to reveal the number of suicides among its ranks in the fourth quarter of last year, a total of 286 active-duty U.S. military personnel committed suicide last year, according to a report by Military.com.

The number included 57 Marines, 68 navy sailors, 58 airmen and, through October 1, 103 Army soldiers.

The report warned that the number could equal the highest-ever annual record, 321 suicide deaths in 2012, or even exceed it if the Army agrees to disclose the full statistics.

The high number shows the challenge that the Pentagon and the U.S. military services continue to face despite having instituted numerous programs to awareness about suicide and promote prevention.

In his 2019 guidance to Marines released last week, Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller warned his forces against committing suicide as a solution to solve their mental issues, urging them to think about the lasting impact of a "permanent solution to a temporary problem."

"We pride ourselves on building tough, resilient, mission-focused Marines, but we also pride ourselves on taking care of our own. ... While there is no dishonor in coming up short or needing help, there is no honor in quitting. MARINES NEVER QUIT ON EACH OTHER!" Neller wrote.

The 57 cases of suicide among active-duty Marines represented a 25-percent increase from 2017. It was also the highest suicide deaths since the service seriously began tracking such cases in 2001.

Separately, the Marine Corps also reported 18 suicide deaths among its Reserve members in 2018, almost equaling the all-time high number of 19 suicide deaths of reservists in 2016.

The number of Navy suicides also increased from 65 in 2017 to 68 a year later, meaning that the adjusted rate was more than 20 deaths per 100,000. That's far more higher compared to five years ago, when the number stood at 12 deaths per 100,000 service members.

The Navy is the only service that publishes its data, including calculated suicide rates, online.

The U.S. Air Force officials was the only branch to report a slight decrease -- 58 active-duty airmen compared to 63 in 2015 and 2017, and 61 in 2016.

Brigadier General Michael Martin, director of Air Force Integrated Resilience, admitted that the numbers were still troubling.

(Source: agencies)

Tokyo 2020 plans weather monitoring after heatstroke fears

Tokyo 2020 organizers on Thursday unveiled plans for a centre to monitor extreme weather, after concerns the city’s scorching summer could cause heatstroke or even deaths during the Games. The next Olympics will also overlap with Japan’s typhoon season, and the potential for extreme conditions has become a major headache for the event after a string of weather-related disasters. Organizers will work with a private weather company and the government’s meteorological agency to analyze climate data in areas with Olympic venues, a Tokyo 2020 official told AFP. The centre will send warnings about weather-related emergencies, including the risk of heatstroke and even evacuation information if necessary, she added.

Last year Japan was rocked by a number of weather emergencies, including record rainfall in the west of the country that killed more than 200 people. A deadly heatwave also gripped the country during the summer, raising concerns about outdoor events during the Games, particularly the marathon. Japanese medical groups have warned the event could “lead to deaths” from heatstroke.

In December, Tokyo 2020 officials announced they would move up the start of the marathon to “between 5:30am and 6am.” They had previously moved it up to 7am.

Organizers have toyed with various ways of beating the heat including the introduction of daylight saving time -- an idea that appears to have fallen by the wayside.

Last time Japan hosted the Olympics, in 1964, the competition was held in October to avoid the hot summer conditions. *(Source: AFP)*

Sauber F1 team changes name to Alfa Romeo Racing

The Sauber name will disappear from the Formula One grid this season after the Swiss-based team announced on Friday it had been renamed Alfa Romeo Racing as part of an extended sponsorship deal.

The team, who finished eighth out of 10 in the constructors’ championship last year, will remain under the same independent ownership and management with Frenchman Frederic Vasseur as principal. Sauber made their Formula One debut as a privately-owned team in 1993, taking their sole victory at the 2008 Canadian Grand Prix while racing as BMW’s factory team.

They have been partnered by Fiat Chrysler brand Alfa Romeo since last year.

The team use the same engines as Ferrari, with whom they have close ties, and have Finland’s 2007 world champion Kimi Raikkonen and Italian Antonio Giovinazzi in an all-new driver lineup for 2019. Alfa Romeo has a strong heritage in Formula One with the first two world championships in 1950 and 1951 won by Italian Giuseppe “Nino” Farina and Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio in cars carrying the four-leaf clover emblem.

Ferrari’s late founder Enzo also started out racing and managing a team for Alfa Romeo, before setting up on his own in the late 1930s. Founded in 1910, Alfa Romeo supplied Formula One engines in the 1960s and 1970s and returned as a constructor in 1979 before again withdrawing at the end of 1985. *(Source: Reuters)*

Mick Schumacher visits museum in honor of his father Michael Schumacher

The son of seven-time Formula 1 world champion Michael Schumacher has visited the museum dedicated to his father’s racing career, in Italy.

Formula 2 driver Mick Schumacher, who is 19, posted photos on social media of his trip to the museum.

Ferrari unveiled the special exhibition at their headquarters in Maranello on 3 January to mark former Ferrari driver Schumacher’s 50th birthday.

“Michael has a special place in the history of Ferrari,” the team said.

“The museum is decorated with images from the unforgettable years that the seven-time world champion gave to all at Ferrari.”

The German suffered serious head injuries in a skiing accident in 2013 and has not been seen in public since.

He is being treated at his home in Switzerland, but little is known about his recovery.

His family have said he is “in the very best of hands”. Mick Schumacher followed in his father’s footsteps by winning the Formula 3 championship last year, and has been selected for the Ferrari driver academy.

He will compete in Formula 2 this year, with the Prema team. He says joining Ferrari will help “extract whatever helps” him to achieve his “dream, racing in Formula 1”.

Schumacher’s family have released the Official Michael Schumacher App, which is a “virtual museum” of the driver’s achievements. *(Source: BBC)*

Fulham sign winger Markovic from Liverpool

Fulham have signed Serbian winger Lazar Markovic on a free transfer from Liverpool for the remainder of the season, the London club confirmed on Friday.

Fulham said Markovic, who has played 34 times for Liverpool but not once this season, was signed after being recommended by compatriot Aleksandar Mitrovic, and club owner Tony Khan said the 24-year-old would strengthen their attack.

“Lazar Markovic is a gifted young player. We’re pleased to welcome him from Liverpool for the remainder of the season. He has the support of our manager,” Khan said.

Fulham’s next game is a trip to Crystal Palace for a Premier League clash on Saturday. *(Source: Goal)*

Real Madrid draw Barcelona in Clasico Copa del Rey semi-finals

Clasico rivals Real Madrid and Barcelona will face off in the semi-finals of the Copa del Rey after being drawn together on Friday.

The first leg of the tie will take place at Camp Nou on the week beginning February 4 before the second leg at Santiago Bernabeu in the final week of February.

It will mark the first time the two sides have met since Barca thrashed Madrid 5-1 in October in what proved to be Julen Lopetegui’s final match in charge of the Blancos.

The two giants of Spanish football have held a monopoly over the Copa in recent years, winning eight of the last 10 editions between them. Barca are going in search of their fifth successive domestic cup triumph, but have had to do things the hard way so far this season. They came from behind against both Levante and Sevilla having lost the first legs of both their last-16 and quarter-final clashes respectively, with Lionel Messi called into action at Camp Nou on both occasions having been rested for the away legs.

Manager Ernesto Valverde had seemingly hoped to hold Messi back and keep him fresh



for La Liga - where Barca currently hold a five-point lead over second-placed Atletico Madrid - and the Champions League. Madrid, meanwhile, have enjoyed a more

straightforward route to the last four, beating Girona 7-3 on aggregate in the quarter-finals. With Santiago Solari’s side 10 points behind Barca already in La Liga, the Copa del

Rey offers Santiago Solari his most realistic opportunity of domestic silverware, and as such his first two Clasico matches as Madrid manager are likely to hold extra significance.

His third in charge will soon be around the corner too, with the second leg set to take place on February 27 or 28 while the Bernabeu will host the second league Clasico of the campaign on March 2.

The draw also sees Madrid faced with a daunting gauntlet of matches during the first two weeks of February across three competitions. They face fifth-place Alaves in La Liga at Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday before their trip to Catalunya for the first leg of their Copa Clasico double-header.

Solari’s side then face local rivals Atletico Madrid at the Wanda Metropolitano on February 9 before travelling to Amsterdam to face Ajax in the Champions League four days later.

Meanwhile in the other semi-final, Real Betis will take on Valencia, with the final set to be played in Sevilla on May 25. *(Source: Goal)*

Kovac hoping Frankfurt give Bayern helping hand in title race



Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovac is hoping his former club Eintracht Frankfurt can force leaders Borussia Dortmund into stumbling this weekend in the Bundesliga title race.

Dortmund, who are six points clear of second-placed Bayern, face a tough away task on Saturday at fifth-placed Frankfurt, who boast one of the league’s deadliest attacks.

Likewise, Kovac’s Bayern also face a tricky trip on Saturday to Bayer Leverkusen, who just like Frankfurt, have a powerful attack, but a leaky defence.

On Thursday Kovac, who lifted the German Cup only last May as Eintracht coach before quitting to take over at Bayern, joked that he hopes his former club trip up Dortmund to allow Bayern to narrow the gap. “My Frankfurt boys already know what they have to do,” joked Kovac.

Frankfurt struggled in defence during last Saturday’s 2-2 draw at Werder Bremen, but forwards Sebastian Haller, Ante Rebic and Luka Jovic, the league’s top-scorer, have scored 31 goals in 19 league games this season.

As Bremen director Frank Baumann suggested, “Frankfurt will be a challenge for Dortmund, just like Leverkusen will be for Bayern”. With their mouth-watering Champions League last 16, first leg clash at Tottenham Hotspur now less than two weeks away, Dortmund need to keep playmaker Marco Reus and England winger Jadon Sancho fit.

The pair were at the heart of last Saturday’s 5-1 romp at home to strugglers Hanover 96 and are key if Dortmund are to secure a first league win at Frankfurt in nearly six years.

“Of course we’ll be looking at our rival’s result (in Leverkusen), but we can’t influence that, the focus is on our game in Frankfurt,”

said Dortmund coach Lucien Favre. ■ **Piszczek concern** Dortmund’s main injury concern is defender Lukasz Piszczek, who took a knock to the heel against Hanover.

Dortmund’s new signing, teenager Leonardo Balerdi suffered a mouth injury on duty with Argentina’s juniors in the South America Under-20 championships and is not expected back in Germany until early next week.

It has been nearly four years since Bayern, who are chasing a seventh straight league title, last lost at Leverkusen, who are preparing for their third game under new coach Peter Bosz.

The Dutchman’s influence showed as Leverkusen romped to a 3-0 win at Wolfsburg last weekend with Germany forwards Kai Havertz, Kevin Volland and Julian Brandt banging in the goals.

Defending champions Bayern will be without veteran wingers Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery in Leverkusen, both of whom are returning from injury, Kovac said.

Central midfielder Thiago Alcantara is back in training after a leg knock and “should be an alternative for Leverkusen,” said Kovac. The departure of Sandro Wagner to Chinese side Tianjin Teda means Bayern have sold their back-up striker for Robert Lewandowski and did not sign a replacement before the transfer window closed on Thursday.

“There is only one or two players in the world who can replace him,” said Kovac, insisting that either Germany forwards Thomas Mueller or Serge Gnabry could slot in for the prolific Poland goalscorer in the event of injury. *(Source: AFP)*

Martial can take inspiration from Ronaldo, says Solskjaer



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has challenged Anthony Martial to fulfil his potential at Manchester United by following Cristiano Ronaldo’s example.

United announced on Thursday that the France striker had signed a new contract that commits him to the club until at least June 2024, with the option for a further year.

Martial, who is expected to recover from a minor training injury to play at Leicester in the Premier League on Sunday, has scored 10 goals this season, although he had gone more than a month without one before striking in the 3-1 FA Cup win at Arsenal on January 25.

Solskjaer, United’s caretaker-manager, witnessed Ronaldo’s transformation from raw teenager to world-class talent while at Old Trafford.

The Juventus forward, who joined United from Sporting Lisbon as an 18-year-old in 2003, spent six years with the club before joining Real Madrid.

Martial moved to Old Trafford from Monaco in 2015, aged 19, and has shown flashes of talent, without ever establishing himself as a consistent goalscorer.

Solskjaer believes the France forward has plenty of room for improvement and has urged him to look at the way Ronaldo developed.

“Cristiano was the best, the way he’s changed to now, that’s part of any player’s development,” said the interim United boss.

“You’ve got to model yourself on someone and you’ve got to have more challenges ahead of you. You can’t just rely on what you do now.

“I speak about my experience at this club with Cristiano and what Anthony can

achieve. I talk about Cristiano’s career, what he’s made, how he’s got there.”

Martial scored 17 goals in his first season with United, but has not matched that total since.

He endured a difficult campaign under Jose Mourinho last season, missing out on France’s World Cup squad, and it seemed at one stage as if he might leave Old Trafford.

■ **Martial confidence** He appears to be playing with more confidence now, and Solskjaer sees the new contract as a sign of the club’s faith in the forward.

“He’s had some ups and downs at the club, he’s been top scorer, he’s been developing,” said Solskjaer.

“Of course as a young lad moving abroad it’s not easy but now he knows he’s going to stay here for the coming future and I believe in him, I certainly believe in him.

“He’s a fantastic finisher, with great ability. He’s young, but he’s intelligent, knows his football.”

Solskjaer, a prolific striker for United between 1996 and 2007, is certain that Martial has the ability to become a 20-goal-a-season striker.

“He has the capability but I’d like him to make a few more runs in behind because he doesn’t miss chances,” he said.

“When he gets chances, he’s a fantastic finisher, so he needs to get more chances. That’s one of the things I keep telling him -- you’ve got to read and sniff wherever there’s going to be a chance, and maybe some scruffy goals at times.”

Solskjaer hopes that goalkeeper David de Gea will follow Martial in signing a new contract. *(Source: AFP)*

LeBron James ‘ready to make this push’ after longest injury layoff of career

About an hour before LeBron James made his long-awaited return, the Los Angeles Lakers star had a quick story to share with his locker room neighbor Rajon Rondo.

“You were in my dream this afternoon,” James said. Rondo, always thinking ahead, asked, “Was I holding up a trophy?”

The Lakers’ chase for a Western Conference playoff berth received a massive boost with James’ return Thursday night against the LA Clippers. After a 17-game absence, James had to work overtime and log an unexpected 40 minutes. And despite not looking like his normal explosive self and at an admitted 80 percent, the All-Star still nearly had a triple-double with 24 points, 14 rebounds and 9 assists in a 123-120 win over the Clippers.

“He’s the greatest player on the planet,” Lakers center Tyson Chandler said. “So he brings his super powers [back].”

When James went down because of a groin injury he suffered during a Christmas night win at Golden State, the Lakers stood 20-14 and fourth in the Western Conference, just 2½ games behind the Denver Nuggets and Golden State Warriors for first in the conference. But without James -- and with Rondo out for a long stretch as well -- the Lakers were inconsistent and rudderless, going



6-11 and falling to ninth place and 10½ games behind the first-place Warriors.

James’ return means everything for the Lakers and comes at a crucial time with the team in the midst of the most grueling stretch of its schedule.

“The message for the team is we’re all ready to make this push,” James told ESPN’s Dave McMenamin after the win. “That’s it. Let’s make that push. ... We’re on the road. We’re on the road for the whole month of February. We got

two home games. So if you want to make a push, why not make it on the road? That’s the best time where you can come together as a team when you’re on the road and it’s just us. So, let’s do it.”

The Lakers’ next five games are on the road at Golden State, Indiana, Boston, Philadelphia and Atlanta before the All-Star break. The Lakers (27-25) then play a home game against Houston before hitting the road again to New Orleans and Memphis.

In the middle of all that is the Feb. 7 trade deadline -- a day that could change the shape of the Lakers’ roster completely as they pursue a blockbuster deal for New Orleans’ Anthony Davis.

“There ain’t nothing to talk about,” James told McMenamin when asked about the uncertainty some in the locker room could feel. “That ain’t nothing but fantasy basketball until something happens. We’ll see what happens.”

Having James back might have felt like a dream come true for coach Luke Walton as far as the timing is concerned. Both Staples Center hallway neighbors are vying for a playoff spot with the Clippers entering the night two games ahead of the Lakers in the standings in eighth place. *(Source: ESPN)*

Branko Ivankovic speaks out over Iran link

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic has given his first interview about Iran national football team since Team Melli failed to reach the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. He is being considered as potential candidate to take charge of Iran national football team, however the Croat says he is under contract with Persepolis.

Team Melli are without coach after parting company with Carlos Queiroz.

“I don’t know if they are looking to hire a new coach or not. It depends to the federation and it will make the best decision after analyzing the best choices. But, I am Persepolis coach at the moment and I have extended my deal for two more years at the beginning of the season,” Ivankovic said.

Ivankovic led Team Melli to the third place in the 2004 AFC Asian Cup in China.

He also steered Iran national football team to the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

Persepolis fans, as the most popular football team in Iran, adore Ivankovic after he led them to the AFC Champions League final for the first time in their history.

Ivankovic and Queiroz engaged in verbal warfare from the last year following mismanagement of Team Melli’s preparation programs.

Their feud became so heated ahead of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup when the Portuguese informed Ivankovic had been talking up Iraq’s coach Srecko Katanec while goading Queiroz to beat their bitter rivals.

Rumors had been circulating around the local media that the Iranian federation is going to sign a big name as a replacement for Queiroz.



Qatar’s Almoez Ali breaks Ali Daei’s record in Asian Cup

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Qatar football team striker Almoez Ali scored a record-breaking early goal in the match against Japan in the final match of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

On Tuesday, he scored a goal against the UAE and joined Iranian legendary striker Ali Daei as the forward who holds the record for the most goals in a single Asian Cup.

Daei scored eight goals in the 1996 edition, which

seven of them came in the group stage.

The Qatari forward scored his ninth goal in the tournament with a stunning overhead kick just 12 minutes into the match against Japan.

Daei remains the top scorer in the AFC Asian Cup history with 14 goals in the continental competition.

The record for most international goals also belongs to Daei, who hit 109 goals for Iran in 149 appearances between 1993 and 2006.

Sardar Azmoun close to joining Wolves: report



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran football team striker Sardar Azmoun is reportedly on the verge of joining Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Wolves are interested in snapping up Rubin Kazan striker Sardar Azmoun ahead of Thursday’s transfer deadline.

The deal discussed is a £1.75m loan fee for the remainder of the campaign, plus £11.4m buying option with the Russian outfit.

The 24-year-old first joined Kazan in 2013, and returned to the club in 2017 after a two-year spell at Rostov, the first season being on loan.

Azmoun scored four goals for Team Melli at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, where the Persians failed to advance to the final after losing 3-0 to Japan on Monday.

Zenit St Petersburg, Bayer Leverkusen and Club Brugge have also been linked with an approach.

Carlos Queiroz leaves Iran after eight years



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Carlos Queiroz left Tehran for Lisbon Thursday morning after the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) didn’t extend his contract.

The 65-year-old coach stepped down as Iran coach after eight years shortly after Team Melli suffered a 3-0 loss to Japan and failed to reach the 2019 AFC Asian Cup on Monday.

Queiroz marked his 100th match as head coach of Iran national football team

against Japan.

Under tutelage of Queiroz, Iran won 60 matches, suffered 13 losses and registered 27 draws.

The ex-Real Madrid coach steered Team Melli to back-to-back qualifications for the World Cup for the first time in Iran’s history.

Queiroz was the longest serving coach in the history of Iran’s national football team.

He has been linked with Colombia hot seat.

Ghoochannejhad pledges goals for Sydney FC

New Sydney FC signing Reza Ghoochannejhad says his versatility and ability to deliver goals can help them win a record-equaling fourth A-League title.

The Dutch-born forward arrived in Sydney earlier this week on a loan from Cypriot side APOEL in a boost to manager Steve Corica’s attacking options ahead of the run-in to the finals and start of the Sky Blues’ Asian Champions League campaign.

The 31-year-old, who scored 16 goals in 44 games for Iran before retiring from international football in 2018, is in line to face Melbourne City on Sunday.

With 11 games left in the regular A-League season, Sydney are third on the ladder - five points behind leaders Perth Glory.

“I cant wait to start, I’m here to win the A-League and we’re trying to do the best we can and get the best results in Asian Champions League,” he said.

“Both are important to us and I’m glad I can be a part



of it and hope to help the team as much as I can. I’m going to play my heart out on the pitch and give everything for

this club,” Gucci added.

Ghoochannejhad will be a useful addition to Corica’s squad, given his versatility across the frontline.

And the forward is relishing the opportunity to link with the A-League’s joint top-scorer Adam Le Fondre.

“I have played in several position throughout my career. Personally, my best position is a No 9 - as a single striker. I can play on the wings or behind the striker, there are many options but that’s up to the coaches to decide,” he stated.

“One of my strongest points is my combination, I like to link up, I like to get involved and I have a pretty good sense for scoring goals. I’m looking forward to work together with all my teammates. It’s great that Adam has had a great season so far and I hope we can get better and better,” Ghoochannejhad concluded.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Qatar stun Japan to win first continental crown

Qatar have been crowned champions of Asia for the first time after beating Japan 3-1 in Friday’s AFC Asian Cup final at the Zayed Sports City Stadium.

Almoez Ali got the Qataris off to a dream start by scoring the opener after just 12 minutes before Abdulaziz Hatem added a second in the 27th minute with a stunning long-range effort.

Japan did pull one back nine minutes after the hour mark courtesy of a clinical finish by Takumi Minamino but, with seven minutes left on the clock, Akram Afif converted from 12 yards after Qatar were questionably awarded a penalty to secure a maiden Asian Cup crown for his side.

Having never previously progressed past

the quarter-finals, Qatar’s triumph will come as a huge boost especially as they are set to make their FIFA World debut as hosts in just three years’ time in 2022.

Entering the final with a sensational record of having won their previous six games – scoring 16 goals and conceding none in the process – Al-Annabi would have had reason to be optimistic in their prospects, despite coming up against a Japan side gunning for a record-extending fifth Asian Cup crown.

Just 12 minutes into the final, Qatar edged ahead courtesy of a fine effort by Almoez, who latched onto Akram’s left-wing cross and juggled the ball a couple of times before brilliantly directing an overhead kick into the far corner.

Three minutes before the half-hour mark, the Qataris doubled their lead when Abdelaziz – the goal-scoring hero in the quarter-final win over Korea Republic – produced another stunning left-footed effort from 25 yards that had Shuichi Gonda beaten all ends up as it bent inside the post.

At this stage, it looked as though Qatar were cruising but, given their status as the tournament’s record champions, the Japanese were always going to issue some sort of a response.

And, in the 69th minute, the Samurai Blue duly reduced the deficit when Tsukasa Shiotani’s incisive pass was diverted by Yuya Osako into the path of Minamino, who coolly dinked a shot over Saad Al-Sheeb for

his first goal of the tournament.

But, as the game entered its closing stages, Qatar were controversially awarded a penalty with just seven minutes remaining as Maya Yoshida was penalized for handball upon consultation with the Video Assistant Referee after match official Ravshan Irmatov initially allowed play to carry on.

Stepping up to the spot, Akram made no mistake in sending Gonda the wrong way to seal a monumental triumph for Qatar, one that few would argue they do not deserve following a dominant campaign that has seen them emerge as one of Asia’s most-exciting national sides.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Charleroi sign Iranian prodigy Younes Delfi

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Belgian First Division A club Charleroi completed the signing of Iran’s Esteghlal Khuzestan player Younes Delfi on Wednesday.

Delfi has penned a three-year contract with Charleroi, which has an option for a further two year extension.

Charleroi chief Mehdi Bayat has confirmed Delfi is their first winter transfer.

Delfi, who shone in the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in India, can play on both flanks.

The 19-year-old player had been linked with a move to PSV Eindhoven in the summer.

Iran Hazfi Cup: Persepolis edge past Sepidrood Rasht

TASNIM — Persepolis football team qualified for the Iran’s Hazfi Cup quarter-final after beating Sepidrood Rasht 1-0 on Thursday.

The Reds edged past Sepidrood thanks to a Saeid Karimi’s stoppage time goal in Rasht’s Sardar-e Jangal Stadium.

Branko Ivankovic’s team will meet Padideh in the competition’s quarter-final in Tehran and the winner of the match will face Sepahan in Isfahan.

Damash Gilanian football team have already advanced to the final match.

The Hazfi Cup is the Iranian football knockout cup competition, run by the Iranian Football Federation.

Esteghlal is the title-holder and most decorated team with seven titles.

Zob Ahan sign Nigerian striker Christian Osaguona

Persian Football — Zob Ahan football club have completed the signing of Nigerian striker Ighodaro Christian Osaguona.

The 28-year-old forward has joined the Isfahan-based football club until the end of the season.

Osaguona started his playing career at Beninese club Buffles Parakou in 2011 and has also played at Belgian Westerlo and Umm Salal of Qatar.

He was also a member of Nigerian national football team and made five appearances for Super Eagles.

Zob Ahan will face the winner of Al-Wehdat of Jordan and Kuwait’s Al-Kuwait in the AFC Champions League preliminary round 2 and the winner of the match will meet Al-Gharafa of Qatar in Play-off round.

Morteza Pouraliganji joins Al Arabi SC

Iran national football team defender Morteza Pouraliganji has signed for Qatar Stars League (QSL) club Al Arabi SC from Belgium team KAS Eupen.

Pouraliganji was a member of Carlos Queiroz’s side in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, where Team Melli lost to Japan 3-0 at the semi-final.

The 26-year-old center-back had joined the Belgian club in 2018 from Qatar’s Al-Sadd. Pouraliganji played seven matches for Eupen and scored two goals.

Pouraliganji was also part of Iran national football team at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

Al-Arabi Sports Club is a Qatari club founded in 1952.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Big money behind Ayanda Patosi’s move to Esteghlal

The amount of money involved in the deal between Cape Town City and Iranian side Esteghlal explains Ayanda Patosi’s shock move.

The 26-year-old travelled to Asia where he’s set to complete the move to Esteghlal, before the close of their transfer window tomorrow.

“Remember that the transfer window for international clubs is not the same as [the one] in SA. Some windows close a few days into February.”

The Iran Pro League transfer window closes on February 2.

According to an impeccable Sowetan source, the Citizens are in for a big pay with Esteghlal coughing up R5m to loan the player until June and if he signs a permanent deal, City would receive a further R10m for a total of R15m.

For the player, he also couldn’t turn down the deal.

Patosi will earn R474,000 tax free and receive a signing-on-fee of R4m.

Cape Town City director Michel Comitis said the club would never stand in a player’s way for overseas moves if there are concrete offers on the table.

“We have made a commitment with our players that if a concrete move overseas comes on the table then we won’t stand in their way and that is what has happened,” Comitis told Sowetan.

“One thing for sure is that we would never sell Ayanda to a PSL club.

“It will always be difficult losing a player like him but we had to weigh up the benefits for both the club and the player.

Meanwhile, there were a few big movements on the local scene yesterday.

Mamelodi Sundowns midfielder George Lebesse will spend the rest of the season on loan at SuperSport United, while Anthony Laffor has signed a contract extension with the Brazilians.

Chippa United confirmed that they have sold goalkeeper Daniel Akpeyi to Kaizer Chiefs and Bidvest Wits right-back Reeve Frosler also completed a move to the Naturena-based club.

Chiefs also announced they have parted way with Ugandan Godfrey Walusimbi after just four months. - additional reporting by Gomolemo Motshwane.

(Source: Sowetanlive.co.za)

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The least you may do for God is, not to resort to sin through His blessings.

Imam Ali (AS)

FAJR FILMFEST MIRROR

■ Kiumars Purahmad apologizes for strong language in “Blade and Termeh”



Director Kiumars Purahmad attends a press conference during the 37th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on January 31, 2019 to speak about his movie “Blade and Termeh”. (Meh/ Maryam Kamyab)

TEHRAN — Director Kiumars Purahmad has apologized for the strong language used by characters in his latest film “Blade and Termeh”.

Speaking at a press conference after a screening of the film at the Fajr festival, he said that he will make some minor modification to the movie for public screening.

■ Director Siavash Asadi says “Darkhongah” is not anti-Iran

TEHRAN — Siavash Asadi, the director of “Darkhongah”, which recounts a story set in post-war Iran, said that he doesn't intend to give a bad image of Iran in the film.

“It is an anti-war film. Nobody loves the war especially when you see war veterans have not earned anything while rich and powerful people got everything after the war,” he mentioned.

■ “African Violet” gives new image of Iranian women: director

TEHRAN — Director Mona Zandi-Haqiqi has said that her latest film “African Violets” presents a new image of Iranian women.

She asked critics and filmmakers to avoid any prejudice against the film's characters and noted that no immoral or counterculture conduct happens in the story of the film.

The film is about a woman who chooses to look after her former husband who is suffering from an illness.

■ Fajr arranges extra screenings for “The Indian”, “Blood Trap”

TEHRAN — The organizers of the 37th Fajr Film Festival have arranged several additional screenings for the political dramas “The Indian” and “Blood Trap” over the past three days since the beginning of the event.

Directed by Nima Javidi, “The Indian” tells the story of a prison warden who is assigned to transfer the prisoners to a new building during the 1960s.

“Blood Trap” is a sequel to director Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian's previous movie “The Middy Event” about the political history of Iran during the 1980s.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Multimedia

■ Tehran's CAMA — Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings and sculptures by Parvin Jalali.

The exhibit titled “Rhea” will run until February 12 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.

■ Paintings and sculptures by Shohreh Amir Ahmadi are currently on display in an exhibition at Haft Samar Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until February 6 at the gallery that can be found at No. 8, Fifth Alley, Kuh-e Nur St., Motahari Ave.

National hero Gholamreza Takhti biopic premieres at Fajr festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 37th edition of the Fajr Film Festival premiered “Gholamreza Takhti”, a movie about the life story of Iranian Olympic gold-medalist wrestler Gholamreza Takhti whose manly virtue and social activities during the 1960s made him a national hero.

Takhti was found dead at a hotel room in Tehran in 1968 and the Persian dailies Kayhan and Ettelaat reported that he has committed suicide for his unhappy domestic life. However, a large group of people also believed that he was killed by the SAVAK intelligence services due to his disloyalty to the Shah regime.

This is the second movies puts its spotlight on Takhti's life story, but his death still remains a mystery.

“Takhti's death whether he was killed or committed suicide has always been the main topic in Iran,” director Bahram Tavakkoli said in a press conference on Wednesday after the premiere of his film “Gholamreza Takhti” at the Fajr festival.

“In my opinion, what is important about Takhti is his way of life that made him eternal,” he added.

In “Gholamreza Takhti”, Tavakkoli confirms that Takhti has killed himself.

“At the beginning of the film, we unlock the mystery that has always occupied the minds of our people and then recount his life story,” Tavakkoli said.

“If people carry out a research about Takhti's life, they will find this answer about his death, because there numerous sources and documents about this issue,” he added.

Tavakkoli's previous film “The Lost Strait” that recounts the true story of Iran's Ammar Battalion's epic operation



“Gholamreza Takhti” by Bahram Tavakkoli.

during the last days of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was highly acclaimed at the Fajr festival last year.

Ali Hatami, known as the Hafez of Iranian cinema due to the native and

poetic ambiance of his movies, was the first director who chose Takhti's life story to turn into a film during the 1980s.

He began shooting the film titled “World Champion Takhti”, but it remained

unfinished due to Hatami's death in 1996.

Director Behruz Afkhami was then selected to complete the film, which critics called it a good thriller that failed to solve the mystery of Takhti's death.

Tehran Symphony Orchestra dedicates performance to Team Melli



Shahrdad Rohani conducts the Tehran Symphony Orchestra during a concert at Vahdat Hall on January 31, 2019. (Honaronline/Hatef Hosseini)

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Symphony Orchestra by conductor Shahrdad Rohani dedicated a performance to Iran national football team Team Melli on its Thursday concert at Vahdat Hall.

Pointing to the hard efforts made by the Iranian national football team

at the AFC Asian Cup competition, Rohani said, “Football is teamwork. Team Melli was excellent but lost as a result of negligence,” the Rudaki Foundation announced on Friday.

Iran lost to Japan 3-0 in the AFC Asian Cup semi-final on January 28.

The orchestra gave its second performance on Friday.

Iranian movies line up for Vesoul festival



A scene from “African Violets” by Mona Zandi-Haqiqi.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Six Iranian films will go on screen at the various sections of the 25th Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema.

“African Violets” by Mona Zandi-Haqiqi and “Rona, Azim's Mother”, a co-production between Afghanistan and Iran by Jamshid Mahmudi will compete at the official section of the festival.

“Papeli” (“Butterfly”) by Mehdi Zamanpur Kiasari will go on screen at the documentary section, while Abbas Kiarostami's “Taste of Cherry” will be screened at the Wild Card section.

The festival will also screen “Leila” by Dariush Mehrjui and “About Elly” by Asghar Farhadi in Asian Couples Section.

The festival will be held in the French city from February 5 to 12.

Galleries join Fajr Festival of Visual Arts

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — “Chaharsu-e Honar”, a new section dedicated to displaying works from galleries in the 11th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts, opened in Tehran's Qasr Garden Museum on Thursday.

Works by 55 galleries including 24 from Tehran and 31 from other Iranian cities have been put on view in this section, the organizers have announced.

The opening ceremony was attended by veteran curator Lili Golestan, who is in charge of Golestan Gallery in Tehran and the representative of the gallery owners in the policy-making council of the festival.

“This is the first time the gallery owners of Tehran and other cities have come together to take part in the nationwide event,” she said.

She added, “This became possible only with the help of the managers who are in charge of the visual arts in the country.”

Golestan expressed thanks to Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini and Hadi Mozaffari, the director of



Hadi Mozaffari, the director of Culture Ministry's Visual Arts Office (3rd L) visits “Chaharsu-e Honar” exhibit in Tehran's Qasr Garden Museum on January 31, 2019. (Honaronline/Hatef Hosseini).

Culture Ministry's Visual Arts Office.

A number of 270 artists are displaying 50 works in the exhibit.

“I call it a great achievement where the gallery owners from all over the country can get the chance to meet and exchange views,” she added.

She also expressed thanks to all the gallery owners who have helped arrange such a glorious exhibit and have brought great works to this exhibit.

“We are in the path of development and being closely aligned with the world. We need to boost Iran's economy of art and these exhibits help artworks to be seen better,” she concluded.

Hadi Mozaffari called the exhibit a good chance for the friendship of those who help reunite the artists.

“Naturally the masters and veterans do not submit their works to the secretariat of the festival but these exhibits help to see works by the veterans,” he added.

The exhibit will be running until February 13.

Michelle Obama's “Becoming” bestseller in Iran

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A Persian translation of Michelle Obama's “Becoming”, the former U.S. first lady's memoir, has also become a bestselling book in Iran.

Translated into Persian by Ali Salami, the book has been republished 17 times within less than a month, Mehrandish Publications has announced in a press release published on Friday.

According to Penguin Random House, “Becoming” has been the best-selling hardcover book of 2018, having sold more than 2 million copies in North America in its first 15 days, while “Becoming” is also the No. 1 seller in Britain, Germany, France,

Italy, Holland, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Greece. The book is being published in 31 languages.

“Michelle Obama invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her, from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world's most famous address,” Amazon has quoted on its website.

“With unerring honesty and lively wit, she describes her triumphs and her disappointments, both public and private, telling her full story as she has lived it, in her own words and on her own terms. Warm, wise, and revelatory,” it adds.



Copies of the Persian translation of Michelle Obama's “Becoming” by Ali Salami.