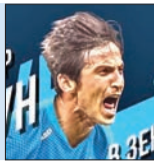




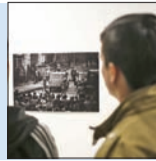
**Leader, thinkers discuss new Islamic civilization** **2**



**U.S. will end up in wheelchair if it attacks Iran** **2**



**Zenit St. Petersburg sign Iran striker Sardar Azmoun** **15**



**Photo exhibit explores 1979 Islamic Revolution** **16**

# Long-range missile unveiled



See page 2

## Rouhani says unity in Venezuela will foil U.S. plots

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday separately received credentials of the new ambassadors of Venezuela, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Croatia, Tunisia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Turkey. In his meeting with the new Venezuelan Ambassador to Tehran Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones, Rouhani said the unity between the Venezuelan government and people will foil the conspir-

acies organized by the United States. He reaffirmed Iran's support for the legitimate Venezuelan government, underlining that through unity the Venezuelan people should prove to Washington that they will not let the U.S. interfere in their country's internal affairs. For his part, Ambassador Cordones said that in this new conspiracy "we are facing the global imperialism and the people of Venezuela will win this fight." **→2**

## Iranian, Russian diplomats hold talks over Syria

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Russia's special envoy on Syria Alexander Lavrentiev met in Tehran on Saturday with Hossein Jaber Ansari, the Iranian foreign minister's special aide in political affairs, who acts as Iran's point man for Arab affairs. The meeting anticipates a trilateral summit of the presidents of the guarantor states of the Syria peace process, Iran, Russia, and Turkey,

scheduled to be held on February 14 in Russia's Sochi. Since January 2017, Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara have been mediating dialogue between representatives from the Damascus government and opposition groups in a series of talks held in Astana and other places. The talks are collectively referred to as the Astana peace process or the Astana Group.

## Putin authorizes development of advanced missiles in response to U.S.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has suspended a Cold War-era agreement after the United States abandoned, authorizing his military forces to push ahead with development of new missiles. "Our American partners have announced they are suspending their participation in the deal, and we are also suspending our participation," Putin announced in a tele-

vised meeting with his foreign and defense ministers on Saturday. "We will wait until our partners have matured enough to conduct an equal, meaningful dialogue with us on this important topic," he added. Putin said Russia would work on its advanced intermediate-range missiles, including supersonic ones. **→13**



### ARTICLE

**Hanif Ghaffari**  
Political analyst

## The battle before the United Europe

The power of anti-European, anti-migration movements in the European Union is increasing day by day as a result of the financial, economic and migration crisis. Evidences suggest that the European voters' tendency for participating in the 2019 elections for the European Parliament on 23-26 May is decreased to a great extent.

The next European Parliament will be formed after the UK leaves the EU in March, and the numbers of MEPs will be reduced to 705 from currently 751. The remaining 27 seats is thus to be redistributed between members.

We should note that the European political perspective has undergone significant changes over the last five years. Such shifts will be normally reflected in the next European Parliament as well, and is going to affect European policymaking.

Accordingly, dbrsearch published an article written by Kevin Koerner. We read in this article; "Our calculations, based on current national polls, suggest a loss of EP seats for most centrist pro-European groups and a visible gain for anti-EU and EU (ro) sceptic alliances. Polls suggest that the Christian Democrats (EPP) would remain the largest group in the EP with 25.2% (-3.9 pp).

Socialists and Democrats (S&D) would bear the heaviest losses (-5.9 pp) and only reach 19.1% of seats. According to our poll-based calculations, the liberal ALDE could potentially gain 10.5% to 13.5%, depending on whether French President Macron's En Marche will join the alliance. The far-right ENF could gain the most (+3.4 pp) and increase its share of seats to 8.1%. Together with the EU-sceptic EFDD (6.5%), ECR (7.1%) and other anti-EU parties, they could reach more than ¼ of seats in the next EP."

It continues; "Strengthened EU (ro) sceptic parties would have a substantial impact on policymaking in the EU over the next five years." Koerner then argues that "Anti-EU parties might not find the broad agreement required to build a united movement in the EP; but their potential strengthening and closer collaboration would still increase the complexity in the EP, hamper voting and decision making and contribute to further tensions and disputes in an increasingly disunited Union." **→7**

## 'Not enough activity by the Iranian diplomatic missions abroad'

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, believes that Iranian foreign policies after the revolution are a very good case study for a deeper understanding of IR, one that appreciates the impact of norms and ideas.

Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, also adds that "Iran totally changed its foreign policy after the revolution in terms of the grand strategic preferences of the state exemplified in a shift of alliance patterns (break from proclivity to US indicative of the Shah period), support for the



Palestinian cause etc." He adds that "There is simply not enough activity by the Iranian diplomatic missions abroad." Here is the full text of the interview: ■ According to Constructivism, A country's foreign policy is affected by its identity. Based on this assumption, what significant

differences appeared on Iran's foreign policy after Islamic Revolution?

A: In fact, Iranian foreign policies after the revolution are a very good case study for a deeper understanding of IR, one that appreciates the impact of norms and ideas. Iran totally changed its foreign policy after the revolution in terms of the grand strategic preferences of the state exemplified in a shift of alliance patterns (break from proclivity to US indicative of the Shah period), support for the Palestinian cause etc. I have explained this in my first book The International Politics of the Persian Gulf. This approach is a part of my teaching at SOAS, and every year I have hundreds of students who use IR theories analyze the foreign policy of regional countries, in particular Iran. **→7**

## Energy Fintech in Iran: An expert view

By Ebrahim Fallahi

**TEHRAN** — Tehran Times once more welcomed Chris Cook, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security Studies at University College London and a leading global expert in energy markets and financial technology, and Mahmood Khaghani, one of Iran's experienced and informed energy experts, to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Iran as the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution approaches. Following is the text of the interview:

■ Welcome to Iran once more, Mr. Cook I understand that your presence in Iran is related to energy strategy, security and resilience?

(CC) Indeed so. I have in the last couple of years made a breakthrough in my research in the

field of legal design of market institutions and instruments, based upon a study of the emergence of what is called Financial Technology or Fintech. I have addressed the Delphi Economic Forum in Greece on the subject and was also asked last year by a Russian deputy energy minister to outline our approach to Energy Fintech generally and the Energy Credit Obligation (ECO) specifically.

■ Mr. Khaghani, you have collaborated with Mr. Cook for many years in relation to energy markets. Are you optimistic in respect to the ECO proposal?

(MK) Indeed I am, since it represents a development of the joint proposal Mr. Cook and I made in Tehran in 2008 for a "Petro" unit, but regrettably this was premature. More importantly

perhaps, is the fact that Iran (in common with most nations) lacks an energy strategy capable of being independently implemented when Iran is virtually detached from the global financial system and payments, conventional development financing and long term funding are all almost impossible.

■ Do you think the recently launched European Instrument for the Support of Trade Exchanges (INTEX) will assist Iran?

(MK) Anything that facilitates trade is helpful, but in my view this vehicle cannot address the U.S. threat to international banks and businesses that they can either do business with Iran or the U.S. While specialized regional banks and SME businesses may participate, **→4**



Director Reza Mirkarimi (L) and cast members attend a press conference for "Qasre Shirin" at the 37th Fajr Film Festival.

## "We Are All Together" producer denies allegation of money laundering

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Reza Mirkarimi, the producer of director Kamal Tabrizi's comedy film "We Are All Together", denied on Friday online reports alleging the project has helped certain people to launder money. "The reports are being published by those who have dominated Iranian cinema by their flops and when they see their interests under threat from new successful productions, they begin poisoning the minds of people by accusing the successful filmmakers of using dirty money in their movies," Mirkarimi said at a press conference for his latest film "Qasre Shirin" as a director. **→16**



### ARTICLE

**Masoud Hossein**  
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

## Iran has much to learn from Qatar football

Qatar football team, headed by Felix Sanchez, lifted the AFC Asian Cup for the first time in their history, and the triumph was a far cry from everyone's expectation.

The Qataris won the title after scoring 19 goals and conceding just one, and it showed that they were not just the best attacking team, but a team with best defensive style.

But the question is how a small country like Qatar blossoms so much in football?

The answer is clear, a cohesive program. And it's time for the Iranian football officials to learn from their small neighbors.

Undoubtedly, Qatar is faced with a big problem for finding native footballers. For instance, their newest national hero Almoez Ali was not born in Qatar, but it was not an issue for them. On the contrary, Iran has the advantage of having million talented players but there is no a systematic program for grassroots football.

Iran must restructure the country's football and the federation should take grassroots football into consideration as Qatar did and won.

The Iranian federation should also hire a coach with a very precise job description, because Queiroz, who was not assigned a blueprint of his duties from day one, went beyond his authority to lead his team.

The Portuguese instructor, the longest serving Iranian coach, had to concentrate on his job ahead of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, but he preferred to publish provocative statements on his Instagram account against an Iranian football club and his critics. Queiroz called his critics "crocodile."

Sanchez is not worried about the prospect of losing his job in spite of the fact that the Qataris are going to sign a new head coach for the 2022 World Cup.

However, Queiroz seemed to be apprehensive about losing his job after he found out that Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic could be his potential replacement. **→15**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader, thinkers discuss new Islamic civilization

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Thirty Iranian thinkers held in-depth discussions about a new Islamic civilization with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday, Mehr reported on Saturday.

During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to Islam's political potential for creating a civilization in the Islamic world, underlining the necessity of sustained efforts to create a new Islamic civilization.

"The emergence of a new Islamic civilization in the world depends upon the creation of Islamic government and Islamic society," he noted.

The Leader also underscored the necessity of analyzing and rethinking the causes of the decline of the Western civilization.



Europe has agreed to €20m nuclear project in Iran: Salehi

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Saturday that European countries have agreed to invest up to 20 million euros in a nuclear project in Iran.

According to Salehi, this will be the biggest nuclear safety project in West Asia.

Salehi, a nuclear physicist, also announced that Iran is fully able to build light water research reactors and willing to offer its knowhow to other countries.

He also hailed the establishment of the European Union's INSTEX, a payment system which is meant to keep EU-Iran trade live despite U.S. sanctions.



INSTEX is a disgrace: MP

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A member of the Majlis presiding board said on Saturday that INSTEX is in fact a disgrace on the Iranian nation and "it is not clear until when the administration wants to continue this disgrace."

The conditions set out by Europe as it established INSTEX are in violation of the 2015 nuclear deal and Iran's national independence, Mehr quoted Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi as saying.

"The Westerners have become conditional toward Iran," he said, adding that they exploit the Rouhani administration's weak spot with regard to the nuclear deal in order to put more pressure on Iran.



ATR seeking U.S. permission to deliver planes Iran has bought

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — ATR aircraft manufacturer has requested permission from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury for the delivery of the turboprops Iran has purchased, the CEO of Iran Air has said.

Farzaneh Sharafbafi told Tasnim on Saturday that the delivery of the remaining ATR turboprops to Iran requires a permission from the OFAC.

In December 2018, Sharafbafi said that Iran Air would not back off from any of its previous contracts to purchase passenger planes from Airbus.

She announced that Iran has received a total of 16 passenger planes since the 2015 nuclear deal took effect, including three from Airbus and 13 from Franco-Italian turboprop maker ATR.



Iran, Iraq to conduct joint research projects

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Tehran and Baghdad will increase academic and scientific cooperation with programs to exchange university professors and conduct joint research projects, Science Minister Mansour Gholami said in a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Qusai Soheil on Saturday.

"The collaborations are rooted in the cultural, Islamic and historical interests of the two countries," said Gholami, adding that the extent of cooperation is not enough.

According to Fars, he also said more than 3,300 Iraqi students are studying in Iranian universities, and that Iran is ready to accept more Iraqi students.



MP advises Europe against linking FATF to INSTEX

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has advised Europe against linking the FATF and similar issues to INSTEX, a new transaction channel that will allow European companies to continue trading with Iran despite U.S. sanctions.

The Europeans have not taken a practical measure regarding the nuclear agreement, so they should not expect Iran to take a step with regard to the FATF for them, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh said, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The lawmaker also said INSTEX is not so much of a monetary tool as it is a political one, predicting that the European mechanism will lead to "further isolation of America".

# Rouhani says unity in Venezuela will foil U.S. plots

## Eight foreign ambassadors submit credentials to Rouhani



Venezuelan Ambassador to Tehran Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones (L) shaking hands with President Hassan Rouhani

**1 →** He added, "In our fight against imperialism and conspiracies, we are counting on our good friends, including Iran."

**'Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is hoped to be completed soon'**

Speaking with Pakistan's new Ambassador Riffat Masood, Rouhani said Iran is looking forward to working closely with the new government in Pakistan in order to further strengthen bilateral relations.

He also said Tehran hopes the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline will be completed soon, because it is of great significance for both countries.

Masood said she is confident that the close, historical ties between the governments and people of the two countries and the strong political will on both sides would provide an impetus to bilateral relations that will also bode well for peace and stability in the region.

**'Kazakhstan has political resolve to develop ties with Iran'**

In the meeting with the new Kazakh ambassador to Tehran, the Iranian president called for efforts to enhance bilateral economic cooperation, saying the two nations share stances on many regional and international developments.

For his part, the new Kazakh envoy congratulated Iran on the 40th anniversary of victory of the Islamic Revolution, highlighting his country's political resolve to develop ties with Iran.

**'U.S. sanctions have no impact on Tehran's ties with other countries'**

Meeting with Croatia's new ambassador, Rouhani said both countries can have extensive cooperation, especially in energy and financial fields.

He also said the U.S. sanctions can leave no impact on Iran's relations with other countries.

For his part, the Croatian ambassador said he is happy with the creation of the European Union's payment mechanism with Iran to bypass U.S. sanctions, predicting that this

mechanism can help strengthen relations between Zagreb and Tehran.

The ambassador also said Croatia will use any opportunity to improve relations with Tehran.

**'More amicable relationship with Tunisia'**

Rouhani told Tarek Bettaieb, Tunisia's new ambassador to Iran, that "we are willing to develop a more amicable relationship between the two nations of Iran and Tunisia and expand the mutual cooperation."

He further stressed the necessity to use the existing capacities to expand economic relations and encourage the private sectors of the two countries.

**'Readiness to develop scientific ties with Mali and Sierra Leone'**

The president also met with the new Ambassador of Mali to Tehran, saying the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to develop scientific and academic, as well as agricultural relations with African countries, including Mali.

In his meeting the new Ambassador of Sierra Leone, Rouhani expressed Tehran's readiness to boost cooperation with Freetown in all fields of mutual interest, saying, "We are ready to develop scientific and cultural relations and cooperation with Sierra Leone."

**'Iran-Turkey relations are friendly and strategic'**

Speaking with the new Turkish ambassador to Tehran, Rouhani said Iran-Turkey relations are "friendly" and "strategic".

The two countries' common views about the Islamic world and region as well as a big cooperation potential are the best chances to boost Tehran-Ankara ties, he said.

President Rouhani also met with Iran's new ambassadors to Turkey, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Brunei before their departure.

He wished the new ambassadors luck and asked them to spare no efforts to strengthen Iran's relations with those countries.

## U.S. will end up in wheelchair if it attacks Iran, Larijani warns

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Reacting to U.S. military threats against Iran, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said the Americans won't dare attack Iran as they know they will "wind up in a wheelchair" afterwards.

### The parliament speaker says Iran does not bear any hard feelings toward the world and wants to have diplomatic relations with all countries, but "we will not be dependent because the Iranian nation has experienced the poisonous taste of dependency in the past."

Iran is a tough opponent for them, and the Americans do not get involved with a tough opponent because "we will not go easy on them," Larijani said in an interview with Lebanese television channel Al Mayadeen published on Friday.

Pointing to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's efforts to unify other countries against Iran, he said if the Americans had

been able to actually do anything against Iran, they wouldn't have wasted their breath traveling from place to place.

"They know they cannot change Iran and cannot change Iran's behavior as well," he added.

Making a comparison between the pre- and post-Islamic Revolution Iran, he said the British and American ambassadors used to give orders to the Shah, "but today Iran is an independent country in which democracy is practiced."

"People choose the rulers, from the Leader of the [Islamic] Revolution who is elected by the Assembly of Experts to the president and Majlis [representatives] who are elected by the people," the speaker explained.

In similar remarks on Saturday at the opening ceremony of an exhibition showcasing the Islamic Republic's 40 years of achievements, Larijani said Iran used to be America's operational base in the region.

"With the Islamic Revolution, an earthquake occurred in the region which was the most important incident of the century and overturned Iran's conditions," the top lawmaker added.

Today the status of Iran in the world cannot be ignored, he remarked.

He also said Iran does not bear any hard feelings toward the world and wants to have diplomatic relations with all countries, but "we will not be dependent because the Iranian nation has experienced the poisonous taste of dependency in the past."

## Zarif: Trump's exit from nuclear missile pact proves 'any deal with U.S. not worth the ink'

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday the Trump administration's decision to suspend its compliance with the INF nuclear missile pact with Russia sends this message to the world that "any deal with the U.S. government is not worth the ink, even treaties ratified by Congress."

According to Press TV, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that Washington will suspend its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty 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.

Russia denies violating the treaty, which bans either side from stationing short- and intermediate-range, land-based missiles in Europe.

"Yet another withdrawal from an accord by the Trump administration; this time the #INF Treaty. It's not just the #JCPOA or Iran: Seems this clique is allergic to anything w/ US signature on it. Message: Any deal with US govt is not worth the ink; even treaties ratified by Congress," Zarif said in a post on his official Twitter account just a few hours after Pompeo's announcement about the INF.

President Donald Trump withdrew Washington in May from the landmark 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and reimpose unilateral sanctions against Tehran.

Under the deal, reached between Iran and the 5+1 group -- the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia plus Germany -- in July 2015, Iran undertook to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

### "Yet another withdrawal from an accord by the Trump administration; this time the #INF Treaty. It's not just the #JCPOA or Iran: Seems this clique is allergic to anything w/ US signature on it. Message: Any deal with US govt is not worth the ink; even treaties ratified by Congress."

Since taking the helm at the White House in January 2017, Trump has withdrawn the U.S. from multiple international organizations including Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Paris

Climate Agreement, Trans-Pacific Partnership, UN Human Rights Council, UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Iran nuclear deal.

## Tehran reiterates support for govt.-led Afghan peace talks

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's envoy to a meeting of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan has voiced Tehran's support for the Afghan peace process.

Praising the key role by the Kabul government to restore peace to the war-torn country, Rassoul Eslami in a Thursday address to the meeting called for cooperation of various political factions with the Kabul government to advance peace talks.

The meeting was hosted by London and attended by about 80 representatives from over 50 countries, international and regional organizations, and the Afghan government, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Eslami also urged all neighbors to Afghanistan to lend support to the Afghan peace efforts.

He further noted that a military approach to the crisis in Afghanistan has failed to restore peace and security to the country, and the timeframe announced for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan will be a wise move to prepare the ground for the beginning of peace talks.

More than 17 years of the United States' presence in Afghanistan at the top of a military coalition have brought



nothing but chaos and insecurity to the country as a result of which all forms of organized crimes, especially production of illicit drugs, have been skyrocketing. The country has also turned into a hotbed of violent acts by major terror outfits, especially Daesh.

The meeting was attended by U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad who has been heading separate talks with the Taliban group.

After several rounds of talks between the two sides, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Reuters on

Friday that "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."

He claimed a complete foreign troop pullout would pave the way for "the establishment of an Islamic system," which would be sought through "negotiations with different political sides, even if they have so far been under the umbrella of the invaders."

The spokesperson said the next round of the talks with the U.S. would take place in the Qatari capital of Doha on February 25.

Iran has been engaged in separate talks with the Taliban group as well. Speaking to reporters late in December, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi confirmed Iran had hosted a delegation from the Taliban to discuss possible ways to end hostilities in Afghanistan.

"Since the Taliban are in control of more than 50 percent of Afghanistan, and given the insecurity, instability and other issues that the country is dealing with, they [the Taliban] were interested in talks with Iran," Qassemi said.

## Long-range cruise missile unveiled

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — On Saturday, Iran unveiled a long-range surface-to-surface cruise missile designed and built by experts at the Defense Ministry's Aerospace Industries Organization.

The missile, with a flight range of more than 1,350 kilometers, was showcased as Iran is marking the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The cruise missile, called "Hoveyze", was put on display and prepared to

be handed over to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force.

Hoveyze is the name of a city in southwestern province of Khuzestan known for its resistance during Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the 1980s.

Speaking at the ceremony, Defense Minister Amir Hatami described the missile as "a symbol of self-confidence" and said it is a major defense achievement that indicates Iran's advances in military technologies.

The missile proves that nothing can

block the Iranian nation's determination to develop its defense sector, the minister added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, General Hatami pointed to another domestically made cruise missile dubbed "Soumar" that had been unveiled earlier and has a range of 700 kilometers.

Soumar is also the name of a village in Khuzestan whose inhabitants were all killed with chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein's army.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subject to negotiations.

# U.S. threatens Venezuela with ‘all options’ after coup bid

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence has reiterated support for Venezuela’s opposition leader Juan Guaidó, saying Washington will forgo “dialogue” and consider “all options” to help the Latin American country’s self-proclaimed president against the legal government of President Nicolás Maduro.

“The United States will continue to assert all diplomatic pressure to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy, but those looking on should know this: All options are on the table,” Pence told a crowd of Venezuelans in the state of Florida.

“And Nicolás Maduro would do well not to test the resolve of the United States,” he warned. “This is no time for dialogue. This is time for action.”

The remarks came days after Maduro said he was ready to sit down with the opposition leader, Guaidó, who declared himself “interim president” last month.

“I am ready to sit at the negotiation table with the opposition for us to talk for the benefit of Venezuela, for the sake of peace and its future,” Maduro told Russian news agency RIA in an interview broadcast on Wednesday.

The administration of President Donald Trump has wasted no efforts in stepping up pressure on Maduro since Guaidó challenged his leadership. Trump immediately recognized the opposition leader as the legitimate president of the oil-rich country, and soon after that Washington imposed unilateral sanctions on Venezuela’s oil industry in an attempt to boost the opposition.

The move prompted a furious response from Maduro, who vowed to take legal action against Washington.

■ **Bolton threatens to send Maduro to Guantanamo**

Meanwhile, Trump’s national security adviser, John Bolton, who has floated possible military action against Venezuela, pushed the envelope even further, suggesting that Maduro



should choose between retirement or possible imprisonment in the U.S. military’s notorious detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

“I wish him [Maduro] a long, quiet retirement on a pretty beach far from Venezuela. And the sooner he takes advantage of that, the sooner he’s likely to have a nice, quiet retirement on a pretty beach rather than being in some other beach area like Guantanamo,” Bolton told a radio interview on Friday.

■ **Guaidó desperately trying to reach out to soldiers**

Guaidó, who had claimed earlier that he was involved in talks with military and civilian officials in Venezuela “behind the scenes” to convince them to defect, published an open letter, calling on the military to abandon Maduro and join him.

He also called on his supporters to take to the streets on Saturday and demand Ma-

duro’s resignation.

The self-proclaimed president also said that he would guarantee “safe passage out of the country” for Maduro and “everyone who is prepared to put themselves on the side of the constitution in order to recover the democratic order.”

Maduro, who began his second six-year term as president in January, has the backing of the country’s army amid the political crisis. Reiterating support for Maduro, Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino said earlier this week that his soldiers were ready to die for the country.

■ **EU divided over Venezuela**

On Thursday, the European Parliament recognized Guaidó as the de facto head of state in Venezuela and urged the European Union (EU)’s all 28 member states to follow suit and consider him “the only legitimate

interim president.”

Italy, however, defied the call, warning the bloc against a Libya-style regime change.

“Today, the greatest interest we have is to avoid a new war in Venezuela,” Manlio Di Stefano, Italy’s deputy foreign minister, said Thursday. Referring to the 2011 ouster of Libya’s former dictator Muammar Gaddafi during a NATO-led military intervention, he called the decision to invade the African country a “mistake” as it led to more instability not only for the country but the whole region.

“We must prevent this from happening in Venezuela,” Di Stefano warned.

Libya has been the scene of increasing violence since 2011, when Gaddafi, who had ruled the country since a 1969 coup, was toppled from power.

Maduro himself has warned that Washington’s actions were motivated by the desire to “steal” Venezuela’s massive oil reserves, “as they did in Iraq and Libya.”

■ **Bolivia stands with Venezuelan president**

Bolivian President Evo Morales, who was in Caracas on his way home from a trip to the United Nations in New York City, wrote in a Twitter post that he stopped in the Venezuelan capital to express his full support to Maduro.

“We are meeting with my fellow President of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro and in the face of the overthrow and intervention by the empire that wants to appropriate Venezuela’s national wealth in violation of international law. Bolivia supports dialogue aimed at avoiding conflicts,” Morales wrote.

Besides Bolivia, other countries like Russia, China and Iran have also expressed support for Maduro against what he has described as a coup openly led by the United States.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has also made it clear that he would only work with Maduro to help resolve the tensions.

(Source: agencies)

## French ‘yellow vests’ march through Paris denouncing police violence



Several thousand “yellow vest” protesters marched through Paris and other French cities on Saturday on the 12th weekend of action against the government despite opinion polls pointing to a recovery in President Emmanuel Macron’s popularity.

The protests – named after the fluorescent jackets French motorists are required to carry in their cars – began in mid-November over plans to raise fuel taxes before developing into a broader revolt against the government that mobilized tens of thousands of demonstrators nationwide each Saturday.

The government warned on Friday police would not hesitate to use flashballs in case of violence by demonstrators after it was authorized by France’s highest administrative court.

Protesters on Saturday paid homage to those injured in the past months, denouncing the use of flashball riot control guns banned in much of Europe.

About 1,000 police officers have been injured along with 1,700 demonstrators since the start of the protests, according to official figures.

“It’s true that this intermediate weapon can hurt, but faced with rioters, the police need it to defend themselves against those who attack them,” said Interior Minister Christophe Castaner.

Opinion polls show a recovery in Macron’s battered popularity rating after he launched consultations, including town hall debates, to try to quell social unrest.

A Harris Interactive poll of 1,000 people on Friday showed Macron gaining 4 percentage points since December taking him to a 35 percent approval rating.

As in previous weeks, protesters on Saturday carried French flags and held signs attacking Macron as out of touch or calling for referendums tabled by citizens.

Protesters injured in previous weeks of violence were put at the front of the protests with some wearing eye patches with a target sign on them.

In Valence in the south of France, the mayor said measures had been taken to prepare for about 10,000 demonstrators. Authorities fear about 10 percent of those could be violent rioters.

The Interior Ministry said 80,000 security officials had been mobilized, including 5,000 in Paris.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Iraq, Jordan agree deal over trade of oil and goods

Iraq and Jordan Saturday agreed a deal over the trade of oil and goods at a meeting between their two prime ministers on the Iraqi-Jordanian border.

Under the deal, Iraq would sell 10,000 barrels per day of oil to Jordan at a special price, transported by tanker from its Kirkuk oilfields, the Jordanian prime minister’s office said in a statement. It did not say what the price was or when the oil would be exported.

Iraqi goods imported via Jordan’s Aqaba port on the Red Sea would meanwhile receive preferential tariffs, it said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel-Mahdi, who said on Tuesday the deal was close to being reached, finalized the agreement at a meeting with his Jordanian counterpart Omar Razzaz.

Aqaba port at the north end of the Red Sea has long been a major transit route for Iraqi imports and exports, and Amman has long relied on Iraqi crude to fuel its economy.

Razzaz’s office also said Jordan would begin to export electricity to Iraq within the next two years.

Mahdi says the government aims to decrease dependency on oil exports for state revenue. Oil exports from OPEC’s second-largest producer account for more than 95 percent of state revenues.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Argentina’s Fernandez plans election run against Macri

Former Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner intends to run for the office again this year, two sources close to left-leaning politician told Reuters, the strongest indication yet that the populist leader will look to mount a challenge to incumbent Mauricio Macri.

Fernández, who has yet to formally announce herself as a candidate in the elections in October, would make boosting consumer purchasing power a focus, the sources said, a counter to Macri’s austerity push that has dented his popularity.

The election run, if confirmed, would make Fernández the first and most high-profile challenger to Macri, who is expected to run for a second term but whose leadership has faced heavy criticism after rampant inflation last year and a falling economy hit voters hard.

A Macri versus Fernández battle would likely dominate the election process in what will be a major crossroads for Argentina’s economic and political future: a choice between Macri’s IMF-backed economic reforms or a return to Peronism.

(Source: Reuters)

# Three women who could be Modi’s biggest nightmare in India’s election

Three powerful women politicians, each from a very different section of Indian society, may pose a big threat to the chances of Prime Minister Narendra Modi winning a second term in a general election due by May.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, part of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that has ruled India for much of the time since its independence from the British in 1947, joined the struggle in January, when the opposition Congress party made her its face in the nation’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh.

Two other senior female politicians – the firebrand chief minister of West Bengal state, Mamata Banerjee, and Mayawati, a former Uttar Pradesh chief minister – are also plotting to unseat Modi’s ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition by forming big opposition groupings, though there is no firm agreement between them as yet.

“The opposition has more powerful women leaders than the NDA, and therefore they will be able to carry conviction with voters generally, and with women voters, in particular,” said Yashwant Sinha, 81, a former finance minister who quit Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which dominates the NDA, last year.

“They should be very worried, especially after the defeat in the three major Hindi heartland states,” he said, referring to BJP’s losses in recent state elections.

The entry of Priyanka – she is usually referred to by just her first name – into the political fray drew a gushing reaction from much of the Indian media.

There were pictures of elated supporters dancing, a lot of talk of the 47-year-old’s resemblance to her grandmother, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and comments about her gifts as a speaker able to connect with voters. That contrasts with her brother, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who in the past has been criticized for lacking the common touch.

■ **Triple challenge**

The other two women seen threatening Modi’s grip on power have a lot more experience than Priyanka, and both could be seen as potential prime ministerial candidates in a coalition government.

Mayawati, a 63-year-old former teacher who goes by just the one name, last month formed an alliance between her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) – which mainly represents Hinduism’s lowest caste, the Dalits – and its once bitter foes, the Samajwadi Party that tends to draw support from other lower castes and Muslims.

Then there is 64-year-old Banerjee, who has twice been railways minister in federal governments. Last month, Banerjee – who built her All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) party after leaving Congress in 1997 – organized an anti-BJP rally in Kolkata that attracted hundreds of thousands.



Party colleagues of the three women leaders said they were not available for comment.

To be sure, Modi remains, for now, the most popular leader in the country, opinion polls show.

Modi also cannot be accused of ignoring women’s issues during his first term. He has launched a government campaign – Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, or “Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter” – and called for the eradication of female foeticide. His campaigns to provide toilets and subsidized gas cylinders for poorer Indians are often promoted as ways to empower women.

He has six women in his 26-strong cabinet, though a lot of power is centralized with Modi and a couple of senior male lieutenants.

The BJP said it would seek votes on the basis of achievements under Modi and the opposition did not have a “positive alternative to the government, and its activities”.

■ **Personal ties**

Congress has said it wants to form a post-poll partnership with Mayawati’s BSP and SP alliance, though it will be fighting against it in 78 seats. The alliance will not contest two Gandhi strongholds won multiple times by Rahul and his mother Sonia.

Mayawati told a press conference announcing the alliance with the SP that Congress was not part of it because they did not think “there would be much benefit in having them with us before the election”.

The BSP, however, backs Congress-led governments in the northern states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

There is no formal alliance between Banerjee and Congress, though she does know Rahul and Priyanka.

# China disciplines 80 officials linked to major vaccine scandal

China’s corruption watchdog Saturday said it has disciplined more than 80 officials linked to a major vaccine scandal last summer that inflamed public fears over the safety of domestically produced drugs.

Changchun Changsheng Biotechnology – a major Chinese manufacturer of rabies vaccines – was slapped with a \$1.3 billion fine last October after it was found to have

fabricated records.

Four officials from the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA), including a deputy director, have been handed over to prosecutors, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection said in a statement Saturday.

The brief statement did not say what they were alleged to have done.

The graft watchdog also said it would “seriously deal with” more than 80 other provincial or local officials from multiple government organizations, without offering details.

These officials have already been fired or demoted, it said.

Authorities earlier said the faulty rabies vaccines did not enter the market. But the

case provoked outrage from customers fed up with recurring product-safety scandals, particularly in the drug sector.

The drug company’s chairwoman and 14 employees were arrested after the scandal came to light last July, while more than a dozen national, provincial and local officials were sacked.

(Source: AFP)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	159855.4
IFX	1940.51

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,113 rials
GBP	55,937 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$62.75/b
WTI	\$55.26/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.76/b
Gold	\$1,318.30 /oz
Silver	\$15.94/oz
Platinum	\$828.89oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



**Iron ore concentrate output rises 22% in 9 months on year**

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** — Production of iron ore concentrate in Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – September 21, 2018) rose 22 percent compared to the same period of time in the previous year, IRIB reported on Saturday citing the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

As reported, Iranian producers of iron ore concentrate produced 34.306 million tons of the product during the mentioned period of time, while the figure was 28.159 million in the nine-month time of the past year.



**Tehran hosting intl. exhibition of logistics, supply chain**

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** – Iran’s 4th International Exhibition of Logistics and Supply Chain Related Industries and Equipment kicked off at Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds on Saturday, IRIB reported.

Exhibitors from Iran and other countries including Turkey, Germany, Russia, Azerbaijan and China are showcasing their latest products and services during the four-day event.

According to the exhibition’s organizers, this event aims to present a platform for the participants to get to know about various products and the latest technology and know-how in logistics industry, and consequently create a path for the country’s logistics industry to thrive.



**Over 200 companies attending Iran’s intl. accessories, machinery expo**

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** — Some 200 Iranian and 17 foreign companies are taking part in the 17th International Exhibition of Accessories, Machinery & Wood, Equipment and Related Industries in Tehran, IRIB reported on Saturday.

The exhibition is being held from February 2 to 5 at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

The showcase seeks protection of domestically produced products, the report said.

Turkish economy needs no external support: ministry

It is “obvious” that Turkey’s path will not have to cross the IMF’s for either loans or technical support, the Turkish Treasury and Finance Ministry said on Feb. 1.

In a written statement, the ministry ruled out talks with the IMF.



“It is very clear that the motive for bringing up the IMF is a certain misinformation operation which lacks any consistency,” an operation mounted despite Turkey’s favorable indebtedness ratios, debt rollover ratios, and financial discipline performance, the ministry said.

Underlining that the Turkish economy is solid, the ministry said Turkey is continuing its stabilizing period successfully with no need for external support.

The rallying Turkish economy will continue thanks to the strategy and measures taken by the government, the statement added.

(Source: Hurriyet Daily)

IME’s worth of trades up 5% in a week

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** — During weekdays ending up to January 31, while 561,786 million tons (MT) of commodities worth over \$547.6 million were traded on Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), the trading volume and value experienced growth of 11 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

According to the report from IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal

and mineral trading floor of IME, 140,220 MT of various products worth close to \$211 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 127,120 MT of steel, 7,955 MT of copper, 4,000 MT of aluminum, 1,000 MT of cement, 110 MT of molybdenum concentrates and 15 MT of precious metal concentrates were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 419,819 MT of different commodities with



the total value of \$353 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 185,040 MT of VB feed stock, 84,420 MT of bitumen, 75,085 MT of polymer products, 30,767 MT of chemical products, 42,210 MT of sulfur, 50 MT of

base oil as well as 2,246 MT of insulation were traded.

Moreover, on the agricultural trading floor of IME some 1,474 MT of maize was traded by customers.

Germany’s federal agency welcomes European trade vehicle with Iran

**ECONOMY DESK** **TEHRAN** — Germany’s BGA trade association announced that the mechanism known as the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges, or INSTEX, created by France, Germany and Britain to facilitate trade with Iran is legitimate and sends an important signal of Europe’s reliability as a trade partner,

Reuters reported.

According to the BGA President Holger Bingmann, questions nonetheless remain about the exact structure of the INSTEX.

The Bundesweite Gründerinnenagentur (BGA) is a federal agency that acts as a Germany-wide one-stop shop for information and support services for women entrepreneurs.

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 INSTEX also called the SPV (a special purpose vehicle), 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.

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.

Energy Fintech in Iran: An expert view

**I →** major banks and businesses will not. Add to that the strong suspicion in Iran that the aim of European Central Bank and private banks is to tie Iran into PetroEuro relationships through € debt development financing and long term funding.

(CC) I understand Mr. Khaghani’s pessimism, but I remain optimistic because I believe that there are now constructive agreements and instruments available which can resolve these issues. Indeed, that will be the subject of our upcoming Energy Fintech workshop with the Iran and Tehran Chambers of Commerce kindly convened by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Shams Ardakani, whom I look forward to meeting again.

■ What do you mean by Energy Fintech?

(CC) Financial Technology or Fintech, has been around for a long time, and in simple terms describes the convergence of financial and physical markets with communications technology and professional services such as accountancy and law. My particular interest and expertise is in the legal design of market agreements and rules, and of the contractual instruments which are traded, cleared and settled on markets.

I first took an interest in Fintech around 1992 while a director of a global oil exchange which developed an electronic trading system. Then in 1998 I invented an online shared transaction registration system - OilClear - which gave legal effect to oil market contracts of all types, whether they were arranged on or off an exchange; manually or automatically. This market operating system exists to this day at major global exchanges who simply appropriated the concept as their own, and now make billions of dollars selling market information to the buyers and sellers who originated it.

■ Is this shared market database related to the Blockchain concept?

(CC) Yes and No. On the one hand encryption of online transactions authenticates & validates them. But on the other hand, the cost of replicating shared databases throughout networks, and encrypting an entire shared database for every new transaction soon becomes prohibitive in cost and performance.

■ Is your Energy Credit Obligation (ECO) related to energy-based Coins, such as Venezuela’s Petro?

Again, Yes and No. Firstly, the average Iranian does not own an oil refinery, and therefore would not be particularly interested in consuming crude oil. Oil products such as gasoline or diesel fuel are another matter. Secondly the Petro is essentially only a receipt for payment which is nominally backed by Venezuelan oil reserves. Crucially, Petros cannot be used to pay for crude oil instead of dollars even for those who own refineries.



Chris Cook (L) and Mahmood Khaghani

■ So Iranian oil refineries could issue ECOs in exchange for money, goods and services from investors who could then use them to pay for (say) gasoline, or sell them to investors or consumers. But what is to prevent them issuing ECOs excessively, so that insufficient gasoline is available for all holders to return their ECOs?

(MK) There is significant current parliamentary criticism of H E Zanganeh in relation to domestic sales of oil and gas, and a long standing difference of view between the Oil and Energy Ministries continues in relation to the desirability of domestic or international sales. The ECO potentially enables resolution of these difficulties, since it makes possible the raising of domestic prices to match international prices.

(CC) Note that the Caspian Oil Swap made clear the need for transparency of ECO issuance, and for professional management by an expert service provider. The most important ECO risk is that an issuer is unable to supply products because the cost of his raw materials such as oil and gas has risen. Oil for product energy swaps enable producers to supply crude oil in exchange for the rights to a proportion of the flow of oil products, or to oil product ECOs rather than selling oil on the open market. As I have been pointing out since the global oil market platform 2001 is owned, controlled and thoroughly manipulated by traders and investment banks with an interest in volatility and low transparency.

■ One of the most difficult current Iranian political issues is how to fund energy subsidies when Iran’s revenues are constrained by sanctions. How may the ECO proposal help resolve this?

(MK) The proposal is firstly to gradu-

ally increase fuel prices, which creates an Energy Pool fund in rials. And rather than distributing subsidies in new rials, which we know from experience will cause inflation, an Energy Dividend distribution of ECOs will be made which may be presented in payment for fuel, transport of all kinds or to back investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

■ So the ECO comprises new and non-inflationary credit or money in Iran’s financial system. But how do the financial and banking systems fit in to the ECO picture?

(CC) Clearly neither the Central Bank nor private banks can issue ECOs since they do not provide energy services. However, private banks may firstly manage ECO issuance, and secondly arrange energy Loans whereby investment is made out of the Energy Pool fund in rials with a return to investors in ECOs.

In other words, banks will have an additional line of business, and this will require very little financial capital compared to conventional banking. Central Bank monetary supervision and oil and energy ministry expertise will be combined in a new Energy Treasury institution.

(MK) We also envisage that for business users, and major investors, the ECO and energy swaps represents new domestic trading opportunities and asset classes for Iran’s exchanges and financial services industry. There is a vast amount of idle capital in Iran, much of it in gold, hard currency cash, and property, and here we believe that the ECO at last represents an instrument which may mobilize these assets and stimulate Iran’s domestic economy.

■ What outcomes do you hope for from domestic ECO use? And what would be the next steps?

(MK) It is not an exaggeration to say that the ECO and energy swaps represents a new paradigm which Ambassador Dr. Shams Ardakani observes, and this will enable an energy revolution in Iran, through funding massive investment in the cheapest energy of all – energy savings – and in harnessing Iran’s abundant renewable energy resources. It is appropriate that such an energy revolution should begin now, on the eve of the 40th anniversary of Iran’s Islamic Revolution.

■ Moving on from Iran’s domestic energy policy, does Energy Fintech open the way for what H E Zanganeh refers to as Energy Diplomacy?

(CC) Indeed so. Applied on an international scale, risk, cost and production sharing agreements, combined with the ECO instrument, which knows no borders, opens up new policy options. By way of example, we may use Energy Fintech to address the deficiencies of the new INTEX vehicle and any Iranian counterpart vehicle which deals with INTEX.

So our complementary proposal is for a neutral Swiss custodian to hold a shared registry of Energy Credit Obligation (ECO) transactions and for the new INTEX to manage ECO issuance, exchange and settlement as a service provider. Businesses would then transact in ECOs via energy swaps through membership of an ECO Clearing Union association which would mutually assure performance and standards under ‘Club Rules’ similar to the way Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Clubs mutually assure shipping risks on a global scale.

(MK) I have myself been involved in innovating energy swaps, such as the Caspian Oil Swap, and Armenian Gas for Power swaps and also their extension in Nakhchivan (Republic of Azerbaijan) to avoid a humanitarian disaster, which was termed Energy for Peace.

I observe great potential for new generations of international energy swaps, whereby energy commodity producers like Iran no longer sell oil & gas on a financial oil market under the control of Wall Street, but supply it to overseas refineries in exchange for a flow of oil product ECOs.

By way of example I have long advocated implementing oil for product swaps with Greece, a country which I regard strategically as a “Golden Gate” to Europe, and which I understand is one of the few European jurisdictions prepared to take the risk of engaging with Iran. So Iran could supply oil to Greece in exchange for a flow of Greek issued ECOs which would be accepted throughout the region by consumers of Greek oil products.

■ Gentlemen, thanks for a fascinating discussion, and I wish you every success in developing the ECO concept.

China buys U.S. soybeans a day after trade talks - traders

Chinese state-owned firms bought at least 1 million tonnes of U.S. soybeans on Friday, a day after high-level bilateral talks yielded progress toward a trade deal and a Chinese commitment to buy more U.S. soybeans.

The purchases are slated for shipment between April and July, with a large share expected from U.S. Gulf Coast export terminals, three traders with knowledge of the deals said.

One trader with direct knowledge of the deals said total purchases were around 2.2 million tonnes. The other two traders said the sales were similar to three recent waves of buying in which state-owned firms booked 1 million to 1.5 million tonnes of soybeans.

U.S. soybean futures Sv1 rallied to multi-month highs on Friday on news of renewed demand from the world’s top importer.

But the market’s gains were restrained by worries that Chinese purchases will hardly dent massive soybean stockpiles in the United States and around the world. The looming harvest of a large soy crop in Brazil, the world’s top supplier, further

capped prices.

“It certainly is good to see some concessions and more buying interest from China, but this is a concession in terms of a larger trade agreement. Brazilian offers are cheaper than we are so it’s just part of the negotiation,” said Terry Linn, analyst with Chicago-based brokerage Linn & Associates.

Friday’s purchases by state-owned firms were believed to be destined for China’s state reserves, and thus immune from high import tariffs on U.S. beans. The 25 percent tariffs, imposed last summer in retaliation for U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods, remain in place for U.S. soy imports by commercial crushers in China.

Exports to China have plummeted this season during a bitter trade dispute, with swelling supplies sending prices to near decade lows last autumn and U.S. farmers struggling to turn a profit.

China has been buying most of its soybeans from Brazil, which is in pace to harvest a bumper crop in the coming months.

Friday’s sales bring China’s total purchases of the 2018 U.S. soybean harvest to at least 6.5 million tonnes, a fraction of its traditional annual haul from the United States of more than 30 million tonnes.

Through January of 2017, more than 29.4 million tonnes of that season’s harvest had already been shipped to China, with another 4 million tonnes sold and awaiting shipment, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data.

Benchmark Chicago Board of Trade March futures climbed to \$9.31-1/4 a bushel on Friday, the highest point for a most actively traded soy contract Sv1 since mid-June. Beijing slapped steep tariffs on U.S. soybeans on July 6, effectively halting all U.S. shipments to their top customer.

Before Friday’s sales, China had previously booked an estimated 5 million tonnes of U.S. soybeans in three waves of purchases since U.S. President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping agreed to a trade war detente on Dec. 1.

(Source: Reuters)

# Global deepwater oil production to hit new record in 2019

Global deepwater liquid production is set to jump by 700,000 bpd from 2018 to reach a record-high of 10.3 million bpd in 2019, thanks to new fields coming on stream in Brazil and the U.S. Gulf of Mexico, research firm Rystad Energy said on Friday.

In addition to Brazil and the United States, the other biggest deepwater producers will be Angola, Norway, and Nigeria, according to Rystad.

For the U.S. Gulf of Mexico, energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie expects “a historic year” in 2019, with Shell’s Appomattox marking the first production ever from a Jurassic reservoir in the Gulf of Mexico. Drilling in the area is also set to post the first increase in four years and new projects are expected to be sanctioned, according to WoodMac.

Operators have driven down the cost of developing new deepwater barrels by more than 50 percent since 2013, Wood Mackenzie said in November.

According to the consultancy’s data and analysis, the most competitive region for



deepwater is the Americas, and in particular Brazil, Guyana, and the Gulf of Mexico. In

those areas, more than 50 billion boe of pre- and post-sanction deepwater developments

are now profitable below an oil price of US\$60 a barrel, based on break-even costs.

The industry has started to increase investments in deepwater after the downturn, encouraged by the cost cuts and realizing that offshore resources would be important for meeting demand growth, WoodMac said.

The consultancy sees global annual capital expenditure (capex) on deepwater rising to around \$60 billion by 2022 from some \$50 billion currently, driven by big projects in Guyana, Brazil, and Mozambique.

The higher spending on deepwater, however, will lead to cost inflation, which may end the cost reduction streak for exploration and production companies, WoodMac warned.

“We believe that many cost savings are not as ‘sticky’ as industry suggests, and are sceptical that many will stand the test of time during a sustained cyclical uptick,” Wood Mackenzie research director Angus Rodger said.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## U.S. gives non-U.S. firms 3 months to wind down PDVSA deals

The U.S. Treasury Department said Friday that transactions between non-U.S. firms and PDVSA, Venezuela’s state-owned oil firm, which involve the U.S. financial system or U.S. commodity brokers would be prohibited after April 28.

In a series of answers to “Frequently Asked Questions,” Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control clarified that these non-U.S. entities had three months to wind down these transactions with PDVSA, indicating U.S. sanctions on Venezuela’s oil sector may be more extensive than many analysts initially thought.

But these sanctions are not secondary sanctions, explicitly prohibiting oil and product trade between PDVSA and foreign firms, sources said.

“While it superficially looks like secondary sanctions, my understanding is that it means third parties can’t use dollars, not that they can’t trade in non-dollar currencies,” said Kevin Book, a managing director with ClearView Energy Partners. “It wouldn’t surprise me, however, if Treasury wrote it this way as sort of a high inside pitch for those who might be looking for an end-around.”

In the FAQ document Friday, Treasury’s OFAC also explicitly prohibited swap transactions, under which US refiners would buy Venezuelan crude sold by PDVSA through



a third party.

“It is certainly clarifying that this category of trade cannot occur,” said Elizabeth Rosenberg, director of the energy program at the Center for a New American Security and a former senior sanctions adviser at the Department of the Treasury. “I don’t think this was a loophole more than it was an area of enormous confusion for the last couple of days.”

But Treasury Friday did not provide additional clarity on U.S. shipments of diluent, which were subject to an im-

mediate prohibition Monday.

PDVSA uses naphtha from the U.S. to thin its heavy crude so it can be shipped.

Several U.S. shippers had diluent shipments in process to Venezuela when sanctions were announced Monday, and those shipments have been left in limbo since, according to Ginger Faulk, a partner with the Eversheds Sutherland law firm.

The U.S. ships about 120,000 b/d of petroleum products to Venezuela, according to S&P Global Platts Analytics, and exports about 50,000 b/d of naphtha to Venezuela, according to Nicolas Daher, an oil analyst at FGE.

Losing access to U.S. diluent would put between 200,000 and 250,000 b/d of Venezuelan oil production at risk, Daher said.

Under the new sanctions, U.S. refiners will be permitted to continue to import Venezuelan crude, at least for three months, but payments for these crude shipments must be deposited into a blocked, interest-bearing account located in the US until Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro leaves office, a requirement which is expected to immediately shut down crude flows between Venezuela and the U.S.

(Source: Platts)

## Black Sea Oil & Gas gets Romania gas project permit, but frets over new taxes

Romanian-based Black Sea Oil & Gas received a construction permit from the country’s energy ministry on Friday for an offshore gas project, but it said new taxes could make it hard to go ahead with the development.

The company, controlled by private equity firm Carlyle Group LP, discovered two wells holding an estimated 10 billion cubic meters of gas in 2008 some 120 kilometers offshore in the Black Sea.

It hoped to start production by 2020, pending a final investment decision, becoming the first in a line of companies to tap the European Union state’s vast offshore resources.

But Romania’s Social Democrat government approved a slew of taxes via emergency decree in December without an impact assessment or public debate, including a 2-percent tax on turnover for energy firms and a cap on gas prices.

That came on top of other new laws for offshore drilling stipulating that Romanian companies would need to sell at least half their yearly gas output in the country.

“The impact of these legislative changes on (our) investment plans are highly negative,” the firm’s chief executive, Mark Beacom, told Reuters.

“Our ability to obtain a final investment decision is adversely impacted.”

Unlike other countries in the region, Romania is largely independent in terms



of its energy needs. It imports less than 10 percent of its gas needs from Russia, with the rest produced locally, mainly by state producer Romgaz and OMV Petrom, controlled by Austria’s OMV. “(The price cap) removes investor confidence that being a Romanian producer will not result in being economically disadvantaged versus investing in other countries,” Beacom added.

The sales restrictions also made it difficult for the company to finance the offshore project, he said.

The new taxes and price caps have received widespread criticism from businesses, but the government has said it has no plans to withdraw or amend the emergency decree.

In October, after the offshore law was approved, Petrom postponed an investment decision on its Black Sea Neptun block, a joint venture with U.S. major ExxonMobil.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russian oil output down in January, misses global deal target

Russian oil output declined to 11.38 million barrels per day (bpd) in January, or by around 35,000 bpd from the October 2018 level, the baseline for the global oil accord, missing the deal’s target, Energy Ministry data showed on Saturday.

This was down from 11.45 million bpd in December, a record monthly high. In tons, oil output reached 48.113 million versus 48.442 million in December.

Russian oil pipeline exports in January fell to 4.313 million bpd from 4.496 million bpd in December.

Rosneft, the world’s largest oil producer by output, reduced its production by 0.1 percent last month from December, while second-largest Russian oil producer Lukoil saw production cuts of 0.8 percent.

Output at Rosneft’s largest unit, RN-Yuganskneftegaz, declined by 0.8 percent after a blaze ripped through Priobskoye oilfield in early January.

Production at Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of gas giant Gazprom, edged up by 0.1 percent.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak has said the country’s overall cuts would total 50,000 bpd in January from October.

The Organization of the Petroleum Producing Countries and other leading global oil producers agreed in December to cut their combined output by 1.2 million bpd in order to support oil prices and evenly



balance the market.

Of that, Russia has pledged to cut its production by around 230,000 bpd in the first quarter.

Novak has also said Russia was unable to reduce oil output sharply due to technical limitations but would try to do so more quickly.

The slower than expected cuts have drawn a rebuke from Saudi Arabia, the OPEC kingpin.

Reducing production presents a challenge because Russia’s harsh winter climate can cause wells to freeze, Russian officials and analysts have said.

According to a Reuters survey, OPEC oil supply has fallen in January by the largest amount in two years.

Russian natural gas production was at 67.43 billion cubic meters (bcm) last month, or 2.18 bcm a day, versus 67.04 bcm in December.

(Source: Reuters)

## Qatar, Exxon to proceed with \$10 billion Texas LNG project: sources

Qatar Petroleum and Exxon Mobil Corp are expected to announce plans next week to proceed with a \$10 billion project that will expand a liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facility in Texas, three people familiar with the transaction said.

ConocoPhillips, the third partner in the existing import terminal, plans to sell its 12.4 percent stake and does not plan to participate in the expansion, the people said.

LNG demand is soaring. Worldwide consumption of the fuel is expected to more than double to 550 million tons a year (mtpa) by 2030, triggering a race among oil and gas companies eager to dominate the market.

Golden Pass LNG began as a receiving and regasification facility in Sabine Pass, Texas able to handle up to 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas imports per day.

However, as U.S. gas production has soared to new records, bolstered by shale production, the demand for export capacity has increased. The potential \$10 billion expansion, first announced in 2014, would focus on this new market dynamic.

It is part of Qatar Petroleum’s plans to invest some \$20 billion in the United States as the company seeks

to increase its overseas oil and gas footprint.

The most likely buyer for ConocoPhillips’ stake is Exxon Mobil, two of the people said, adding that the existing partners do not want to bring in another participant, as plans for the project are in advanced stages.

Currently, Exxon has a 30 percent stake in the LNG export project, and Qatar Petroleum holds a 70 percent stake. The two have been strengthening a global alliance across LNG projects from the United States to Mozambique.

Exxon expects this year to “sanction” the Golden Pass export terminal and another LNG project in Mozambique, Chief Executive Darren Woods said Friday on a conference call with analysts.

The company has been “working very closely with QP (Qatar Petroleum), our partner in Golden Pass, to advance that investment and look forward to announcing something here in the very near term,” Woods said.

Qatar was the world’s largest LNG producer in 2017 and has annual output of 77 million tons.

Exxon and ConocoPhillips declined to comment, while Qatar Petroleum could not immediately be reached for

comment.

ConocoPhillips’ stake sale led to delays in announcing the final decision to proceed with the project, one of the people said. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the conversations were private. The move comes as ConocoPhillips hones its focus on international projects.

The Golden Pass project is one of many that could be approved this year. Firms are expected to make final decisions on projects that could add more than 60 million tons per annum of LNG capacity this year. That’s well above the previous record of about 45 million tons in 2005 and triple last year’s 21 million tons, Wood Mackenzie’s research director for global gas and LNG, Giles Farrer, said last month.

More than 320 million tonnes of LNG was shipped globally in 2018, according to Refinitiv Eikon shipping data.

Qatar left the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries last year, allowing it to expand in the United States without concerns about proposed legislation that could limit OPEC members’ investments in the country.

(Source: Reuters)

## Oil tankers floating in limbo as U.S. bars payments to Venezuela

U.S. oil refiners won’t be allowed to complete shipments of Venezuelan crude they booked before the Trump administration slapped new sanctions on the Latin American nation.

U.S. Treasury Department officials have informed some companies that previously contracted cargoes won’t be exempt from a new rule blocking payments to Venezuela’s PDVSA, according to two people familiar with the matter. The requirement forces purchasers of Venezuelan crude to deposit payment into an account state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA can’t touch.

The clarification puts refiners in a difficult position, as PDVSA is now demanding up-front payment before releasing any tankers bound for the U.S. But under the Trump administration’s Jan. 28 sanctions, U.S. companies are barred from doing business with PDVSA.



Two vessels contracted for Valero Energy Corp. and one belonging to Chevron Corp. are anchored in Venezuela, awaiting payment. A fourth tanker booked by Chevron may be rerouted without getting the oil it came for, according to tanker tracking data compiled by Bloomberg.

For days, refiners had asked the Treasury Department to issue some clarification on the new sanctions, including assurances freeing them to pay PDVSA for transactions arranged before the restrictions were imposed. Officials now insist that payment for those previously booked cargoes go into the special account, even for deals with different payment terms inked prior to the imposition of sanctions on Jan. 28, said the people, who asked for anonymity to discuss the matter.

Newly released Treasury Department guidance did not include language allowing payment to PDVSA for earlier crude transactions. Representatives of the Treasury Department did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The move illustrates uncertainty over the intricacies of the sanctions while the Trump administration tries “to write the playbook” governing them, said Scott Modell, managing director of Rapidan Energy Group.

It’s unclear whether U.S. refiners will actually be able to buy any Venezuelan crude during a “wind-down” period that allows those sales through April 28 -- but only as long as payments go to the special account.

“I have not heard anybody walk away with a crystal clear idea as to how they are going to proceed in the coming months,” Modell said. The administration is moving fast, both “figuring out its next moves, and, at the same time, taking a breather and working with people in the industry to explain what they just did.”

A Valero spokeswoman did not respond to a request seeking comment. Chevron spokesman Braden Reddall said the company does not comment on supply and trading matters.

The effect of the sanctions was immediate, as Gulf Coast refiners scrambled to find alternative supplies of heavy crude. Meanwhile, companies halted plans to sell petroleum products to Venezuela, including diluents used to facilitate pipeline shipment in the country. On Tuesday, one petroleum-loaded tanker bound for the Latin American country did a U-turn in the Gulf of Mexico.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Chevron’s profit rises on higher oil prices and output

U.S. oil and natural gas producer Chevron Corp on Friday reported quarterly earnings that topped analysts’ estimates on higher prices and production, sending shares higher in morning trading.

Results for the San Ramon, California, company reflected a 12.5-percent increase in oil and gas production as net output rose to 3.08 million bpd. Prices paid for its crude were \$59 a barrel in the quarter, up from \$57 a year earlier, the company said.

It was “a good beat overall,” said Muhammed Ghulam, an analyst at Raymond James. “Permian production growth remained strong, up 12 percent compared to the prior quarter and 84 percent year over year,” he said.

The Trump administration last month added new sanctions against imports from Venezuela, where Chevron is the last major U.S. oil company with production operations.

Chevron continues to operate in Venezuela and believes it can maintain a “good, stable operation” there, Chief Executive Michael Wirth said Friday on a call with analysts. It has been able to replace Venezuelan crude usually processed at its Pascagoula, Mississippi refinery, he said.

Chevron’s fourth-quarter cash flow from operations rose to \$9.2 billion from \$8 billion a year earlier, reflecting the higher output and expense reduction. Investors have been pushing oil companies to restrain spending and increase returns to shareholders.

Wirth forecast oil-equivalent production this year to grow between 4 percent and 7 percent, excluding asset sales.

Chevron reported a profit of \$3.7 billion, or \$1.95 per share, compared with \$3.11 billion, or \$1.64 a share a year earlier. Analysts’ mean forecast was \$1.87 a share, according to Refinitiv.

Its operating results compared to the year-ago period were lower because of the impact of U.S. tax reform a year ago. Profit from oil and gas exploration was \$3.29 billion compared with \$5.29 billion a year earlier; refining profit fell to \$256 million compared with \$1.2 billion a year ago.

The company this week agreed to pay \$350 million to buy a refinery in Pasadena, Texas, from Brazilian state oil company Petrobras (PETR4.SA), confirming a Reuters report from Monday. The acquisition is intended to process oil flowing from its West Texas shale fields.

(Source: Reuters)

## How Republicans erased Trumpism

By Matthew Glassman

Donald Trump has a Congress problem. He can't get Republicans to promote his policies. And when he forces the issue — as with his border wall — he can't win their support.

But most Americans don't know that. After all, Republican legislators voted with the president well over 90 percent of the time during the 115th Congress. Record numbers of appellate judges were confirmed, and the president signed major tax legislation. Many observers have concluded that Mr. Trump dominates the Republican Party, and his loyal base holds congressional Republicans tautly in line.

But discerning legislative influence is more difficult than it appears. Throughout the first two years of the Trump presidency, Republican leaders in Congress skillfully used a variety of tactics to minimize the president's influence and maximize their own control over public policy.

Critically, congressional Republicans have adopted strategies that make the public — and more important, his conservative base — think Mr. Trump is in command. To casual followers of political news, the visible evidence from congressional votes and news releases suggests a powerful president leading a loyal congressional party. In reality, Republican legislators have hidden their influence, purposefully disguising a weak president with little clout on Capitol Hill while also preserving party unity.

In his 1960 book, "Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents," the political scientist Richard Neustadt argued that presidential power is "the power to persuade." Strong presidents have significant influence over public policy because they wield informal power, developing a reputation for getting their way and punishing those who impede their progress. Weak presidents — like Mr. Trump — fail to persuade, allowing competing political actors in Washington to block their goals and assert their own influence.

### Political actors

Mr. Neustadt identified a second resource that aids in presidential persuasion: public prestige. Political actors in Washington may not fear the president, but they may think twice about standing in his way if they perceive the public response to doing so may hurt them.

On this dimension, Mr. Trump appears to be stronger. His overall approval rating is very poor, but he is extremely popular among Republican voters. And his sizable conservative base is ready and willing to turn on elected Republicans in primary elections should they displease the president. The infrastructure of conservative media — Fox News, talk radio — strongly supports (and influences) Mr. Trump, augmenting this public power. Mr. Trump may not have much ability to sway Democrats, but Republican officials credibly fear crossing him.

Nevertheless, congressional Republicans have found a solution to this challenge: agenda-setting. Political power is not simply the ability to influence the positions citizens or lawmakers take on issues, but also the ability to control what issues are discussed and voted on.

Throughout the last Congress, Republican leaders simply declined to take up legislation that reflected the priority of the president but not their own. There were no votes on immigration restrictions or funding for a border wall, protectionist trade legislation or infrastructure.

The Trump budget proposals for the 2017 and 2018 fiscal years requested deep cuts in nondefense discretionary spending. Congressional Republicans quietly buried them and delivered bills both years that increased nondefense spending.

Such "negative" agenda-setting leaves little trace; without a vote, it becomes difficult for opponents or voters to identify or understand what happened. President Trump's priorities weren't voted down in the House or the Senate; they were just never considered.

Agenda-setting also provides congressional leaders "positive" power to set legislative priorities. Mr. Trump has famously shown little interest in the details of policy, and Republican leaders in Washington easily convinced him to accept as his priorities the party's orthodox issues of Affordable Care Act repeal and tax cuts during his first year in office.

By setting the agenda and having the president sign on, Republican legislators controlled policy while sharing the position of the president. When Republicans held a White House celebration after passing tax legislation, Mr. Trump claimed credit, and legislators publicly praised the "Trump" tax bill, and the president himself.

This trade-off, in which orthodox Republicans get policy control and Mr. Trump gets the glory, is also apparent in the nominations of judges and executive branch officials. The president was quite successful in having judicial nominees confirmed. But virtually all of his confirmed judges have been standard conservatives; likewise, his successful executive branch appointments much more reflect Republican priorities than his own.

By privately influencing Mr. Trump to nominate people who reflect Republican priorities, congressional leaders not only win substantively, but the president gets to show off a perfect record of confirmations on the Senate floor, and a high rate of Republican support for his nominees.

Despite this, Mr. Trump has had an unusually large number of nominees rejected by the Senate, many of whom were put forth without previous input from congressional leaders. But this, too, has been done less visibly, with candidates withdrawing or being defeated in committee rather than being rejected in actual votes on the Senate floor.

The logic of agenda-setting also explains the reticence of congressional Republicans to conduct meaningful oversight of Mr. Trump or his administration. Full-scale legitimate investigations require visible agenda-setting. They cannot be accomplished by omission or in private.

Negative and positive agenda-setting served the Republican policy agenda well during the first two years of the Trump administration. In December, however, in backing out of a Republican-constructed Senate deal that would have kept the government open, the president forcefully asserted his own legislative agenda-setting.

Given the power of the veto as a presidential tool of negative agenda-setting, exasperated Republican senators had little choice but to allow Mr. Trump to take control of the border wall negotiations.

### Agenda-setting tactics

Congressional leaders, however, continued to use subtle agenda-setting tactics. The majority leader, Mitch McConnell, became largely absent from the public debate, declining to take part in post-negotiation news conferences at the White House and flatly declaring he would not bring legislation to the Senate floor until the president and

# Theresa May's disastrous dithering



**As the deadline for Britain's exit from the European Union approaches, UK assets face a similarly binary outcome — making investors justifiably unwilling to take big bets on the endgame.**

tion of their sins before rising to heaven or descending into hell. As the deadline for Britain's exit from the European Union approaches, UK assets face a similarly binary outcome — making investors justifiably unwilling to take big bets on the endgame.

As things stand, it remains a coin-toss whether the nation crashes out with no deal, or whether the latest political gymnastics will produce an accord palatable to both sides. What seems unlikely is a second referendum that could — maybe — see the UK stay in the bloc.

UBS is warning investors to steer clear of making Brexit-related bets. "We remain wary of taking directional views on sterling and UK assets," the bank's economists said in report published Wednesday. "Although much seems like it has changed, the reality is that very little has." The Swiss firm this week cut its UK growth forecast for this year to 1.5 percent, down from 1.8 percent previously.

It's little wonder that British stocks have underperformed their peers elsewhere.

### Domestic investors

Other benchmark equity indexes have rallied by about twice as much as those in the UK this year as domestic investors have shunned the British market. There, individual investors pulled 2.1 billion

pounds (\$2.7 billion) out of their funds in November, the biggest outflow since the Brexit referendum, according to figures released earlier this month by the Investment Association. Shares of Hargreaves Lansdown Plc, the UK's dominant fund platform, have fallen almost 10 percent this week, with most of the decline coming Tuesday after the company blamed Brexit for most of the 6 percent drop in assets under administration it experienced in the final six months of last year.

Investors are right to be wary of sterling-denominated assets. Almost every path in the decision tree that leads to a deal has potentially insurmountable roadblocks. There's the infighting in both the Conservative and Labour parties. There's the very vocal reluctance of the EU to reopen the so-called Withdrawal Agreement. And the issue of the Irish border — barely mentioned by either side in the run-up to the referendum — remains the biggest current obstacle in the talks.

Because none of the potential outcomes of the debate has a probability of more than 50 percent "any Brexit bet is more likely to be wrong than correct," according to Bloomberg Intelligence economist Dan Hanson. He's absolutely correct.

A stay of execution may be possible, but what exactly delaying the end-date would achieve hasn't been made clear even by its most fervent supporters. The bloc is understandably unwilling to give the UK yet more time to tie itself into more knots.

"How well or badly do you think the UK government is doing at negotiating Britain's exit from the European Union?"

Policymakers at the Bank of England, meantime, have been unusually reticent in commenting on the chaos. As my colleagues David Goodman and Jill Ward at Bloomberg News note, there's only been one significant policy speech since the publication of the central bank's economic forecasts in November — on "Some Effects of Demographic Change on the UK Economy" by Michael Saunders.

### The storm of criticism

Given the storm of criticism that greets any Brexit-related warnings from the BOE, a self-imposed purdah is probably a sensible strategy. But it's hardly reassuring for investors that the impartial, independent grown-ups in the room feel compelled to stay silent during such a crucial juncture in history.

And the evidence of harm to the UK economy is mounting. Figures this week showed consumer confidence sank to its lowest level since May 2013 this month, while lenders approved the fewest home loans in eight months in December.

To be sure, the global economic back-drop is also deteriorating generally. The German government just cut its growth forecast for 2019 to 1 percent from 1.8 percent previously, which would mark the slowest expansion since 2013. In a speech on Wednesday, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier cited "great concern in industry that an unregulated Brexit, a hard Brexit, at the end of March could lead to significant economic upheaval between the U.K. and the rest of Europe."

For Brexiters, the economic damage that a no-deal exit would inflict on Britain's neighbors remains a key bargaining tool. But I'm reminded of the scene in the 1974 Mel Brooks film "Blazing Saddles" where the sheriff threatens to shoot himself if the vigilantes threatening to kill him don't back away. His bluff worked; I don't think chief EU negotiator Michel Barnier is as gullible as the townsfolk in the movie.

Quitting without a deal remains the default option, and therefore is in many ways the easiest to envisage, even if it's the most economically painful outcome for everyone concerned. Investors are right to stay on the sidelines as far as UK assets are concerned; March 29 will arrive soon enough, and probably faster than a resolution to the crisis Britain has created for itself.

(Source: The Bloomberg)

## The struggles for Liberian citizenship

By Robtel Neajai Pailey

It has been exactly one year since newly inaugurated Liberian President George Manneh Weah sparked controversy by declaring staunch support for enacting dual citizenship and repealing a constitutional "Negro clause", which prohibits non-blacks from obtaining citizenship by birth, ancestry or naturalization.

Although the footballer-turned-president acknowledged the historical pre-occupations of Liberia's settlers who fled 19th century economic servitude in the United States and the Caribbean, he claimed that upholding the "Negro clause" and prohibiting dual citizenship would impinge upon the country's 21st century post-war progress and prosperity, especially given the vital development contributions by Liberians abroad.

Yet, my research on how Liberians view citizenship in general and dual citizenship in particular - based on over 200 interviews in cities in West Africa, Europe, and North America - shows that the laws remain unchanged because objections to amendments are deeply socioeconomic in nature, and cannot be simply wished away by presidential proclamations. Liberians experience citizenship differently based on their class, gender and ethnicity, and this largely influences whether they reject or accept dual citizenship and the "Negro clause".

Generated in 2014, my findings uphold the hard-line stance of the majority of delegates at a 2015 constitutional review conference in Liberia who vetoed legislating dual citizenship and removing the "Negro clause". This has been further corroborated by 2018 Afrobarometer survey data in which two-thirds of Liberians said they oppose dual citizenship as a policy prescription, support limiting citizenship to people of "Negro descent", and believe that only citizens - and by extension blacks - should own land.

### The rival sentiments

While the president has elevated the rival sentiments of some Liberians at home and abroad, rumors abound, however, that his position on citizenship is based on self-serving rather than national interests. Many argue that he is ineligible for his current position having allegedly been naturalized as a French citizen while playing for Paris Saint-Germain in the 1990s. Some say that he wanted his Jamaican U.S. citizen wife to be automatically entitled to a Liberian passport. And others contend that he aims to advance the commercial interests of Lebanese associates and therefore wants non-blacks to own land.

These concerns and more drive anti-dual citizenship and pro-"Negro clause" lobbies.

Contrary to President Weah's assertion that Liberia's citizenship provisions are unnecessarily restrictive and "racist", based on my previous and current research here



are four key reasons resistance to his proposed amendments persist in popular imagination and policymaking as "protectionary":

Displacement and dispossession define Liberia's past and present

Scholars like Bronwen Manby have illustrated how struggles over citizenship and belonging are most apparent in African countries that experienced widespread colonial-era forced and/or voluntary migration of Africans from other parts of the continent, Asian indentured workers or European settlers, such as Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

For example, whereas Sierra Leone inserted a "Negro clause" in its constitution following independence, other countries like Chad, Malawi and Mali at one time restricted citizenship to people of "African origin" or "African race". And while a large majority of African countries currently recognize some form of dual citizenship, others like Liberia remain doggedly opposed.

Although Liberia was never formally colonized by Europe, its founding history of displacement and dispossession - in which black migrants created citizenship tiers excluding indigenes for almost a century - has impacted how people view citizenship in the 21st century.

### Liberia's protracted wars

I have argued previously that a 19th century settler/indigene divide has been replaced by a 21st century returnee/non-returnee rift pitting those who fled Liberia's protracted wars - and are now returning to demand citizenship rights - against those who never left and feel that they do not benefit sufficiently from the institution of citizenship.

The presence of wealthy Middle Eastern and Asian merchants - many of whom have lived in Liberia for decades but are ineligible to own land, vote in elections or hold public office - further intensifies the competition for Liberian citizenship.

While land in Liberia can primarily be owned by citizens, the administration of Weah's predecessor leased millions of hectares to foreign multinationals for logging, palm oil production and other agro-industrial ventures without consulting affected communities, which resulted in protests and riots.

During Liberia's armed conflicts, squatters occupied unclaimed land and with the post-war return of diaspora Liberians - some of whom revoked their citizenship by naturalizing elsewhere and therefore relinquished any entitlements to the property once owned - this has created a perfect storm for violent clashes.

In an attempt to reconcile statutory and customary tenure systems, Liberia passed in September 2018 an historic Land Rights Act, but it remains to be seen how the new law will actually mitigate land disputes since it reinforces Article 22 of the constitution permitting non-citizen "benevolent" entities to own land for humanitarian and educational purposes.

Regulations intended to protect Liberian citizens are unenforced and flagrantly disregarded, especially by political and economic elites. Despite the current gridlock on dual citizenship, some Liberians break the law by carrying two passports.

For example, after Liberia's ambassador to the U.S.-designate, Gurly T Gibson, was reportedly rejected by the U.S. government for holding a U.S. passport, she was later confirmed ambassador to the United Kingdom after successfully evading questions about her de facto dual citizenship.

These stories are rife in the public sphere, leaving many Liberians wondering what the rights and responsibilities of non-black or dual citizens would be if the laws were changed and if this would give the rich and powerful the license to infringe upon their already limited citizenship privileges.

President Weah also announced last January that he had inherited a "broke country" with a "broken economy", but his own mishaps the past 12 months have widened disparities and made Liberia's socioeconomic outlook grimmer.

The president claims to have adopted a "pro-poor" agenda and yet he is being accused of embezzling public funds to construct flashy homes across the country. Meanwhile, inflation is at an all-time high, \$100m worth of cash allegedly disappeared from a Liberian port, and dubious loan agreements totaling nearly \$1b have mushroomed the country's debt.

Liberia has become frighteningly unequal, prompting outrage against attempts to further privilege a seemingly advantaged class of people by adopting dual citizenship and abolishing the "Negro clause".

(Source: aljazeera.com)

# ‘Not enough activity by the Iranian diplomatic missions abroad’

**1 → ■** What is your assessment of Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy in “Look East” doctrine and what are the elements of this sort of foreign policy?

A: Iran’s pivot to the East is a natural effect of at least three factors: First, the revolution and its emphasis on widening the Iranian foreign policy orbit to include emerging powers in Asia. Second, and interdependent to the former, the fact that Iran is as much an Asia power as it is a “Middle Eastern” one in terms of geography and traditions. And lastly, the recurrent aggression of US governments and their inability to accommodate Iran as an independent, rather than subservient actor as it was the case under the Shah. I believe that the government of President Rouhani should do more to cultivate relations with Asian countries. I should add, that Iran has a lot in common with Latin America too, certainly in terms of political culture and there needs to be more diplomatic activity in that regard as well especially right now as we are witnessing an aggressive effort of the Trump administration to return South America to the bad old days of semi-colonial submission.

■ What is your assessment of Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy in the Middle East especially in the Persian Gulf? What are the different components of this policy in regard with the region?

A: Iran has failed to pacify its relations with Saudi Arabia which is not only due to the intransigence of the Saudi leadership. I have repeatedly called for a positive cultural diplomacy in the absence of official relations. There need to be joined cultural festivals in the arts and movies for instance - as secular as possible, given that religion has been



more of a dividing, rather than uniting factor among Muslims.

■ Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran-Europe relations have dramatically changed. What are the major changes?

A: Iran acts as an independent regional superpower, whereas before it was a dependent actor. What is absolutely crucial is that Iran uses its foreign embassies more effectively in support of a cultural diplomacy that highlights the crucial interdependence that Iran and Europe share since antiquity.

Iran is also a European country in

the sense that it has been a part of the European imagination at least since the Greco-Persian wars, repeatedly as the “Other”, but also as the epitome of culture and sophistication as in the poetry of Goethe in his East-Western Diwan. Iranians have lost this reputation due to some of the reckless policies of the state after the revolution and up until today.

There is no doubt that mistakes were made, inhuman ones that did not sit well with the ideals of the revolution. To repair this image of Iran, which the enemies of the country have been easily exploiting, requires

a sophisticated PR campaign based on the realities and truths of contemporary Persia rather than the propaganda by the anti-Iranian lobby. This is probably the most important pre-requisite for a successful global diplomacy for the Iranian state.

■ Iran had first a critical dialogue with the European Union. It then changed it for a constructive dialogue. Now the question is that how much this relationship is affected by the U.S.?

A: Apart from the Obama administration, all of the US governments acted as spoilers of closer Iranian-European relations. These US governments act vis-à-vis Iran in a distinctly irrational and hypocritical way. There is no doubt about that. But they are only able to do so because of some of the weaknesses in Iran’s global strategies as indicated above. There is simply not enough activity by the Iranian diplomatic missions abroad, especially when I compare it to the period of President Khatami when the embassies were by far more active.

■ Some experts believe that balancing Iran’s foreign policy between east and west will provide Iran’s national interests. What is your opinion on this matter?

A: I had talked about this issue with Iranians before. The revolutionary slogan “neither East nor West” which was necessary to proclaim Iranian independence at that time, has to be changed more systematically into a policy of “both East and West”. As a part of this strategy, the Rouhani administration is well advised to zoom closer into Asia and Latin America. Mind you, the latter IS in the so called “West”, so Latin America is as crucial to Iranian interests as Asia is.

## The gap between AMIA and DAIA



By Heshmatollah Rahnama

**TEHRAN** — On January 31, the content of the letter AMIA sent to DAIA was disclosed, in which AMIA had requested DAIA hold off on a complaint against Former Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Former Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman and other members of the previous government for signing an agreement with Iran. This was an accord that began after the death of Alberto Nisman, an Argentine lawyer who worked as a federal prosecutor. DAIA intended to move forward with the case in the assembly scheduled in May.

DAIA was prepared to prosecute Fernandez de Kirchner for treason against the homeland. This was an unprecedented case only after another complaint of similar nature filed in Argentina in 1955 against Juan Domingo Peron. Until then it was unheard of that a Jewish organization in a country run a complaint against the incumbent government. Such accusations were made possible through former DAIA and AMIA officials who are currently among government officials (PRO), such as Federal Minister of Security Patricia Bullrich, MP Waldo Wolff, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development Sergio Bergman, Minister for Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism Claudio Avruj, and others.

It is worth noting that DAIA is a non-governmental organization, NGO, linked to Argentinean Jewish institutions, and is a political arm of the Jewish community in Argentina. Jorge Knoblovits, chairman of DAIA, expressed his dissatisfaction with the Clarin newspaper, and called AMIA one of the 128 institutions affiliated with DAIA.

The covert case in Iran’s memorandum of understanding is severely weakened. [When the trial began, Luis D’Elia, Fernando Esteche, and Jorge Khalil were arrested. Timerman was also under house arrest, and the United States rejected his visa, which delayed her cancer treatment, of which he eventually died. Esteche Fernandez is still in prison.

Now, we shall wait and see whether the ex-government officials, who are likely to be acquitted, will file a lawsuit against Jewish institutions.

A letter says, “The continuation of this complaint is harmful to the Jewish community, and in particular, it will affect AMIA management. The letter also acknowledges “Dismissing the lawsuit against Fernández de Kirchner was to compensate for the seriousness of previous management mistakes.”

The letter was sent on January 22, signed by AMIA deputy head Ariel Eichbaum and First Secretary Darío Fernan Curiel. According to a Jewish news agency, the document was not signed by the head of the Jewish community, Agustín Zbar, as he went to Israel with the other authorities to commemorate prosecutor Nisman.

AMIA’s request to discard a lawsuit against former Senator and President Fernández de Kirchner, for her signature of a memorandum of understanding with Iran, surprised many leaders and organizations that criticized AMIA for using the AMIA file for their political interest. In their view, the Jewish institutions, political and media powers have used AMIA’s case for their own interests.

Following charges brought by former chairman of the AMIA special investigation department Mario Cimadevilla against Macri and his Minister of Justice Germán Garavano, Jorge Elbaum called for investigations on “all those involved in this fraudulent network.” The investigation began with the suicide of Prosecutor Nisman and the case of “MoU with Iran.”

The letter also refers to an undisclosed trial that has been requested by DAIA and the Mauricio Macri government; it is clear that an undisclosed trial is in favor of the United States and Israel, through which they intend to put pressure on Iran.

## The battle before the United Europe

**1 →** Europe’s Nationalist parties know well that in the event of the inability of the traditional European parties, including socialists, social democrats, and conservatives to revive public participation in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, the opposition front including the opponents of the United Europe and the Eurozone will find it easier to win this political battle.

Over the past few years, far-right movements have become active players in countries like Austria, Germany, Sweden, and France. Currently, one of the main concerns of European authorities is the impact of the European Parliamentary elections on the reorganization of the right-wing extremists in the EU member states.

If nationalists can win European parliamentary elections, they will be able to play a major role in shaping the political future of the European countries. In this case, there is no guarantee that the traditional and pro-EU parties in countries such as Germany and France will survive.

Undoubtedly, European politicians such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the French President Emmanuel Macron, and senior European officials such as Jean-Claude Juncker, will seek to maximize public participation in the European Parliamentary election. In this way, they attempt to prevent the nationalists from standing high above others in the European Parliament. Under such circumstances, the conflict between traditional parties and anti-Euro movements in Europe is worth seeing!

# Venezuela: Blood for oil II

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro says while he is willing to open talks with opposition leaders he will not bow to the demands of foreign “imperialists”.

He accuses the U.S. government and other right-wing forces - like was done in Iraq and elsewhere - of trying to get their “hands on our oil.” In his words, “If the U.S. intends to intervene against us they will get a Vietnam worse than they could have imagined.”

Maduro’s latest comments, which came via interviews and a video posted online, have arrived amid new threats via U.S. national security advisor John Bolton who continues to lead the charge for regime change on behalf of the Trump administration.

However, according to a new polling conducted inside Venezuela, an overwhelming majority of people - from across the nation’s political spectrum - would oppose U.S. intervention and disapprove of the economic sanctions that the Trump administration has only increased in recent days. With Iraq in mind, more than eight out of ten Venezuelans oppose U.S. intervention, both military and non-military, in their country, as well as the illegal sanctions imposed by the U.S. to force President Maduro out of power.

Furthermore, according to a study conducted in early January 2019 by the polling firm Hinterlaces, 86 percent of Venezuelans would disagree with international military intervention. And 81 percent oppose the U.S. illegal sanctions that have gravely hurt the South American nation’s economy. After all, more peaceful and democratic alterna-

tives exist to address the nation’s very real economic and political problems.

Whatever this is, military intervention and imposing coercive economic measures have been a staple of American foreign policy for decades, despite their penchant for failure and the collateral damage often left in their wake. As for the military option, there is no reason to think it would go better than the invasions of Iraq or Afghanistan:

- The U.S.-led campaigns for regime change did not end well in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Afghanistan. To avoid another senseless, costly, and ill-advised American war, war-party Washington needs to take it off repeat in Venezuela.

- In this prewar period, President Trump might simply swear that his administration officials are religiously ready to respect and preserve what they refer to as Venezuela’s patrimony for the sake of freedom and democracy. But when it comes to serious coverage, that will be about that.

- With 16 years of Iraqi experience under our belts, it should now be clear that Trump’s slogan for democracy in Venezuela is misconceived in at least one crucial way. It is blood for oil II. Indeed, this is perhaps the strangest, most instructive, and least written about aspect of the U.S. interference in Venezuela’s internal politics and present chaos.

- The U.S. is seeking to ensure that Venezuelan oil revenue goes to opposition leader and self-declared interim president Juan Guaido, and to cut off money from President Maduro. We can be assured that, in the next few weeks and months, we are going to be hearing far more about “resource wars,” tight energy supplies, and the need to nail down raw materials

militarily. It may not be long before Trump administration officials start telling us that the U.S. must invade Venezuela and seize its oil fields because of the world energy situation.

In the prevailing environment, and at a time when the Pentagon regime refuses to rule out U.S. military deployment on Venezuela’s border, we are guaranteed to see more Pentagon planning and war gaming based on the control of Venezuelan energy supplies, not to speak of more and ever better military bases planted in oil-rich areas of the Latin American nation.

So it’s important to take stock of what actually is happening to Venezuela, as well as its oil and the American dreams of dominance that go with it. The thing is, energy is a strange thing to control militarily. As Iraq showed, its flow is remarkably vulnerable, whether to terrorists in Iraq and Syria and their trans-regional patrons or Venezuela’s opposition leader.

Indeed, it is next to impossible to guard hundreds, not to say thousands, of kilometers of oil or natural gas pipelines in Venezuela. It is all very well to invade and occupy the country, set up American “enduring camps,” and imagine the U.S. controlling the key energy spigots of Venezuela, but doing so is another matter. Any doubters should ask Iraq.

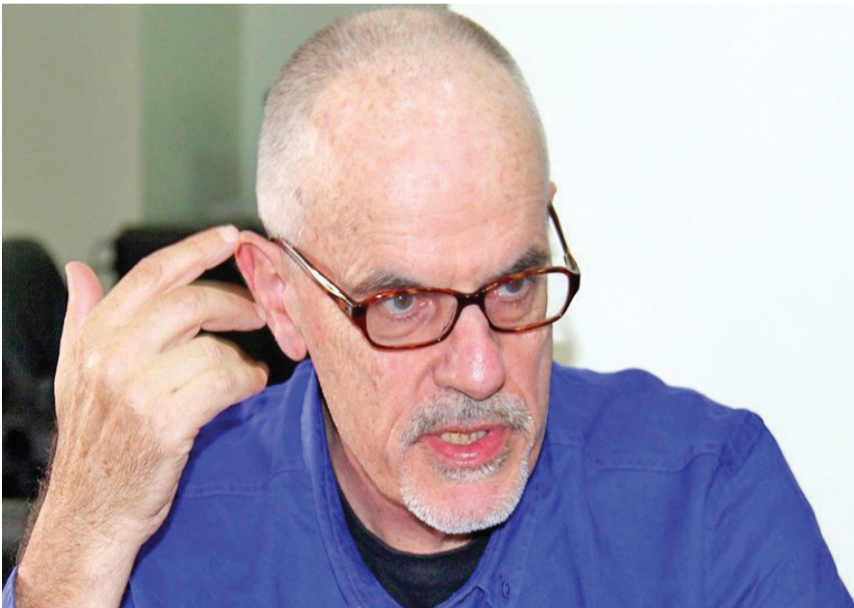
It’s the perfect sorry slogan for yet another sad, brainless war; and even the Pentagon’s resource-war planners might consider it a lesson worthy of further study as they think about their next energy or military gambit, this time in Latin America.

do you see their concerns?

A: Of course, Iran will be concerned about Daesh in Afghanistan, as they are about Daesh in Iraq and Syria and in the Caucasus. Iran is the chief target of both Israel and Washington, because of its leading independent role. Not that long ago the Saudi regime (chief sponsor of terrorism and effectively a ‘cat’s paw’ for the U.S. in West Asia) sent in Daesh terror attacks on Iran’s National Assembly (parliament), the Imam Khomeini mausoleum and, more recently against a military parade. Riyadh has even tried to recruit for Daesh, with limited success, within Iran. There has been an ongoing war - including economic, terrorist and propaganda wars - against Iran ever since 1979. There can be little doubt that Daesh assets in the region are being mobilized against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

■ Do you think that Daesh would be able to establish a foothold in Afghanistan given the fact that the Muslim people in the country are strongly opposed to them and their extremist ideologies?

A: It will indeed be difficult for Daesh to build support within Afghanistan. First, the Afghan people are fiercely and famously independent. Second, while extremism in Afghanistan was fed by Washington in the 1980s, the particular strains of fanaticism in that country come from the Deobandi (South Asian) and not from the Salafi (Persian Gulf Arab) traditions. Although these can appear similar to outsiders, Deobandis and Salafis generally do not get along. However Saudi money can broker some alliances, with local intermediaries. We have seen, for example, some Pakistani mercenaries within Daesh groups in Syria.



pursuing by transferring the terrorists to Afghanistan and strengthening them?

A: Washington seems keen to keep its prime assets, not least Daesh commanders, in the region for ‘divide and rule’ operations which help sustain a pretext for U.S. bases across the region. Driving divisions between peoples, with the help of Israel and the Saudis, and preventing the normal peaceful integration of neighboring countries of the region, has become a key to U.S. strategy in West Asia. That is also why they wish to keep their own troops stationed on the borders of Syria-Iraq, and surrounding

Iran. Washington is reported to have lost some of its special forces soldiers in the operation to free Daesh fighters from a Taliban prison.

That can raise an image problem for Washington back home, where U.S. soldiers dying to rescue Daesh fighters does not look good, given the well-publicized but false pretext (‘fighting Daesh’) for U.S. troop presence in much of the region.

■ As you know, some regional countries, including Iran, have been sensitive about the presence of Daesh in Afghanistan due to their national security concerns. How justifiable

# U.S. protecting Daesh to sustain pretext for its regional bases

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — A senior professor and political analyst based in Australia said recent reports about a covert operation by the U.S. to help Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) commanders escape a Taliban prison in Afghanistan prove that Washington is seeking to “sustain a pretext” for its bases in the region.

“Washington seems keen to keep its prime assets, not least Daesh commanders, in the region for ‘divide and rule’ operations which help sustain a pretext for U.S. bases across the region,” Professor Tim Anderson, a lecturer at the University of Sydney, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

“Driving divisions between peoples, with the help of Israel and the Saudis, and preventing the normal peaceful integration of neighboring countries of the region, has become a key to U.S. strategy in West Asia,” he added.

Professor Tim Anderson is a distinguished author and senior lecturer of political economy at the University of Sydney, Australia. Author of the ‘The Dirty War on Syria’, he has been largely published on various issues particularly the Syrian crisis.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Recent evidence shows that the Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) terrorist group is on the rise in war-torn Afghanistan with the support of the U.S. government. According to Tasnim dispatches, a large number of prisoners, all of whom senior members of Daesh, recently broke out of a Taliban prison in northwest Afghanistan after U.S. troops helped them escape through a covert operation. Given that Daesh’s so-called caliphate has collapsed in Syria and Iraq, what goal is Washington

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# Production of 5 drugs for refractory, rare diseases increased

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Production volume of five pharmaceutical products for refractory and rare diseases has risen by 25 percent in a biopharmaceutical company in the province of Alborz, IRIB reported on Saturday.

The new phase of the production lines of the pharmaceuticals including recombinant proteins and monoclonal antibodies were inaugurated with Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani in attendance.

The 25-percent rise in production of the medications for patients with multiple sclerosis, cancer patients and patients suffering hemophilia will stop currency outflow of \$250 million annually and will make the country self-sufficient, the report highlighted.

Factor VII (for uncontrolled bleeding in hemophilia patients), rituximab (a medication used to treat certain auto-

immune diseases and types of cancer), etanercept (a biopharmaceutical that treats autoimmune diseases), trastuzumab (a monoclonal antibody used to treat breast cancer), bevacizumab (a medication used to treat a number of types of cancers and a specific eye disease) are the five drugs seen increase in production.

CEO of AryoGen Pharmed, Amir Farshchi explained that launching the new phase of the medical production line with a budget of \$1 million has resulted in 150 new employment opportunities.

The company's exports amount to \$20 million in a year, Farshchi added.

AryoGen Pharmed an Iranian biopharmaceutical company specializing in manufacturing Therapeutic Monoclonal antibodies and some other recombinant proteins.



**The 25-percent rise in production of the medications for patients with multiple sclerosis, cancer patients and patients suffering hemophilia will stop currency outflow of \$250 million annually and will make the country self-sufficient.**

## Cancer cliches to avoid: I'm not 'brave'

Fighter, warrior, hero - some of the terms you might see used to describe people with cancer.

But according to a new survey, for some with the illness the words are seen as inappropriate rather than uplifting.

The UK poll by Macmillan Cancer Support of 2,000 people who have or had cancer found "cancer-stricken" and "victim" were also among the least-liked terms.

The charity said it showed how "divisive" simple descriptions of cancer can be.

Calling a person's cancer diagnosis a "war" or a "battle" and saying they had "lost their battle" or "lost their fight" when they died, were other unpopular descriptions, according to the poll carried out by YouGov.

Articles in the media and posts on social networks were found to be the worst offenders for using such language.

The survey found a preference for factual words to describe people with cancer, their diagnosis, and when someone with the illness dies.

### ■ 'I'm not inspirational'

Mandy Mahoney, 47, has incurable metastatic breast cancer.

The outreach support worker, from London, was initially diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011 and it

has since returned five times.

She said: "I think cancer-speak can be quite negatively loaded - the brave, fighter, warrior and survivor standard descriptors put an awful lot of pressure on the newly diagnosed."

Mandy said she also objected to describing people as "losing their battle" with cancer.

"That confers that you didn't fight or gave up," she said.

Instead, she prefers "clear, factual language" and describes herself simply as "living with incurable cancer".

"I'm not brave or inspirational, I'm just trying to live the life I have left well," she added.

However, Craig Toley, who was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2016 and is now in remission, said he thought some of the more positive terms could be empowering.

The 31-year-old, who is a powerlifter in his spare time, says: "Language like 'fight', 'struggle', 'warrior' and 'battle' will be interpreted differently by different people.

"Personally, I found those words helped empower me a lot and made me think of my cancer as a challenge I needed to fight.

"Everyone likes the story of a fighter."

### ■ 'Divisive words'

Karen Roberts, chief nursing officer at Macmillan Cancer Support, said: "These results show just how divisive and 'Marmite' simple words and descriptions can be.

"Cancer throws all kinds of things your way, and struggling to find the words, and the emotional turmoil caused when our friends and family don't get it 'right' only makes lives feel even more upended.

"By drawing attention to this we want to encourage more people to talk about the words they prefer to hear, and stop the damage that can be caused to people's wellbeing and relationships."

Mandy said it was not necessary for people to "swallow a textbook and come up with all of the key phrases" to talk to someone with cancer, and it is fine to not always know what to say.

"If you tell me it's awkward and you don't know what to say I will find a way to make that right for you, and actually on some occasions I might say 'we don't have to talk about it'.

"But just be real."

Macmillan Cancer Support has launched a campaign to highlight the challenges posed by a cancer diagnosis and the support available.

(Source: BBC)

## Statins effective in reducing heart attacks in older people, new study finds

There has been uncertainty over the effectiveness and safety of the cholesterol-busting drugs in older people, but a new study by Australian researchers found statins reduced cardiovascular disease risk in senior citizens.

They were also found not to increase the risk of deaths from non-cardiovascular disease, or the risk of cancer, at any age, according to the findings published in The Lancet.

"It's encouraging to see further research showing that statins are safe and effective drugs that can reduce risk of cardiovascular conditions when prescribed appropriately, as there remains a lot of controversy around their use," said professor Martin Marshall, Vice Chair of the Royal College of GPs, said of the findings:

"It's particularly reassuring to see evidence of benefit in patients over the age of 75 - the age group most likely to need cholesterol medication, and who are at risk of heart attacks and strokes.

He added: "Like any medication, statins can have side effects - and some patients won't want to take long-term medication. But GPs are highly-trained to prescribe and will only recommend the drugs if they think they will genuinely help the person sitting in front of them, based on their individual circumstances - and after a frank conversation about the potential risks and benefits.

"We will also continue to encourage all patients to make lifestyle changes that can improve their long-term health and well-being."

He added: "As with any new research, it is now important that this study is taken on board as clinical guidelines are updated and developed, in the best interests of our patients."

The study appeared to draw similar conclusion to findings published by researchers at Imperial College London and the University of Leicester in December.

They concluded that a change in dosage could also see 12,000 cardiovascular events - such as heart attacks or strokes - averted among high-risk patients in the UK.

The study was the first to look at the combined effect of high intensity statin treatment and adherence in patients who have already had a cardiovascular event and who are at increased risk of it happening again, compared to the general public.

Publishing their findings in the JAMA Network Open, they said that those taking the highest doses of statins to reduce their low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels - the "bad" cholesterol which builds up in the arteries - and, crucially, who take the medication as advised by their doctor, saw the biggest reductions in risk for future cardiovascular events.

Patient adherence describes the degree to which a patient follows medical advice and takes medication correctly.

(Source: The Independent)



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## Bronze-Age skeleton, objects unearthed

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A human skeleton and related objects, dating from the Bronze Age (c. 3300–1200 BC), have recently been unearthed in Bandpey rural area, Mazandaran province, northern Iran.

An adult-size skeleton, which was laid to rest in a fetus-shaped position, was found adjacent to a kiln, itself dating from the Bronze Age, ISNA reported on January 30. The discovery was made by a team of Iranian archaeol-



ogists following some 40 days of excavation.

The team dug three trenches, one of which yielded intact soil in the depth of ten meters. Another one was embedding the human remains in the depth of nine meters, archaeologist Sahar Aghajan-nasab explained.

“In Bronze Age, the deceased were buried in the form of a fetus beside a kiln during special ceremonies and such a ritual was customary at that time,” the archaeologist added.

Earlier in January, some tomb chambers were unearthed from an ancient graveyard in Rostamabad, northern Gilan province. One of the tombs contained a human skeleton, a sword and pottery vessels full of animal bones, which may refer to food offering to the deceased person.

## Tehran exhibit to feature royal electrical telegraph receiver, objects

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A royal electrical telegraph receiver along with some relevant documents, once belonged to Iran’s Ministry of Court during Pahlavi era, will go on show at the Sa’dabad Cultural-Historical Complex in northern Tehran.

The exhibit is organized on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution and the electrical telegraph has never been on a public show before, and CHTN reported.

Several experts have been invited to deliver speeches during the opening ceremony, which will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. on February 6.

Sprawled on about 110 hectares of a mountainside parkland, the Sa’dabad complex was once a royal summer residence during Qajar era (1789–1925) and its subsequent Pahlavi epoch (1925–1979).

The exhibit will be running through February 24.



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Morne Trois Pitons National Park

A rugged mountain range featuring steep volcanoes and deep canyons forms the natural spine of Dominica, a volcanic island of the Lesser Antilles.

A World Heritage, Morne Trois Pitons National Park (MTPNP) protects a scenically striking part in the central and southern highlands with an extension of 6,857 hectares, roughly 9 percent of the country’s land area.



The centerpiece is Morne Trois Pitons, one of five live volcanic centers within the park. Above 1,300 m.a.s.l., this spectacular dome complex is the highest peak within the property. The park’s landscape is dominated by the extreme relief covered by various types of tropical forest against the dramatic backdrop of diverse volcanic topography and features.

The scenic beauty is further complemented by numerous natural lakes and pools, including Boeri Lake and Freshwater Lake, the country’s largest lakes. Countless rivers and creeks originate in MTPNP, often forming magnificent waterfalls on their way towards the ocean.

Within MTPNP there are massive volcanic piles surrounded by precipitous glacia slopes and soufrieres, in particular the Grand Soufriere or Valley of Desolation. In this large amphitheater-like area surrounded by mountains, the volcanic activity is displayed in the form of streams of various colors interspersed with fumaroles and hot springs, bubbling mud ponds and the aptly named Boiling Lake.

The latter is a massive hot spring with a water temperature of about 95°C. Surrounded by steep cliffs, the lake is one of the largest of its kind in the world. It constantly bubbles and churns, with steam emitting an almost surreal sound. Water level and coloration vary greatly.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iran says it has traced two Achaemenid reliefs stolen decades ago

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran tourism chief has said that the country has traced two more Achaemenid-era (550-330) bas-relief carvings, which were stolen from Persepolis decades ago.

“We have learned that there are two Achaemenid relief carvings similar to a previously-recaptured one, so we are taking steps to recapture them, and now one of them has been accurately traced,” Ali-Asghar Mounesan said in a radio show, Mehr reported.

The traced objects depict an Achaemenid imperial guard, one their counterparts was handed back to Iran under a rule laid down by a U.S. court back in June, 2018.

Estimated to be worth \$1.2 million, the bas-relief is an eight-square-inch piece of carved limestone that was part of a long line of soldiers depicted on a balustrade at the central building on the Persepolis site.

The object was reported to be stolen from Iran in 1936 and stolen again in 2011 from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, to which it had been donated decades earlier. It was confiscated in October from the Park Avenue Armory in New York, where it was being offered for sale at an art fair.

Experts say that the bas-relief carvings were made sometime between 510 and 330 BC, when Persepolis was ultimately sacked by Alexander the Great.



A newly recovered limestone relief, which depicts an Achaemenid-era Persian guard, is on show at the National Museum of Iran on October 7, 2018.

## Noruz added to Vancouver calendar of events

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Vancouver City Council has added Noruz, the Persian new year festivity, to its official celebrations and observations calendar.

Vancouver City Council has put the event on the calendar of the Canadian metropolis to recognize an intangible heritage of Iranians and other immigrants who celebrate the first day of the spring and the renewal of nature, IRNA reported on Saturday.

A motion from Vancouver councillor Jean Swanson proposed on the City of Vancouver to recognize Noruz as an officially observed celebration day in Vancouver and to celebrate it at Vancouver City Hall.

“Nowruz is a holiday that is about connecting people of diverse cultures and backgrounds with nature, and Vancouver is proud of its diversity and its connection to nature. Iran is in the top ten countries that send immigrants to Vancouver, and Persian is in the top ten non-official languages that Vancouverites speak,” the motion’s preamble reads.

In 2009, the Parliament of Canada passed a bill to officially add Noruz to the national calendar of Cana-



da, and the province of British Columbia proclaimed March 20 as the day of Noruz, according to a resolution by Councilor Jean Swanson.

Noruz is the celebration of spring equinox, marking the beginning of the year for hundreds of millions of people worldwide, celebrated in more than 15 countries from Eastern Europe to Central and South Asia, is a public holiday in over 10 countries, and included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Meaning “new day”, Noruz is an ancestral festivity that includes rituals, ceremonies and cultural events, as well as the enjoyment of a special meal with loved ones. New clothes are worn, visits are made to family and friends, and gifts, especially for children, are exchanged.

According to UNESCO, the event is celebrated for over 3000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions, to cement values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighborliness.

## UNESCO and the Revival Fund, hand in hand for protecting historic buildings

By Parham Janfeshan

The issue of protection and revival of historic buildings as the intergenerational treasures, has always been an important concern in stable development considered by global organizations such as ICOMOS.

Many thinkers, in stable development field assume stable development equal to protection and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage of a country, received from one’s ancestors after many years or even centuries. A wide range of humanity assets such as waters, rivers, trees, forests, qanats, buildings, halls, porches, minarets, finial awnings, etc... fall into this category.

In the current situation and in technology era, many international organizations and institutions are paying attention to nation’s history, culture and identity in order to protect the humanity memory and history. Nowadays, the motif of many meetings, seminars and expert workshops in UN educational, scientific and cultural organizations revolve around the concern of missing humanity

historical memory or historic-cultural amnesia and its consequent hazards.

In Iran, along with global evolutions, based on the above-mentioned definitions, the movement towards stable development is accelerating. The Fund for Revival and Exploitation of Historic and Cultural Sites, serves as the executive force of Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) in upgrading its activities toward introduction and fertilization of material and spiritual values residing in historic buildings through holding cultural festivals that can revive the stream of life together with introducing intangible heritage, handicrafts and native cultures in each district, in the minds of the new generation.

Now we can scrutinize the title of this article: “UNESCO and the Revival Fund, hand in hand for protecting the historic buildings”; because on the one hand, UNESCO and institutions like ICOMOS manage this area on a global and international level; on the other hand, ICHTO and its subsidiary offices such as the Revival Fund that represent ICHTO in a wide range of

missions and duties, works on a national level. Therefore, the collaboration between these sections can lead to a significant effect on the reservation of humanity historical identity and memory.

In a recent enactment in Islamic Consultative Assembly regarding a change in the title of the Revival Fund from “the Fund for Revival and Exploitation of Historic and Cultural Sites” to “the Fund for Development of Handicrafts and Carpet, and Revival and Exploitation of Historic and Cultural Sites”, a unique capacity has been entrusted to this institution to develop and promote the culture of reviving historic buildings.

On the other hand, UNESCO as a global organization, with more than half a century experience in collaborating with non-governmental organizations operating in its specific area, has took many important steps toward realizing the objectives and goals of the organization and promoting its ethical and spiritual ideas in human society, which can be a complementary attempt for the activities if the Revival Fund in both national and international arenas.

UNESCO has formal relationships with 305 international, non-governmental organizations and 270 similar institutions and foundations throughout the world. The recent memorandum signed between the Revival Fund and Iranian National Commission for UNESCO can be an important step toward more collaborations in the area of historic buildings.

The most important topics of this memorandum are: “Holding gatherings, seminars and providing promotional examples of historic sites revival in order to introduce the advantages and capacities of this area in tourism”, “Propagation of knowledge and empowerment of experts in cultural and historic buildings protection in revival and exploitation of these buildings inside and outside of Iran”, and “Association and collaboration for exchanging the experiences in restoration, revival and exploitation of historic and cultural buildings.” We hope the development of these collaborations lead to the promotion and growth of attentions to the humanity historical memory. (Parham Janfeshan is CEO of the Fund for Revival and Exploitation of Cultural and Historic Sites)

## On the trail of Iran’s ‘Assassins’ in the Alborz Mountains

Beyond the first ramparts of northern Iran’s Alborz Mountains, Gazorkhan village sits beneath an impenetrable-looking wall of jagged ridges in an elongated valley.

The surrounding pomegranate orchards and poplar glades fill a verdant shelf of inclined land. A mass of gray-brown rock looms alongside the village and you can just about discern fortifications perched atop its summit.

This is Alamut Castle, the first long-crumbling bolthole of a millennia-old sect that spawned the word “assassin.” Alamut means “eagle’s nest” and its name reputedly derives from a regional eighth-century king who spied an eagle landing amid its rugged lofty crags and was inspired to build an impregnable fortress.

These days Alamut is something of a great day out. Visitors can leave Tehran first thing in the morning for Qazvin, weave across the Alamut’s first ramparts a few hours later and, heading up-valley, reach Gazorkhan in time for a late lunch. Companies such as Tehran’s Turquoise Domes can arrange tours.

Most visitors -- virtually all Iranian -- regard the gorgeous mountain-rimmed valley as an idyllic weekend retreat. Villages and hamlets dot its floor and sides; corn fields and rice paddies occupy parcels of land between ravines, and irregular terraced plateaus ruffle the valley’s picturesque undulating terrain.

In Gazorkhan, snack and tea vendors do a brisk trade beneath the castle’s entrance kiosk.

A steep trail winds up the hillside past an unfinished hoist to a narrow saddle overlooked by a weirdly eroded slanting crown of rock and cliffs. Pony-men offer rides up to his point; above it and still just out of sight stands the fortress.

An increasingly precipitous path contours the ridge until stone steps and a few outbuildings mark the outer



Gazorkhan village and the Alamut Valley viewed from Alamut Castle.

fortifications.

The last few zigzags reach a tall masonry wall against which stands a crude framework of iron spars supporting wooden stairs.

Largely neglected until recent decades, relatively little has survived.

Alamut was famed for its library and, though relatively small, boasted deeply excavated storage chambers and sophisticated water cisterns likely fed by springs.

Most of these are now fenced off though one tiny cave-like “café” offers small cups of black tea.

But the views across the valley and not-so-distant mountains are superb, even when brief but intense summer storms arrive -- the extravagant lightning underlining just how exposed this spot is.

Heading east and further up into the narrowing valley leads to Garmaroud village backed by a particularly sheer and jagged ridge.

Here in a hotel restaurant with a wall-mounted panoramic picture of the locality, staff pointed out the scant remains of Nevisar Shah, another blink-and-miss-fortress perched among severe-looking pinnacles.

It takes goat-like agility and stamina to reach it.

When the hardy British writer Freya Stark ventured into the valley in 1931, barely any visitors even went to the far more accessible Alamut Castle. In her celebrated 1934 travelogue “The Valleys of the Assassins,” she recounts her hike up to Nevisar with mules that “seemed to be standing on their hind legs.”

It was a place imbued with strange tales; in one its lord and his son are besieged by guards but, transformed into a ram and black dog by their witch-mother, they simply trot out unnoticed and flee.

Just beyond Garmaroud village, the road worms through a steep-sided cleft alongside the Alamut River and climbs dramatically in a series of hairpin bends to Pichebon hamlet.

Framed by muscular snow-dusted mountains, the stark landscape is fleetingly softened by small lush meadows and a handful of oval pens for goats and sheep.

Stark was told by a villager these slopes were so rich in minerals that grazing sheep grew golden teeth when chewing a particular herb.

Today’s cheery weather-beaten shepherds tending their flocks seem more grounded by “liquid gold” -- fine milk used to make curd and cheese.

A stepped path climbs round the hillside before leveling out on a pronounced “neck” that connects an almost island-like bluff.

Ruined masonry walls and bastions still edge the plateau and you can make out rock-cut cisterns and a few crude buildings with vaulted rooms.

(Source: CNN)

# We might have been wrong about ocean circulation, and it will have big impacts

Scientists have long feared that the so-called “overturning” circulation in the Atlantic Ocean could slow down or even halt due to climate change - which would have enormous planetary consequences.

But at the same time, researchers have a limited understanding of how the circulation actually works, since taking measurements of its vast and remote currents is exceedingly difficult. And now, a major new research endeavor aimed at doing just that has suggested a dramatic revision of our understanding of the circulation itself.

A new 21-month series of observations in the frigid waters off Greenland has led to the discovery that most of the overturning - in which water not only sinks but returns southward again in the ocean depths - occurs to the east, rather than to the west, of the enormous ice island.

If that’s correct, then climate models that suggest the circulation will slow as the climate warms may have to be revised to take this into account.

The magnitude of the scientific surprise, on a scale of 1 to 10, is pretty large, said Susan Lozier, an oceanographer at Duke University who was lead author of the research published Thursday in *Science*.

### Remote regions

The new results come from the \$32 million OSNAP, or Overturning in the Subpolar North Atlantic, program, the first attempt to comprehensively measure the circulation in the exceedingly remote regions in question. These icy seas, it is believed, are where cold, salty waters - which are extremely dense - sink below the sea surface into the depths, and then travel back southward again all the way to the Southern Hemisphere.

This “overturning” process is crucial



because the sinking in the North Atlantic effectively pulls more warm, salty water northward via a system of currents that includes the Gulf Stream. This heat delivery, in turn, shapes climate throughout much of the region, and especially in Europe.

Better understanding of how the circulation works is key, since some scientists have already proposed that it is slowing down, with major consequences, including ocean warming and sea level rise off the U.S. East Coast.

**A new 21-month series of observations in the frigid waters off Greenland has led to the discovery that most of the overturning - in which water not only sinks but returns southward again in the ocean depths - occurs to the east, rather than to the west, of the enormous ice island.**

## What birds can teach us about flying robots

Picture a pigeon perched on a telephone wire. Ready for takeoff, it raises its wings, springs into the air and flaps away, perhaps with the intention of leaving its calling card on your car’s windshield. This series of actions is so commonplace that you probably do not pay it much attention. But University of Manchester biomechanical engineer Ben Parslew does. He is trying to design robots that can jump like birds.

Most conventional robots roll around on wheels, constraining mobility. There is a need for more agile robots that “can jump over obstacles or debris in cluttered environments,” Parslew says. To design such a machine, he turned to nature: “Birds are really good jumpers,” he notes.

The trouble is, when birds start to take off, they lean so far forward that, according to the rules of physics, they should tip over and fall onto their beaks. Yet that does not happen. Parslew and his team used computer modeling to discover how birds avoid this fate. They discovered that birds rotate their bodies slightly backward while accelerating into a jump. They also have flexible leg and toe joints, which prevent them from taking off briefly and immediately crashing into the ground. The results were published last October in *Royal Society Open Science*.

Parslew thinks engineers can use this information to design robots that can not only jump well but also launch into flight more efficiently. Most human-engineered flying machines require either long runways (think: airplanes) or flat,



stable surfaces (think: helicopters or drones) for takeoff. Either way, they take a while to overcome gravity and gain elevation.

### The rapid acceleration

University of Southern California biomechanist Michael Habib, who was not involved in the study, says springs and levers enable more rapid acceleration than wheels and axles do. And many animals are masters of springs and levers.

A “house cat will beat a Lamborghini Diablo off the line for the first 100 feet,” he says. While the car has to rev up, the feline catapults itself into a run. The same principle underlies how birds initiate flight.

“If you can understand how that works,” Habib adds, “you can build a robot that’s good at running around and good at flying, and it will also be good at taking off suddenly in all kinds of conditions and landing on a dime.” Parslew is now designing such a robot, as an alternative to wheeled rovers for exploring other planets.

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

## Climate change and infertility -- a ticking time bomb?

Rising temperatures could make some species sterile and see them succumb to the effects of climate change earlier than currently thought, scientists at the University of Liverpool warn.

“There is a risk that we are underestimating the impact of climate change on species survival because we have focused on the temperatures that are lethal to organisms, rather than the temperatures at which organisms can no longer breed,” explains evolutionary biologist Dr. Tom Price from the University’s Institute of Integrative Biology.

Currently, biologists and conservationists are trying to predict where species will be lost due to climate change, so they can build suitable reserves in the locations they will eventually need to move to. However, most of the data on when temperature will prevent species surviving in an area is based on the ‘critical thermal limit’ or CTL - the temperature at which they collapse, stop moving or die.

In a new opinion article published in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, the researchers highlight that extensive data from a wide variety of plants and animals suggests that organisms lose fertility at lower temperatures than their CTL.

### Climate-induced fertility loss

Certain groups are thought to be most vulnerable to climate-induced fertility loss, including cold-blooded animals and aquatic species. “Currently the information we have suggests this will be a serious issue for many organisms. But which ones are most at risk? Are fertility losses going to



be enough to wipe out populations, or can just a few fertile individuals keep populations going? At the moment, we just don’t know. We need more data,” says Dr. Price.

To help address this, the researchers propose another measure of how organisms function at extreme temperatures that focuses on fertility, which they have called the Thermal Fertility Limit or ‘TFL’.

“We think that if biologists study TFLs as well as CTLs then we will be able to work out whether fertility losses due to climate change are something to worry about, which organisms are particularly vulnerable to these thermal fertility losses, and how to design conservation programs that will allow species to survive our changing climate.

“We need researchers across the world, working in very different systems, from fish, to coral, to flowers, to mammals and flies, to find a way to measure how temperature impacts fertility in that organism and compare it to estimates of the temperature at which they die or stop functioning,” urges Dr. Price.

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

## Researchers create first carbon fibers with uniform porous structure

A professor in Virginia Tech’s College of Science wants to power planes and cars using energy stored in their exterior shells. He may have discovered a path toward that vision using porous carbon fibers made from what’s known as block copolymers.

Carbon fibers, already known as a high-performing engineering material, are widely used in the aerospace and automotive industries. One application is the shells of luxury cars like Mercedes-Benz, BMW, or Lamborghini.

Carbon fibers, thin hair-like strands of carbon, possess multiple prime material properties: they are mechanically strong, chemically resistant, electrically conductive, fire retardant, and perhaps most importantly, lightweight. The weight of carbon fibers improves fuel and energy efficiency, producing faster jets and vehicles.

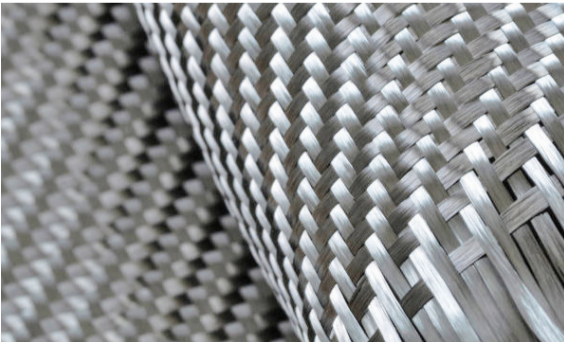
Guoliang “Greg” Liu, an assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry, conceived the idea of creating carbon fibers that wouldn’t only be structurally useful; they would also be functionally useful.

### Storing energy

“What if we can design them to have functionality, such as energy storage?” said Liu, also a member of the Macromolecules Innovation Institute. “If you want them to store energy, you need to have sites to put ions in.”

Liu said ideally the carbon fibers could be designed to have micro-holes uniformly scattered throughout, similar to a sponge that would store ions of energy.

After tweaking a longtime conventional method of chemically producing carbon fibers, Liu now has developed a process to synthesize porous carbon fibers for the first time with



uniform size and spacing. He details this work in a recently published article in the high impact journal *Science Advances*.

“Making porous carbon fibers is not easy,” Liu said. “People have tried this for decades. But the quality and the uniformity of the pores in the carbon fibers were not satisfactory.

“We designed, synthesized, and then processed these polymers in the lab, and then we made them into porous carbon fibers.”

Liu’s lab used PAN-b-PMMA to create carbon fibers with more uniformly sized and spaced pores.

Liu used a multistep chemical process using two polymers—long, repeating chains of molecules—called polyacrylonitrile (PAN) and poly(acrylonitrile-block-methyl methacrylate) (PMMA).

PAN is well-known in the polymer chemistry field as a precursor compound to carbon fibers, and PMMA acts as a

place-holding material that is later removed to create the pores.

But in the past, other chemists had typically mixed PAN and PMMA separately into a solution. This created porous carbon fibers but with differently sized and spaced pores. Energy storage can be maximized with greater surface area, which occurs with smaller, uniform pores.

Liu came up with the new idea of bonding PAN and PMMA, creating what is known as a block copolymer. One half of the compound polymer is PAN, and the other half is PMMA, and they’re covalently bonded in the middle.

### Utilizing block copolymers

“This is the first time we utilize block copolymers to make carbon fibers and the first time to use block copolymer-based porous carbon fibers in energy storage,” Liu said. “Often, we’re only thinking from the process point-of-view, but here we’re thinking from the materials design point-of-view.”

After synthesizing the block copolymer in the lab, the viscous solution then underwent three chemical processes to achieve porous carbon fibers.

The first step is electrospinning, a method that uses electric force to create fibrous strands and harden the solution into a paper-like material. Next, Liu put the polymer through an oxidation heating process. In this step, the PAN and PMMA naturally separated and self-assembled into the strands of PAN and uniformly scattered domains of PMMA.

In the final step, known as pyrolysis, Liu heated the polymer to an even higher temperature. This process solidified PAN into carbon and removed PMMA, leaving behind interconnected mesopores and micropores throughout the fiber.

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

## UK fish and chip shops serve endangered shark species, study claims

A new study found that fishmongers and fish and chip stores in England are selling endangered shark products by using generic sales terms. The find highlights the role of trade in the declining shark populations.

The researchers of a new study tested 117 fish samples from 90 retailers in the UK, 78 of which were battered and fried samples from fish and chip shops while 39 were either frozen or fresh samples from fishmongers. They also had 10 dried shark fins samples from UK wholesalers.

DNA analysis of the products sold by fishmongers and in fish and chip shops revealed that a majority of them are actually meat from endangered sharks but had non-specific labels.

Specifically, even if most of them were sold under “umbrella” labels that are permitted by the EU such as rock salmon, flake, and huss, a majority of them were actually meat from endangered shark species. In fact, 77 of the samples turned out to be spiny dogfish, which is considered critically endangered in the Northeast Atlantic.

The results showed that while the products aren’t exactly mislabeled, they were categorized under umbrella terms and are therefore being sold without giving consumers the specifics of what they are actually buying. In other European countries, specific labeling is required, and researchers surmise that it might be about time for the UK to do the same.

This way, even consumers will actually know what is being presented to them and can make informed decisions on whether to buy it or not.

According to researchers, sharks are particularly in decline because they take a long time to reach sexual maturity and produce fewer young. It doesn’t help either that many shark species are being exploited. In the case of the spiny dogfish, for instance, while the EU prohibits catching them because of their vulnerable nature, the United States and Canada allow it and therefore continue to export the catches to the UK.

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

## NASA repurposes Curiosity to analyze Mount Sharp’s gravity

Curiosity has been on Mars for more than six years, helping scientists unravel the geological history of the Red Planet. It has found evidence of ancient bodies of water, organic material, and more. Curiosity was outfitted with instruments for these tasks, but NASA has managed to repurpose one of its sensors to provide some new data. Using the rover’s navigation gear, NASA analyzed gravitational fields on Mars to study the history and origins of Mount Sharp.

NASA considered dozens of landing sites for Curiosity but eventually settled on Gale Crater in part because it provided access to Mount Sharp. By climbing the slopes of this craggy formation, the rover could investigate different sections of Mars’ geological history. Data from the rover shows that the crater harbored lakes and streams in the distant past, but what of Mount Sharp itself?

Mount Sharp rises 5.5 km (18,000 ft or 3.4 miles) above the floor of Gale Crater, which is taller from base to peak than Mount Everest. A peak this high in a crater is unusual even on Mars, so scientists have long debated how it came to be there. Some suspected it is a small eroded remnant of a massive sedimentary structure that may have filled the crater in the distant past. Others believe Mount Sharp formed from compacted material driven by winds over the source of many years.

That’s where Curiosity comes in. While NASA didn’t equip the rover



with sensors specifically to measure gravity, it does have sensitive engineering accelerometers for navigation. The team used readings from the accelerometers to map the gravitational field strength at more than 700 locations along the rover’s path up Mount Sharp. From this data, the scientists estimated the density of rock in the mountain at 1,680 kg (about 3,704 pounds) per cubic meter. That might sound like a lot, but it’s actually quite low.

The low density of rocks in Mount Sharp suggests that it contains very porous rock. That’s not what you’d expect for a sedimentary structure that was once buried under other several kilometers of rock. However, it does match the profile of a mountain built up from windblown dust.

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

## Huge cavity in Antarctic glacier signals rapid decay, study finds

A gigantic cavity -- two-thirds the area of Manhattan and almost 1,000 feet (300 meters) tall -- growing at the bottom of Thwaites Glacier in West Antarctica is one of several disturbing discoveries reported in a new study of the disintegrating glacier.

A gigantic cavity -- two-thirds the area of Manhattan and almost 1,000 feet (300 meters) tall -- growing at the bottom of Thwaites Glacier in West Antarctica is one of several disturbing discoveries reported in a new NASA-led study of the disintegrating glacier.

Researchers expected to find some gaps between ice and bedrock at Thwaites’ bottom where ocean water could flow in and melt the glacier from below. The size and explosive growth rate of the newfound hole, however, surprised them. It’s big enough to have contained 14 billion tons of ice, and most of that ice melted over the last three years.

“We have suspected for years that Thwaites was not tightly attached to the bedrock beneath it,” said Eric Rignot of the University of California, Irvine, and NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Rignot is a co-author of the new study, which was published in *Science Advances*. “Thanks to a new generation of satellites, we can finally see the detail,” he said.

The cavity was revealed by ice-penetrating radar in NASA’s Operation IceBridge, an airborne campaign beginning in 2010 that studies connections between the polar regions and the global climate. The researchers also used data from a constellation of Italian and German spaceborne synthetic aperture radars. These very high-resolution data can be processed by a technique called radar interferometry to reveal how the ground surface below has moved between images.

“(The size of) a cavity under a glacier plays an important role in melting,” said the study’s lead author, Pietro Milillo of JPL. “As more heat and water get under the glacier, it melts faster.”

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

## Iran to host Expert Consultation on Scientific Tsunami Hazard Assessment of the Makran Subduction Zone

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Kish Island, southern Iran, will play host to Expert Consultation on Scientific Tsunami Hazard Assessment of the Makran Subduction Zone on March 8, 2019.

According to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) Makran Subduction Zone (MSZ) is still poorly understood even though it poses a major tsunami risk in the North West Indian Ocean.



Several decades after the 1945 tsunami that caused hundreds of confirmed fatalities, there are still open questions about whether the Makran is able to generate such large tsunamis in the future. In the worst case of such an event, tsunami waves generated at the Makran source would reach adjoining shores within a few tens of minutes, posing enormous challenges for tsunami early warning systems.

There is urgent need for scientific tsunami hazard assessment of the MSZ based on existing knowledge as well as relevant projects being implemented in the region by international scientific groups. This information will enable Member States to assess their tsunami risk, strengthen warning systems including inter-agency SOPs, warning chains, develop evacuation plans, build emergency response capacity and raise community awareness, preparedness and resilience.

The Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/IOTWMS) sub-regional Working Group for the North West Indian Ocean, established at the 10th Session of the ICG/IOTWMS with India, Iran, Oman, Pakistan and Yemen as Members, is engaged in pursuing these important activities.

As a follow up to actions arising from its working group meetings, the ICG/IOTWMS Steering Group recommended organizing an Expert Consultation on “Scientific Tsunami Hazard Assessment of the Makran Subduction Zone” on March 8, 2019 back-to-back with the 12th Session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG-XII) on March 9-12 in Kish Island.

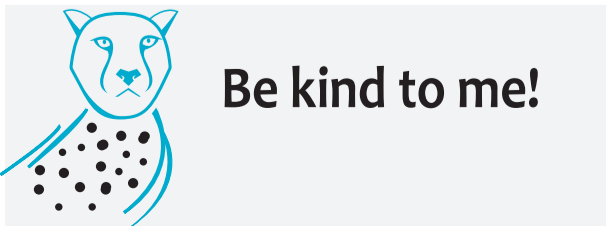
## LEARN ENGLISH

### At The Library

A: Wow! Look at all these books! I bet I can find a book about anything here!  
B: Shhh!! Please **keep your voice down**. There are people reading and studying here.  
A: Ok, I'm sorry. Are you the **librarian**? Maybe you can help me, I am looking for a book.  
B: Yes I am. You can check our online **catalog** to search the book you want based on the **genre**, title or if you know the **author**, I can point you towards the right direction.  
A: I am looking for a book that has **nursery rhymes**.  
B: That would be in our children's **section**. That book shelf there on the right.  
A: Ok, I would like to **check out** these books.  
B: Do you have a library card?  
A: No. How do I get one?  
B: I just need to see your driver's license or **utility bill** to prove that you a resident of this state.  
A: Here you go.  
B: So you are **all set**. You can have these books for two weeks. If you need to have them longer, you can bring them here to **renew** them. If you don't, you get charged ten cents a day for each book.  
A: Ok, thanks!

■ **Key vocabulary**  
**keep your voice down**: used to ask someone to make less noise  
**librarian**: a person trained in library science and engaged in library service  
**catalog**: a complete, usually alphabetical list of items, often with notes giving details  
**genre**: a certain type or style  
**author**: composer of a literary work, such as a novel or poem  
**nursery rhymes**: a short traditional poem or song for children  
**section**: a distinct part or subdivision of anything  
**check out**: to borrow a book from a library  
**utility bill**: The amount a household or office is expected to pay for electricity, water and/or gas each month  
**all set**: ready  
**renew**: to cause something to continue to be effective  
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**fiction**: the class of literature comprising works of imaginative narration, esp. in prose form.  
**nonfiction**: dealing with or offering opinions or conjectures upon facts and reality, including biography, history, and the essay  
**science fiction**: form of fiction that draws imaginatively on scientific knowledge and speculation in its plot, setting, theme

(Source: [irlanguage.com](http://irlanguage.com))



Be kind to me!

# Zarivar wetland designated as a Wetland of International Importance

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Zarivar wetland, in western province of Kordestan, was designated as a Wetland of International Importance on Ramsar list, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday.

The List of Wetlands of International Importance as defined by the Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, recognizes the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands and their economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value.

The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Convention was adopted in the Iranian northern city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”.

There are 252 wetlands in Iran and this is the 25th wetland in Iran designated as a Ramsar site, the report added.

Many important wetlands in Iran are facing decline and have already turned into hotspots for sand and dust storms



in the region causing great discomfort to the health and livelihood of the residents.

Anzali Mordab, Hamoun wetlands, Neyriz Lakes and Kamjan Marshes, Shadegan Marshes and mudflats of Khor-al Amaya and Khor Musa, and Shurgol, Yadegarlu and Dorgeh Sangi Lakes are designated on Montreux Record.

## Climate change rises wind erosion by 30% in Iran: official

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Climate change, coupled with lower precipitations and wetlands' dryness have brought about 30-percent rise in wind erosion in the country, director general of the deserts office at the Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization has said.

Wind erosion is a serious environmental problem attracting the attention of many across the globe. It is a common phenomenon occurring mostly in flat, bare areas; dry, sandy soils; or anywhere the soil is loose, dry, and finely granulated.

According to the U.S. National Soil Erosion Research Laboratory wind erosion damages land and natural vegetation by removing soil from one place and depositing it in another. It causes soil loss, dryness and deterioration of soil structure, nutrient and productivity losses and air pollution. Suspended dust and dirt is inevitably deposited over everything. It blows on and inside homes, covers roads and highways, and smothers crops. Sediment transport and deposition are significant factors in the geological changes which occur on the land around us and over long periods of time are important in the soil formation process.

Based on the figures 21 million hectares of the country's land area is affected by wind erosion of which 7 million hectares were severely hit by the phenomenon which is believed to increase, Farhad Sardari said, adding that, wind erosion would lead to hefty environmental and economic loss.

Wind erosion studies are conducted every five years and the data are being updated since last year, IRNA news agency quoted Sardari as saying on Friday.



Climate changes, lower precipitation rates, drought spells, lower vegetation cover, urban development and agricultural practices can speed desertification, he regretted.

According to the French Scientific Committee on Desertification wind erosion is one of the most traumatic aspects of the desertification process. It leads to severe degradation of the environment, impoverishing soil as vast quantities of particles are carried away by the wind.

Wind erosion is the chief physical factor in the exhaustion of agricultural land. The sand encroachment it produces is also a major cause of concern to urban areas and oases in arid ecosystems, reducing human populations to poverty and migration as they are driven to abandon their sterile land and move either to new territories or into towns.

Sardari also said that in order to fight against desertification [and hence wind erosion] controlling overgrazing, identifying sites prone to desertification and wind erosion,

## Endangered UK plants brought back from brink by driving tractor over them

A crucial but threatened habitat has been revitalized following decades of decline after conservationists decided to run a five-ton tractor over it.

The unusual action was part of a wider effort to save the marsh clubmoss, an endangered plant that evolved 400 million years ago and forms a vital component of damp heathlands.

The plant has declined by 85 per cent in recent decades as its habitat has been largely wiped out, leaving only a few sites in Dorset and Hampshire.

As the clubmoss thrives in ground that has been disturbed by animals, an environmental group working to bring

back the heathland decided to deliberately drive a tractor over thousands of the remaining plants.

Their gamble worked, boosting the 3,000 plants that were growing at the Dorset site to a healthy 12,000.

“We knew that many heathland plants benefit from significant disturbance but there was a sharp intake of breath when we took the decision to drive up and down over a beautiful colony of 3,000 plants in a five-ton tractor brandishing a muck grab for maximum disturbance,” said Sophie Lake, one of the Dorset Heathlands Heart project's managers.

The low-growing clubmoss can be

crowded out by other vegetation, but also relies on a thriving network of species surrounding it to grow.

This is why the scraped tracks created by the tractor appear to have created the perfect conditions for the plant's recovery.

Marsh clubmoss has declined by 85% as its heath habitat has been wiped out (Sophie Lake)

It also resulted in a network of sandy patches and pools of water that have allowed wildflowers to thrive, aiding the overall restoration of the heathland.

Caroline Kelly, another manager of the project, said it had emboldened the team to “mess up” the heaths in order to restore

them to their former glory.

Other wildlife being aided by the scheme include sand lizards, heath tiger beetles and the rare Purbeck mason wasp, found only on Dorset's heathlands in the UK.

New Zealand asks visitors to pledge to protect environment amid concerns over impact of tourism

The work is led by the group Plantlife and is part of the ambitious Back from the Brink plan to save 20 of England's most threatened species from extinction.

Other plants and animals targeted by the initiative include grey long-eared bats, pine martens and lesser butterfly orchids.

(Source: *The Independent*)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Annual dusty days up day-and-a-half in Khuzestan over 3 decades

The number of dusty days in southern province of Khuzestan have increased by day-and-a-half over a 30-year period per annum on average, the provincial meteorological organization director has said.

The number of dusty days is different in different seasons, but on average over a 30-year period sand and dust storms hit the area 63 days annually, IRNA news agency quoted Mohammad Sabzehzari as saying on Wednesday.

However, some years the number of dusty days surged to 115 days over a year, he regretted.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “-bound”

■ **Meaning**: restricted by or confined to  
■ **For example**: For everyone from **deskbound** office workers to managers in meetings, this is the latest addition to one of the best-selling book series.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Trade down

■ **Meaning**: to replace something you own with something cheaper, or buy a cheaper type of thing than before  
■ **For example**: Many of their customers are trading down to cheaper cigarettes.

## IDIOM

### Make a mountain out of a molehill

■ **Explanation**: to exaggerate or put too much focus on a minor issue and make it seem like a major one  
■ **For example**: You got one B and you're acting like you're failing the class. You're making a mountain out of a molehill, if you ask me.

## بروز گرد و خاک در خوزستان در ۳۰ سال گذشته سالانه یک و نیم روز افزایش داشت

مدیرکل هواشناسی استان خوزستان گفت: در مدت ۳۰ سال گذشته روند افزایش روزهای گرد و خاکی در خوزستان یک و نیم روز در سال بوده است یعنی در این مدت هر سال یک و نیم روز به تعداد روزهای گرد و خاکی اضافه شده است. محمد سبزه زاری روز چهارشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرگزاری ایرنا با اشاره به اینکه تعداد روزهای گرد و خاکی در فصول سال مختلف متفاوت است، افزود: به صورت میانگین دراز مدت ۳۰ ساله حدود ۶۳ روز در سال گرد و خاک داشتیم. وی افزود: اما در سال هایی که خیلی گرد و خاک شدید بود تعداد این روزها به ۱۱۵ روز هم رسیده است.

# Putin authorizes development of advanced missiles in response to U.S. suspension of INF

➔ However, Moscow won't deploy any new missiles unless Washington does so, because Russia does not want to enter a new arms race with the U.S., he added.

On Saturday, however, Putin told his ministers not to initiate disarmament talks with the White House.

## ■ Another U.S. step towards destruction

Konstantin Kosachev, the head of the foreign affairs committee in the upper house of Russia's parliament, said on Friday Washington "has taken another step toward [the whole world's] destruction today."

Russian Senator Igor Morozov said that Washington's move "carries a threat to the entire system of international security, but first of all for Russia, because after leaving the INF the Americans will deploy these missiles in European countries."

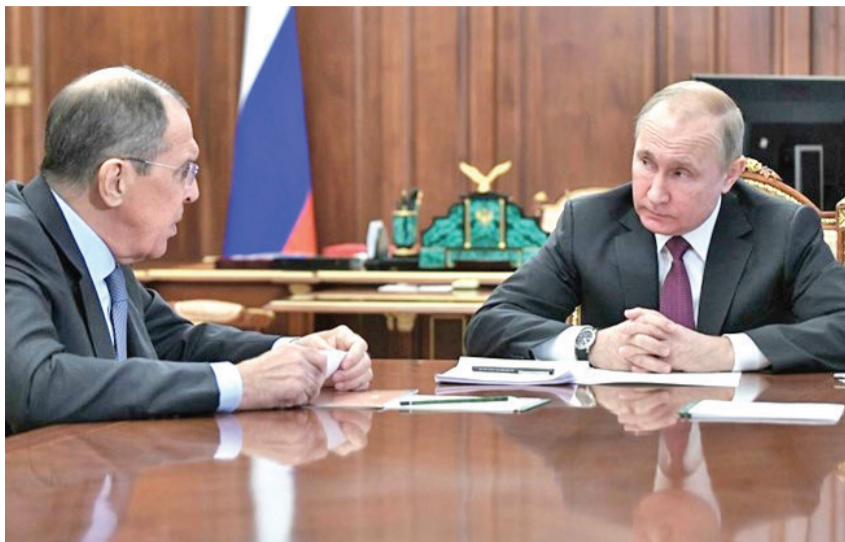
## ■ U.S. suspends compliance with INF Treaty, may withdraw in 6 months

The developments follow as the United States is suspending its compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty 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 the administration will provide a formal notice to Russia that the U.S. is withdrawing from the INF Treaty in six months and, if Moscow doesn't come into compliance, it "will terminate".

The U.S. President Donald Trump announced last year that Washington would withdraw from the treaty, which was signed toward the end of the Cold War in 1987 by then the U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Under the treaty, both sides were banned from creating ground-launch



nuclear missiles with ranges from 500 kilometers to 5,500 kilometers and led to the elimination of nearly 2,700 short- and medium-range missiles.

Washington insists that Russia's new 9M729 missile is in violation of the treaty and should be dismantled immediately.

Russia rebutted the claim last month by unveiling the missile and its key specifications. Russian chief of missile and artillery troops Major General Mikhail Matveevsky said then the missile's maximum range is around 480 kilometers, well within what is allowed under the INF.

Trump said in a statement that "for too long" Russia has violated the treaty "with impunity, covertly developing and fielding a prohibited missile system that poses a direct threat to our allies and troops abroad".

Shortly after Pompeo's announcement on Friday, Trump said in a statement that he would work with the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and draw

up its own set of plans, including military ones, to counter Russia's gains from its "unlawful conduct."

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Russian media the U.S. exit is not a question of "Russian guilt", but the "strategy of the United States is to get out of its international legal obligations in different areas".

Reacting to the U.S. announcement, Russia's Foreign Ministry said Moscow was still ready to maintain dialogue on the INF but reserved the right to respond to the U.S. withdrawal from the pact.

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

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters earlier on Friday that he was expecting to receive official notification in the coming days. He accused Washington of being "unwilling to hold

any substantial talks" with Moscow to save the treaty.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted by the state news agency Tass as saying after the Beijing talks on Thursday, "Unfortunately, there is no progress. The position of the American side is very tough and like an ultimatum."

Ryabkov added that Moscow remains ready to "search for solutions" that could keep the treaty in force.

## ■ Unleash new missile competition

The prospect of the U.S. withdrawal from the INF pact has stirred a global concern. Following the U.S. announcement, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas tweeted that Russia is not prepared to restore confidence in the INF Treaty.

"There will be less security without the treaty," he said.

The French foreign ministry said in a statement that it regretted the U.S. decision, but encouraged dialogue with Russia during the six-month period and consult NATO alliance partners.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told Reuters news agency that the alliance has no intention of moving new land-based nuclear missiles to Europe.

"We don't have to mirror what Russia does," Stoltenberg said.

"But at the same time, we have to make sure that we maintain credible and effective deterrence," he added, without giving specifics on what the different military option NATO is looking at could entail.

NATO said that if Moscow failed to destroy all new missile systems that Washington insists violate the treaty, "Russia will bear sole responsibility for the end of the treaty".

Russian news agency RIA previously reported that Moscow was ready for dialogue over the INF Treaty.

(Source: agencies)

## 70% in U.S. say country headed the wrong way: poll

A large majority of people in the United States say America is headed the wrong way and are pessimistic about the state of the country, according to a new survey.

Just 28 percent of Americans think the US is headed in the right direction, while 70 percent say America is on the wrong track, according to the poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The percentage of those saying the country is on the wrong track now is at its highest point in about a year. The figure was 59 percent in December.

A majority of Americans, 52 percent, are also are pessimistic about the state of the U.S. and believe things are going to get worse over the next year.

While Democratic Party voters are far more likely than Republican voters to feel negative about the direction of the country, even Republican pessimism is growing.

The remarkable level of national gloom is even beginning to extend to how Americans view the economy, once a relative bright spot in America's mood. A slight majority of Americans still has positive feelings about the national



economy, but many expect it to decline in the next year.

About half of Americans, 53 percent, describe the economy as generally good. But looking ahead, they're more likely to expect the economy to get worse than better, 44 percent to 27 percent.

The AP-NORC survey also found that only 34 percent of Americans approve of the way Trump is handling his job as president, compared with 65 percent who disapprove.

The poll was conducted during the longest government shutdown in the U.S. history, the result of Trump's demand to deliver on his campaign pledge to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The partial government shutdown of 2018-2019 occurred after Trump and Congress failed to agree on an appropriations bill to fund the operations of the federal government. Trump had demanded that the bill should include \$5.7 billion for building a border wall, which Democrats strongly oppose.

An ABC News/Washington Post poll released last week found that 48 percent of Americans say they have no confidence "at all" in the president.

The poll found that Trump's overall job approval rating was at 37 percent, the lowest on record for any president after two years in office in polls back 72 years.

(Source: Press TV)

## Dubai becomes money laundering paradise: anti-corruption group

Transparency International says the Emirati city of Dubai has turned into "a money laundering paradise," where criminals can easily purchase luxurious property with their dirty cash.

In its Corruption Perceptions Index 2018 released recently, the leading anti-graft NGO (non-Governmental Organization) said Dubai "has become an active global hub for money laundering."

Citing investigations by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), the group complained that real estate worth millions of pounds can be bought in Dubai in exchange for cash with few questions ever asked.

"As a result, Dubai has become a money laundering paradise, where the corrupt and other criminals can go to buy luxurious property with no restrictions," it added.

Last June, Transparency International issued a similar warning, saying Dubai has become an open market for money laundering and a safe haven for the corrupt.

It blamed the situation on the UAE's weakly regulated financial sector, unaccountable high-end real estate market and lack of oversight on Dubai's property sector.

"Dubai has been attracting secretive high-end real estate purchases by foreign companies and individuals for years, but despite the high risks of money laundering, the government of the UAE fails to ensure that information about companies buying property is sufficiently recorded and made available, and that estate agents ensure they are acquiring all the necessary information about who is behind the deal," said Transparency International Managing Director Patricia Moreira.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. urges new Lebanese government to block Hezbollah

The United States on Friday called on Lebanon to deprive Hezbollah of all official funds after the resistance movement took a record three cabinet posts in a long-delayed government. The United States stressed that it was ready to work with Prime Minister Saad Hariri's new government, welcoming the breakthrough in the eight-month deadlock and saying that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hoped to visit Lebanon.

"Nevertheless, we are concerned that Hezbollah, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, will continue to occupy ministerial positions and was allowed to name the minister of public health," State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said. "We call on the new government to ensure the resources and services of these ministries do not

provide support to Hezbollah," he said in a statement. But the health portfolio makes it difficult for donors to avoid Hezbollah, which is under multiple U.S. sanctions. A donor meeting in Paris last year pledged \$11 billion in low-interest loans and aid for Lebanon, hoping to avert disaster amid political and economic instability and the influx of 1.5 million refugees from neighboring Syria. Hezbollah is allied with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, where Israel says it has carried out hundreds of strikes on the militants and their patron Iran.

Hezbollah first entered parliament with the end of Lebanon's civil war and began steadily imposing itself as a political player, with its first ministers in 2005.

(Source: AFP)

## U.S. hate crimes rise for fifth year in a row: report

Hate crimes in major U.S. cities rose for the fifth consecutive year in 2018, fueled in large part by attacks on African-Americans, Jews and Latino communities, according to a new report.

There were a total of 921 hate crimes in nine of the 10 largest U.S. cities last year, an increase of 14 percent from 2017, according to data compiled by the Center for Hate and Extremism at California State University in San Bernardino.

The study used police department data from around the country.

Last year's bias incidents spiked around the time of the 2018 midterm elections, suggesting "hate-mongers" were emboldened by the United States President Donald Trump's divisive rhetoric, said Brian Levin, the center's director.

"In looking at this correlation, we believe that around highly charged emotional events, like a terrorist attack or an election, the bully pulpit can make a difference,"



Levin told NBC News.

Trump held dozens of televised rallies during the midterm campaign, where he endorsed candidates, attacked Democrats and the press, and focused heavily on

immigration, including a caravan of Central American migrants making their way through Mexico.

A hate crime generally refers to a criminal act that is motivated by bias against a specific group. Hate crimes may involve physical assault, bullying, harassment, damage to property, verbal abuse or insults, offensive graffiti and hate mail.

The Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish organization that tracks anti-Semitism in the United States, recorded an increase of 57 percent in anti-Semitic incidents in 2017, the largest single-year increase on record.

Levin said the rise in anti-Semitism stems in part from a "general disdain for institutions and elites."

Critics say Trump's "xenophobic rhetoric and racist policies" have fomented a surge in right-wing extremism across the country and may have even helped provoke the bloodshed at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh last year.

(Source: agencies)

## PMU fighters stop U.S. military patrol in Iraq's Mosul

Members of Iraqi pro-government Popular Mobilization Units (PMU / Popular Mobilization Forces/Hashd al-Sha'abi), have stopped a United States military patrol in the city of Mosul, according to a new report.

Rezvan al-Anzi, PMU's deputy commander, confirmed the news on Saturday, saying the American troops were scared and requested air cover.

"We consider this act by the U.S. forces deliberate provocations, hence we acted directly, closed roads and warned them," al-Anzi said in a statement, according to Iraqi al-Sumaria television network.

The Iraqi commander accused American troops stationed in Iraq of engaging in futile operations in order to cover up their defeats and create insecurity in recently-liberated areas from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorists.

This is not the first time PMU forces stop the U.S. troops from performing a "suspicion reconnaissance mission" that it argues are aimed at collecting critical information about the movements and positions of the voluntary forces in Iraq.

Commander of the volunteer forces in western Anbar, Qasim Mosleh, told al-Sumaria last month that PMU had blocked another U.S. patrol mission.

The patrol, he said, violated Iraq's sovereignty and could have seriously endangered Iraqi troops on the Syrian border by exposing their deployments and arms depots to terrorist groups.

Mosleh said then that PMU fighters had forced American troops to return to their base, and not approach them.

Iraqi lawmakers have also long called on American forces to leave their country. In December, the U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to end the U.S. military presence in Syria and Afghanistan but said he had no similar plans for Iraq.

The U.S. first deployed forces to Iraq under the banner of war on terror in 2003, two years after invading Afghanistan under the same pretext. The deployment was followed by rampant violence and chaos, which set the stage for the emergence of ISIL in 2014.

Washington then mobilized its allies in another mission to allegedly root out the terrorists. The U.S.-led coalition, however, was suspiciously slow in progress, while its airstrikes against purported terrorist positions led to heavy civilian casualties and damage to Iraqi infrastructure.

The volunteer forces helping the Iraqi army have on numerous occasions urged the U.S. forces to withdraw from Iraq. They have documented evidence showing Washington provides the ISIL terrorists with weapons and military support.

## ■ Australia admits it has killed up to 18 civilians in Mosul air raid

Meantime, Australian Defense Force officials admit that a 2017 airstrike by the country's jet fighters on the northern Iraqi city of Mosul has claimed the lives of six to 18 civilians.

The defense minister, Christopher Pyne, described the deaths as "deeply regrettable" but said a 12-month investigation into the airstrike on June 13, 2017 could not come to a conclusion over who was at fault.

"After a thorough investigation conducted by the Australian Defense Force it's been determined that between six and 18 civilians were killed in a coalition airstrike and that an Australian platform may have been part of that airstrike [and] may have been responsible," Pyne told the Nine Network.

He said it was "not possible" to determine which missiles were responsible and if the casualties "occurred as a result of the Australian airstrike, the nearby Coalition airstrikes, or from other actors."

In a briefing, the chief of joint operations, Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld, said there was no "specific intelligence" indicating civilians were present at the targeted site but admitted there was "a degree of uncertainty surrounding this incident."

"We know that the Australian strike does not precisely correspond with the information provided in the claim, however it was close by. We do not definitively know how these people were killed," he said.

"Ultimately we have determined that it is possible civilians were unintentionally killed by the Coalition during these strikes."

Australia has previously announced "involvement" in three separate reports where civilians were among the death toll from airstrikes which formed part of the Mosul offensive, Operation Okra, in March, May and June 2017.

Australia was part of a U.S.-led coalition which has been carrying out airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since 2014 allegedly targeting ISIL and other Takfiri terrorists. The raids, which did little to dislodge the terrorist outfits, on numerous occasions claimed many civilian lives and inflicted damage on the two countries' infrastructure.

In a report released on December 30, 2018, the U.S. military admitted killing over 1,100 civilians in airstrikes over the last four years. War monitoring groups, however, estimate that the raids have killed thousands of civilians.

"The Coalition conducted a total of 31,406 strikes between August 2014 and end of November 2018. During this period, based on information available, CJTF-OIR assesses at least 1,139 civilians have been unintentionally killed by Coalition strikes since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve," said the report.

(Source: Press TV)

## How Republicans erased Trumpism

➔ Democratic leaders had reached a deal that could pass — and Republicans would not have to visibly cross the president in difficult public votes.

These tactics yielded impressive results. While a majority of Americans blamed Mr. Trump for the partial government shutdown, very few blamed congressional Republicans. The GOP leaders have managed to not get the blame for the shutdown or get blamed by the base for abandoning the president.

Now that Democrats control the House, Republican leaders may find it more difficult to limit the president's legislative role. Mr. Trump will be less likely to accept a mostly theater role in interparty negotiations and, as shown in the shutdown, may be more interested than congressional Republicans in public confrontation.

This bodes poorly for legislative prospects in the new Congress. In our current partisan environment, the visible engagement of the president in the legislative process tends to polarize debate on even seemingly nonpartisan issues. Republican leaders know they've lost much of their policymaking capacity. They may soon realize they also can no longer mask the weakness of Mr. Trump.

(Source: NYT)

## Heavy snowfall forces cancellation of Garmisch downhill

The men's World Cup downhill scheduled to take place at Garmisch-Partenkirchen on Saturday has been cancelled due to heavy snowfall, race organizers said.

Delaying the start of the race until the afternoon was not possible as a number of skiers have flights booked to Sweden ahead of next week's world championships in Are.

"I prefer a cancellation rather than a shortened course in borderline security conditions," said veteran French skier Johan Clarey.

Garmisch was due to stage the last downhill race before the one in Are on February 9, but a combination of snow and rain left the lower section of the mountain in a poor state.

Sunday's giant slalom in Germany is set to go ahead as planned. *(Source: AFP)*

## Tennis Australia backs Hewitt in dispute with Tomic

Australia's Davis Cup captain Lleyton Hewitt has been backed by Tennis Australia in his ongoing row with Bernard Tomic, with the governing body's CEO Craig Tiley confirming on Saturday that Tomic would not be considered for Davis Cup selection.

Twice Grand Slam champion Hewitt said last month THAT he had banned Tomic from playing in the Davis Cup and cut all ties with the player after receiving physical threats against himself and his family from his compatriot, including blackmail.

Tomic, in turn, denied Hewitt's allegations and called the 37-year-old a liar, while also accusing him of favouritism in the awarding of wildcards to the Australian men's players.

Tiley said in the statement on Saturday that he was disappointed by Tomic's disrespect and that Tennis Australia was withdrawing all their support for the 26-year-old.

"Lleyton is right to say Bernard will not be considered for Davis Cup. Bernard does not meet the standards of ehavior and commitment to himself, the team or the sport," Tiley added.

"Now, he is deliberately trying to damage that culture --and not for the first time... We have given (Tomic) more than a decade of support. Ultimately, we have to draw a line when the behavior does not warrant the support."

*(Source: Reuters)*

## Barca's Cillessen out for six weeks with calf injury

Barcelona's stand-in goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen has been ruled out for six weeks with a torn calf muscle, the club said in a statement on Friday, and will miss both legs of the Copa del Rey semi-final against Real Madrid.

The Netherlands international has not played a La Liga game this season but has been the team's first-choice goalkeeper in the Copa del Rey in his three seasons at the club, lifting the trophy in 2017 and 2018.

He made a vital contribution to Barca's win over Sevilla in Wednesday's quarter-final second leg, saving a penalty from Ever Banega which, had the Argentine scored from, would have seen Sevilla take a 3-1 aggregate lead in the tie.

Barca went on to win the game 6-1 for a 6-3 aggregate victory.

German international Marc-Andre ter Stegen is set to stand in for Cillessen in Barca's semi-final first leg against Madrid on Feb. 6 and the second leg on Feb. 27 or 28.

If Barca progress from the tie, Cillessen would be expected to return to play the final against Real Betis or Valencia on May 25. *(Source: Eurosport)*

## Heung-Min Son to the rescue as Spurs win late against Newcastle



Heung-Min Son ended an afternoon of frustration for Tottenham at Wembley when he hammered a shot through Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka to secure a big win for Spurs.

The victory temporarily lifts Tottenham up to second position in the Premier League and the relief was palpable when Son's shot hit the back of the net in the 83rd minute to end a shut-out that threatened to deny the home side all three points from a match that

they dominated from start to finish.

Son Heung-Min scored a late winner as Tottenham beat Newcastle 1-0 at Wembley to move ahead of Manchester City and into second place ahead of City's home game against Arsenal on Sunday. Just seven minutes remained when Son struck from the edge of the area, Newcastle keeper Martin Dubravka allowing the shot to slip beyond him and into the net.

Spurs, who had returned to winning ways in their last home game against Watford, started on the front foot, Son and Christian Eriksen creating pressure down the left.

Playmaker Eriksen almost put Son through with a glorious pass after five minutes, but Dubravka was quickly out to the edge of his area to gather.

The visitors were struggling to get any possession early on, Dubravka again in the action as he gathered a Moussa Sissoko cross before it took two Newcastle defenders to snuff out a Son run.

But they showed their first glimpse of threat after 12 minutes, Sean Longstaff's diagonal pass finding Salomon Rondon on the left before Kieran Trippier dealt with the danger.

Spurs should have led five minutes later, Lucas Moura powering a free header wide from close range after Erik Lamela's cross.

*(Source: Soccernet)*

# Twelve Russian track and field athletes suspended for doping



Twelve Russian track and field athletes, including 2012 Olympic high jump champion Ivan Ukhov, have been suspended for doping, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) announced on Friday.

The suspensions range between two to eight-year bans, with 2013 world high jump gold medalist Svetlana Shkolina also suspended.

CAS had been ruling in the cases in place of the suspended Russian Athletics Federation (RUSAF), and pursued allegations of anti-doping based on evidence from the McLaren report, which uncovered state-sponsored doping in Russia when it was published in 2016.

The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) banned Russia from competing in its competitions in November 2015 and last month upheld the country's suspension into 2019, and CAS opened procedures against the suspected dopers "on behalf" of the IAAF.

"In all cases, the athletes have been found guilty of ADRVs (anti-doping rule violations) under the IAAF Rules and individual sanctions have been imposed by the CAS on each of the 12 athletes concerned," CAS said in a statement.

The court added that the decisions, all focusing on offences committed between the London Olympics and 2013 athletics world championships in Moscow, could be appealed.

RUSAF responded with a statement. "Athletes have 21 days to appeal, all materials will be examined as soon as possible and legal

consultations will be organised," it said. "After these consultations, suspended athletes will make their decision on a possible appeal."

The head of the athletics federation Dmitry Shlyakhtin told TASS agency that he blamed Russian whistle blower Grigory Rodchenkov.

"For the moment it's just the decision of the court of first instance, which, as far as I know, was based on the evidence given by Rodchenkov," Shlyakhtin said. "We need to receive the operative part (of the verdict) before taking the decision what to do next," he added.

■ **'Welcome news'**  
The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)

said it "welcomes the decisions".

"These decisions come as welcome news for athletes, anti-doping organisations, WADA and all others around the world who care about clean sport," WADA Director General Olivier Niggli said in a statement.

"This should serve to reassure athletes that a lot of work is being conducted behind the scenes by various organisations that are committed to ensure that justice is rendered."

Niggli said the ruling vindicated the controversial way WADA handled the retrieval of data from the former Moscow anti-doping laboratory.

"This highlights also, once again, just how important the successful retrieval of

the analytical data from the former Moscow Laboratory by WADA last month is for clean sport and reinforces the decision taken by the WADA Executive Committee (ExCo) on 20 September 2018 to reinstate as compliant the Russian Anti-Doping Agency."

The 32-year-old Ukhov has been suspended for four years starting immediately, and has seen all his results from 16 July 2012 to 28 July 2015 disqualified, meaning he will lose his Olympic title, 2014 world silver medal and 2014 European bronze.

Ukhov had twice jumped 2.31 metres already in 2019.

American Erik Kynard is set to be upgraded to Olympic champion in Ukhov's place, with three athletes -- Britain's Robbie Grabarz, Canadian Derek Drouin and Qatari star Mutaz Essa Barshim -- to be bumped up from shared bronze to silver.

Shkolina has also been banned for four years and had her results from the same period annulled, leaving American Brigetta Barrett set to inherit gold.

The longest bans, of eight years, were reserved for hammer throwers Gulfiya Agafonova and Tatyana Lysenko, who had been banned twice before for doping offences.

The other bans were handed out to veteran sprinter Tatyana Firova, who was also previously suspended, triple jumper Lyukman Adams, hammer throwers Anna Bulgakova and Mariya Beshpalova, shot putter Ivan Yushkov, discus thrower Vera Karmishina-Ganeeva and 100metre hurdles pair Ekaterina Galitskaya and Yuliya Kondakova.

*(Source: AFP)*

## Pelicans underwhelmed by Lakers' initial offers for Anthony Davis



As the Los Angeles Lakers pursue New Orleans Pelicans All-NBA center Anthony Davis ahead of Thursday's trade deadline, the initial offers have been underwhelming, including the Lakers' first offer of Lonzo Ball, Kyle Kuzma, Rajon Rondo, Michael Beasley and a first-round pick, league sources told ESPN. The Lakers have limited offers to two of the franchise's top young players in every proposal, and resisted including more than a single first-round pick in offers, league sources said.

With five days left to make a deal to partner Davis with LeBron James, there's still time for the Lakers to improve offers. New Orleans hasn't responded to or countered those proposals, sources said.

So far, the Lakers' negotiating strategy in their pursuit of Davis is similar to how they chased Kawhi Leonard and Paul George in the past two years. San Antonio and Indiana traded Leonard and George to Toronto and Oklahoma City, respectively. Los Angeles had been hopeful that they could sign the two Southern California natives in free agency. George stayed with the Thunder, and Leonard will be a free agent in July.

Also, the Lakers haven't offered salary-cap relief for the Pelicans, which would mean absorbing unappetizing Pelicans contracts as part of a larger trade, sources said. That's a typical staple of offers designed to acquire superstar players.

Lakers president Magic Johnson has been communicating with Pelicans GM Dell Demps, sources said. So far, New Orleans

hasn't considered the offers worthy of response or countering, league sources said.

The grouping of Kuzma, Brandon Ingram, Ivica Zubac and Josh Hart are included in different Lakers scenarios, but only two of these to an offer, league sources said. For the Pelicans to agree to a trade before Thursday's deadline, it would seem likely that most, if not all, of those players would be included into packages -- with multiple first-round picks.

The Knicks were able to acquire two Dallas first-round picks, including one unprotected, for Kristaps Porzingis on Thursday. Davis, 25, requested a trade Monday through his agent, Rich Paul, of Klutch Sports. The Lakers are Davis' preferred choice, sources said.

New Orleans has been leaning toward waiting until the end of the season to negotiate with the Boston Celtics, who have a larger pool of draft and player assets. Boston is unable to trade for Davis with Kyrie Irving on its roster, because the league's CBA prohibits a player on a designated rookie extension to be traded to a team that already has a player under that contract.

Boston can consummate a deal for Davis in July, once Irving becomes a free agent. Boston has been encouraging New Orleans to bypass the deadline and wait until after the season to work with them on a deal for Davis, sources said. The Pelicans are privately insisting that they would need to be "blown away" to accept a trade in this short window before the trade deadline.

*(Source: ESPN)*

## World and Olympic champion Vonn retires saying 'body is broken'



Three-time Olympic medalist Lindsey Vonn has announced her retirement from skiing because her "body is broken beyond repair" and "screaming to stop".

The 34-year-old American, who won downhill Winter Olympic gold at the 2010 Games in Vancouver, was chasing a record number of World Cup wins.

But after being plagued by injuries and revealing she had further surgery last spring, she has been forced to stop.

"After many sleepless nights, I have accepted I cannot continue," she said.

"I will compete at the World Championships in downhill and super-G next week in Are, Sweden and they will be the final races of my career.

"The past two weeks have been some of the most emotionally challenging days of my life. I am struggling with the reality of what my body is telling me versus what my mind and heart believe I'm capable of.

"The unfortunate reality is my mind and body are not on the same page."

Vonn, who also won two World Championships, a super-G bronze in Vancouver and a Winter Olympic downhill bronze in Pyeongchang 2018, will retire four victories short of equalling Swede Ingemar Stenmark's record of 86 World Cup wins.

Her bronze in Korea made her the oldest woman to claim a Winter Olympics alpine skiing medal.

But after saying she had had "more injuries and surgeries than I care to admit" she described how a knee injury suffered

at Lake Louise last year proved impossible to fully recover from.

She said in an emotional post on Instagram: "My body is broken beyond repair and it isn't letting me have the final season I dreamed of. My body is screaming at me to STOP and it's time for me to listen.

"I have always pushed the limits of ski racing and it has allowed me to have amazing success but also dramatic crashes. I have never wanted the storyline of my career to be about injuries and because of that I decided not to tell anyone that I underwent surgery this past spring.

"A large portion of cartilage that had delaminated from my bone was removed. My crash in Lake Louise last year was much more painful than I let on, but I continued to race because I wanted to win a medal in the Olympics for my late grandfather.

"Again, I rehabbed my way back this summer and I felt better than I had in a long time. Then I crashed in Copper this November and injured my left knee, tearing my LCL plus sustaining three fractures. Despite extensive therapy, training and a knee brace, I am not able make the turns necessary to compete the way I know I can."

Vonn added: "At this point, arthritis is the least of my worries and I hope I can still ski with my kids some day. But even knowing what lies ahead for my body, it has still been worth it.

*(Source: BBC)*

## The questions that will be answered in the upcoming Clasicos

Friday's Copa del Rey semi final draw paired arch rivals, Real Madrid and Barcelona, together in a clash which promises to capture the attention of the watching world. Whilst there isn't quite the battle between the two for the LaLiga Santander title this term, the match is like no other, and it will certainly produce answers to a number of questions.

■ Which of the two teams are the favourite to progress?

Los Merengues began the season slowly under Julen Lopetegui, a run which culminated in a devastating 5-1 defeat at the Camp Nou. However, Santiago Solari's arrival has seen the club somewhat steady the ship and are entering the semi final in good spirits. Los Blancos continue to fight for success on three fronts officially, although the two cup competitions remain the only realistic sources of glory. Barcelona can however feel as though they've had the tougher run to this point, facing Sevilla and Levante in the last two rounds.

■ Will Solari or Valverde start their best players?

The tournament to this point has allowed both coaches

to test out alternative line-ups and strategies, even handing playing time to those who simply wouldn't get a chance to feature in either the league or Champions League. Yet, with a place in a final at stake it may well be the case that both coaches play their strongest team in both legs. Only Jasper Cillessen and Keylor Navas are guaranteed to play in their respective roles as cup goalkeepers.

■ Will there be refereeing controversies? Will VAR be needed?

Real Madrid have fought an ongoing battle with the Spanish Football Federation ever since they felt wronged by the use of VAR in their LaLiga Santander defeat to Real Sociedad. What the Madrid club viewed as a mistake continued to feed into long-held feelings that referees simply were unfair to the European champions. The last Clasicos have been marked by officiating decisions that either side have felt favoured the other, and Ricardo De Burgos Bengoetxea will be part of the VAR team, a figure synonymous with high profile calls in Clasicos.

■ Cuarta pregunta: Who will feel the benefit of playing at the Camp Nou first?

Historically, it has been said that playing the second leg at home was key to progressing through to the next round, but recent seasons have somewhat tarnished that belief. Modern history suggests that Barcelona have won going away to the Estadio Santiago Bernabeu, whilst Los Blancos can boast a good record in Catalonia for the second match.

■ Will there be a surprise star?

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo have characterised this fixture for the best part of a decade, with it often becoming a Messi vs Ronaldo issue rather than Barcelona vs Real Madrid. Ronaldo's departure has left the Argentine essentially starring in a one-man show, but the Copa del Rey semi-final could see another player emerge as the surprise star. Perhaps Vinicius Junior will continue his meteoric rise in the Spanish capital?

*(Source: Marca)*

# Qatar can only get better, says Sanchez

Felix Sanchez has warned the rest of the Continent that his newly crowned AFC Asian Cup winners can become even better after Qatar saw off Japan to claim their maiden continental crown on Friday.

Qatar emerged with the title for the first time after seven straight wins in the United Arab Emirates saw them score 19 times and concede just once to claim the newly-minted AFC Asian Cup trophy as the country continues along the road towards the hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

Almoez Ali emerged as the tournament's Most Valuable Player while Akram Afif and others impressed over the last four weeks and, with the Qataris boasting one of the youngest squads at the tournament, Sanchez believes there is more to come from his talented line-up.

"We arrived here with a target to face everything game-by-game, to show that we can compete against all the big teams in Asia and here at the Asian Cup all of them were here," said Sanchez.

"And I think game-by-game the players showed they were ready to play against all Asian national teams and are able to man-

age the games in different situations and in different scenarios to get the results.

"We're happy with the results, because we won, and in our analysis these players are able to compete against all the national teams in Asia and that's a big step for us. Now we're looking forward to developing the players, because it's a very young squad and they performed very well."

"But the good thing is we can see that we can still grow as a team and we can go forward."

Qatar will host the FIFA World Cup in just under four years' time and have qualified for the tournament automatically as a result, meaning Sanchez and the Qatar Football Association will be able to focus on further enhancing the team until November 2022.

The QFA has lined up appearances at a number of key events, with the team next slated to feature at the Copa America in Brazil in June as Qatar look towards impressing on home soil in 2022.

For the moment though, Sanchez said his team will savor emerging AFC Asian Cup champions.

(Source: the-afc)



## FIFA World Rankings: Qatar set for huge rise after AFC Asian Cup 2019 win



Qatar are set for a huge rise in the FIFA World Rankings after defeating Japan 3-1 to lift the AFC Asian Cup 2019 title at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Friday.

According to Footy Rankings, Qatar are set to rise 38 ranks to 55th in world rankings from their previous ranking of 93. By doing so they will become the fifth best-ranked team in Asia behind leaders Iran, Japan, Korea Republic and Australia.

Southeast Asian champions Vietnam are also expected to rise one rank to 99th in the world and 18th in Asia after their run into the quarterfinals of the Asian Cup. Meanwhile, Thailand who made the Round of 16 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will rise three positions to 115 in world

and 20th in Asia.

Asian Cup 2019 runners-up Japan will also make huge progress to become the Asian No. 2 as they rose 23 positions to become world No. 27. Iran will meanwhile maintain their number one spot in Asia and will also rise six ranks to become 22nd in the world.

Australia fell to No. 4 in Asia while Korea Republic also leapfrogged the Socceroos to become third in Asia.

Meanwhile, India fell six ranks after their disappointing exit from the Asian Cup in the group stages to 103rd in world rankings. Philippines will drop eight positions to 124 and are 24th among AFC nations.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## London to host 2019 Marathon Championships

London, Great Britain, will stage the 2019 World Para Athletics Marathon Championships on 28 April in association with the Virgin Money London Marathon.

The announcement was made by World Para Athletics and London Marathon Events Ltd on Thursday (31 January).

This will be the second time London has hosted the Championships following a successful first edition in 2015 which saw three world records broken on the streets of the British capital.

There will be five different medal events in the 2019 Marathon World Championships, which match the marathon events in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games program:

- Men's and women's T12 (for athletes from classes T11/T12),
- Men's T46 (for T45/T46 athletes)
- Men's and women's T54 (for T52/T53/T54 athletes).

The London Marathon will also be the first opportunity for athletes to earn slots for their National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) for Tokyo 2020. The top four ranked athletes in each medal event obtain one slot for their respective nation.



Haozhe Gao, Head of World Para Athletics, said: "London has staged top class Para athletics marathon events for more than two decades and we are delighted to see the World Marathon Championships return to the city in 2019

following the success of the 2015 Worlds with more than one hundred participants.

"This year's World Championships will be of additional importance as the races will act as qualifiers for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Fans in London will see the world's best Para athletes in action with an extra motivation."

Hugh Brasher, Event Director of the Virgin Money London Marathon, said: "We are proud to host the 2019 World Para Athletics Marathon Championships for a second time. London has always championed disability sport and we look forward to welcoming the world's best Para athletes in April."

Each country can enter a maximum of six athletes into each event and each athlete must have made the minimum qualification standard or been allocated a direct invitation.

The 2019 edition will see Great Britain's David Weir – the most successful athlete in the history of the London Marathon – return to compete for the 20th consecutive year. Weir has won the race on eight occasions.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## AFC President lauds Qatar and biggest-ever AFC Asian Cup

AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has hailed Qatar for creating history in claiming a first-ever AFC Asian Cup title after the West Asians defeated Japan 3-1 in a riveting final at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in the UAE on Friday.

"On behalf of the Asian football family, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to Qatar for their remarkable grit and passion throughout the tournament.

"In claiming their maiden crown, Qatar have set the benchmark for all Asian teams and I am sure their success will serve as an inspiration for everyone to scale even greater heights."

"This victory is testament to the hard work and immaculate planning undertaken by the Qatar Football Association and special praise must also go to the coaching staff and everyone working tirelessly behind the scenes.

"Both teams reached the final undefeated and we must congratulate Japan for showcasing great resolve throughout



the tournament and their outstanding efforts to compete with Qatar, culminating in a spectacular final for the Continent's passionate fans."

The AFC President also praised the outstanding efforts of everyone involved including the Government of UAE, United Arab Emirates Football Association, the Local Organizing Committee, all the competing

teams and Member Associations as well as the broadcasters, commercial partners and fans for ensuring the success of the biggest-ever Continental showpiece in history.

He added: "The AFC decided to expand the tournament from 16 to 24 teams to provide more opportunities for our Member Associations to compete at the highest level and I am particularly pleased by the

impact and legacy of the competition on our teams.

"I have no doubts that the commendable displays by our developing nations will drive others to emulate their success and ultimately, raise the level of competition throughout the Continent."

Shaikh Salman added: "As with all expansions, and all maiden endeavors, challenges are unavoidable, so I must thank the Local Organizing Committee for staging a memorable tournament – one that showcased Asia's undeniable talent and incredible passion for football.

"I must also express our thanks to all our Member Associations, our fervent fans, our generous volunteers, members of the media and all our commercial partners for coming together.

"More importantly, for doing their part to create Asian footballing history in staging the biggest-ever edition and for laying the foundations to create a lasting legacy for football in Asia."

(Source: the-afc)

## Rueful Yoshida reflects on Japan's missed opportunity

A disappointed Maya Yoshida said Japan's loss in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 final was an opportunity lost, after their hopes of a fifth Continental title were extinguished by Qatar on Friday.

Stunning goals from Almoez Ali and Abdelaziz Hatim had Qatar two goals ahead within half an hour, but Japan found a lifeline through Takumi Minamino in the 69th minute, before a VAR-assisted penalty conceded by Yoshida was converted by Akram Afif, effectively sealing the tie at 3-1.

Yoshida, who won the title as a 22-year-old in Qatar eight years ago, was left to reflect on one that got away for the competition's most successful nation.

"We didn't start the game well," said the Southampton defender.

"More than anything I had the sense that this kind of thing could happen. We had played really well against (Islamic Republic of) Iran and then when we watched the game between UAE and Qatar, we really felt we had a big chance.

"As captain, I feel a sense of regret and unease that I wasn't

able to ensure that as a team we kept that feeling in check.

"For the first and second goals we conceded from a player right in front of me, and I really feel a big sense of regret that I wasn't able to lead the team to the title."

Under the tutelage of head coach Hajime Moriyasu, Japan had reached the final with a perfect record of six wins from six matches, and stormed into the decider with a highly impressive 3-0 win over the previously unbeaten Iran.

(Source: the-afc)

## Iran has much to learn from Qatar football

**1 →** Sanchez concentrated on his job and made the Qatar football proud. Now it is time for him to reap the fruit of labor, for what he has done with a small country among the Asian giants. The Qatari team beat Asian powerhouses Saudi Arabia, Iraq, South Korea, the UAE and Japan which made their championship more valuable.

Iran must change several players for the upcoming tournament, a decision that should've been made by departed coach Queiroz.

The next Team Melli coach would have to compete against time as he needs more of it to rebuild a new team. This is while the core of Qatar football team is still very young and this team can compete with the best teams at the 2022 World Cup.

## Zenit St. Petersburg sign Sardar Azmoun



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran striker Sardar Azmoun has completed a transfer to Russian Premier League giants FC Zenit Saint Petersburg from Rubin Kazan.

The 24-year-old forward joined Zenit after an impressive AFC Asian Cup 2019 with Team Melli.

Azmoun has joined the leader of the Russian domestic league on a three-and-a-half year deal.

Azmoun had joined Rubin Kazan from Iranian club Stephan in 2013 and spent the 2015-16 season on loan at FC Rostov.

He moved to Rostov on a permanent deal at the start of 2016-17 season before Rubin bought him back in 2017.

His latest move to Rubin's rivals is reportedly worth €12 million. Azmoun was also a target of Premier League side Wolverhampton Wanderers.

According to Sky Sports, Wolves had agreed a £1.7m loan fee with Kazan for the striker, with an option to buy on a permanent deal in the summer for £11.5m.

But the deal fell through because Kazan wanted an obligation to buy included, rather than the option which Wolves would agree to, Sky Sports reported.

## Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia eye Branko Ivankovic

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Saudi Arabian giants Al Ahli set their sights on hiring Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic.

For the third time over the past two years, Al Ahli want to sign the 65-year-old Croat.

The Saudi Arabian giants are reportedly not happy with their current coach Pablo Guede and want to hire Ivankovic instead of the Argentine.

Al Ahli have been drawn in Group D of the 2019 AFC Champions League along with Persepolis and Qatar's Al Saad SC.

Ivankovic, who has already worked at Saudi Arabian club Al Ettifaq, is under contract with Iran's Persepolis until 2021.

## Iran beach soccer remain second in world ranking

The Iranian national beach soccer team remained second in the world ranking released on January 31.

Spain became the January's Movers of the Month in the ranking. Team Melli still are the best Asian team in the ranking with 2543 points.

Iran prepare to participate at the 2019 AFC Beach Soccer Championship which will be played in Pattaya, Thailand from March 9-17.

Brazil, who won the 2017 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, stayed atop of the ranking with 3785 points.

Portugal are third in the rankings with 2450 points.

Russia and Italy sit fourth and fifth with 2017 and 1978 points respectively.

(Source: Beach Soccer)

## Alireza Faghani chosen to officiate Melbourne Victory v Daegu FC

**TASNIM** — Iranian official Alireza Faghani has been chosen to officiate the match between Australia's Melbourne Victory and South Korean Daegu FC in the 2019 AFC Champions League.

The match has been scheduled for March 5 at the Melbourne Rectangular Stadium in Melbourne.

Faghani also officiated two matches in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the UAE.

He whistled Japan and Turkmenistan match and a game between Jordan and Vietnam.

Faghani will be assisted by his countrymen Reza Sokhandan and Mohammad Reza Mansouri in the 2019 ACL Day 1.

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If you fail to attain your desire, do not blame others, and accept your fate in any case.

Imam Ali (AS)

## FAJR FILMFEST MIRROR

### “We Are All Together” producer denies allegation of money laundering

1 → He addressed the journalists and said, “You will see ‘We Are All Together’ in the future and you will find it a different comedy.”



He said that the accusing people themselves use the dirty money to produce their films.

Starring Hamed Behdad, “Qasre Shirin” had its Iranian premiere at the 37th Fajr Film Festival on Friday. The film is competing in the official section of the festival, which is currently underway in Tehran.

Earlier last week, Saeid Malekan, the producer of “Gholamreza Takhti”, a movie about the life story of Iranian Olympic gold-medalist wrestler Gholamreza Takhti, denied an allegation of money laundering.

### Fajr adds war films to schedule

TEHRAN — The war films “The Advocate” and “The Mediterranean” were added to the lineup for the non-competitive section of the 37th Fajr Film Festival.



Co-directed by Salma Babai and Vanda Doshan, “The Advocate” is a comedy about the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, while “The Mediterranean” revolves around the Syria war and its impact on the water crisis in the region.

### “6.5 for a Meter” gets extra screenings at Fajr festival

TEHRAN — The organizers of the 37th Fajr Film Festival arranged 12 additional screenings for “6.5 for a Meter” by Saeid Rustai on Thursday and Friday due to popular demand.



The additional screenings were held at Tehran’s Kurosh Cineplex for the film, which is Rustai’s second film after the acclaimed drama “Life + 1 Day”.

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### Iranian shorts to compete in Tampere festival

TEHRAN — Two Iranian films will go on screen at the 49th edition of the Tampere Film Festival in Finland.

“Driving Lessons” by Marzieh Riahi and “Pedovore” (Child Eater) by Mohammad Kart will compete in various sections of the short film festival, which will take place in Tampere from March 6 to 10.



### German exhibit showcases Persian children’s books

TEHRAN — The 63rd International Children’s Book Exhibition underway at Kling-spor Museum in the German city of Offenbach is showcasing a collection of books from Shabaviz, a major Iranian publisher.

Publishers from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Italy, Japan, Germany, the U.S. and several other countries are displaying their latest offerings at the exhibition, which will continue until March 10, the organizers have announced.

## Everything is awesome as “Lego Movie 2” star Pratt turns barista

LONDON (Reuters) — Film star Chris Pratt turned barista on Friday during a stopover in London to help launch “Lego Movie 2”, and everything was just awesome - or so reckoned one young fan he served a hot drink to.

Hundreds of locals lined up at the South Bank for a chance to greet Pratt and fellow cast member Tiffany Haddish.

Those lucky enough to also get a steaming beverage on a cold morning include Monty, aged 6-3/4. And what did he think of his hot chocolate? “It’s awesome”.

# Photo exhibit explores 1979 Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN — An exhibition displaying photos of the 1979 Islamic Revolution opened at the Iranian Artists Forum on Friday.

Over 90 photos are on view at the exhibit “Days of Revolution”, which is part of the 11th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts, the organizers announced.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi.

“The photographers have taken photos of the early days of the revolution, which I believe can show the reality without any interpretation,” Salehi said.

He expressed thanks to all the Iranian artists in different branches of the visual arts and said, “The artists have made efforts to register the major events of the Islamic Revolution since its victory.”

He also said that Iran’s economy of art is one of the main programs of the ministry and there are plans to boost the art business.

“Days of Revolution” will be running until February 18.



Art aficionados visit the exhibition “Days of Revolution” at the Iranian Artists Forum on February 1, 2019. (Mehr/Mohammad Moheimani)

## Ara Guler’s career exhibit underway at Tehran center



A poster for “M memoir of Lost History”.

TEHRAN — A selection of photos taken by legendary Turkish-Armenian photographer Ara Guler (1928-2018) are on view in an exhibition at Tehran’s Nabshi Center.

Patrice Vallette, founder and director of Vallette Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, is the curator of the exhibit named “M memoir of Lost History”.

The exhibition showcases over 160 photographs that Guler took in his career which spanned 60 years, the center announced in a press release published on Saturday.

“Life as It Is”, Turkish war correspondent and photojournalist Coskun Aral’s exclusive biopic about Guler, will also be screened at the center today.

Aral, Vallette and Iranian photographer and filmmaker Seifollah Samadian are scheduled to attend the screening program, which will be followed by a review session.

Known as “The Eye of Istanbul”, Guler had photographed famous figures, including Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso.

The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with Visioncy, a Malaysia-based cultural agency.

## Shahram Nazeri, Davlatmand Kholov team up for London concert



A poster for a London concert by Shahram Nazeri and Davlatmand Kholov.

TEHRAN — Veteran Iranian vocalist Shahram Nazeri and Tajik musician and singer Davlatmand Kholov together will give a concert in London on February 24.

The legendary musicians will perform Persian, Tajik and Kurdish songs at the Barbican Hall in London, the hall has announced.

The event is to celebrate the official launch of the great international cultural project “The Language of Love”, the Iranian coordinator of the concert,

Shahab Nikman, said in a press released on Saturday.

The project aims to promote the high position of Persian poetry and literature by introducing Persian luminaries and their roles in preserving Persian culture.

Nazeri is enormously popular in his home of Iran, and Kholov is an expert on the folk music of Central Asia, particularly his native country Tajikistan.

In addition, Nazeri’s latest album will be introduced at the concert.

## Goodbye Hello: Unseen Beatles footage becomes movie project for Peter Jackson

LONDON (Reuters) — “Lord of the Rings” director Peter Jackson is making a movie about The Beatles with previously unseen studio footage, the band’s website said on Wednesday - 50 years to the day after the Fab Four performed live together for the final time.

The Oscar winner will work with some 55 hours of never-released video of John, Paul, George and Ringo as they worked on their “Let It Be” album in January 1969.

The footage, plus 140 hours of audio, “ensures this movie will be the ultimate ‘fly on the wall’ experience that Beatles fans have long dreamt about,” Jackson said in a statement.

“It’s like a time machine transports us back to 1969, and we get to sit in the studio watching these four friends make great music together.”



Former Beatles Ringo Starr (L) and Paul McCartney attend the world premiere of ‘The Beatles: Eight Days a Week - The Touring Years’ in London, Britain September 15, 2016. REUTERS/Neil Hall/File Photo

Jackson last year released a World War One documentary using decades-old frontline footage, to rave reviews.

The “Let It Be” album and film were released in May 1970, after The Beatles broke up, and the unseen footage had originally been planned for a television program.

“Sure, there’s moments of drama - but none of the discord this project has long been associated with,” said Jackson, whose WingNut Films Ltd announced the project in a statement with the Beatles’ Apple Corps Ltd.

“Watching (them)... work together, creating now classic songs from scratch, is not only fascinating - it’s funny, uplifting and surprisingly intimate.”

The band performed live together for the last time on Apple’s offices London rooftop on Jan. 30, 1969. They officially split a year later.

## Assault report ‘100 percent factual’, “Empire” actor Smollett says

CHICAGO (Reuters) — Actor Jussie Smollett defended as completely truthful the account he gave of being accosted on a Chicago street by men who used racist and homophobic slurs and said on Friday he was cooperating with police.

The statement was the first Smollett has made publicly about the alleged assault since media reports about it first surfaced on Tuesday. The matter is being investigated by Chicago police as a possible hate crime.

News of the bizarre incident spread quickly on social media, with many expressing outrage while others suggested it was a hoax after police were unable to find videotape of the attack Smollett said he sustained.

“I am working with authorities and have been 100 percent factual and consistent on

every level,” Smollett said in the statement.

Chicago police said in a statement emailed to Reuters on Thursday the actor had refused to turn over his cellphone records to detectives, although law enforcement officials later said he was working with investigators.

Smollett and his manager have both told police they were on the phone together when the actor, an openly gay African-American who plays a gay character on “Empire,” was accosted on a street early on Tuesday by two men shouting racial and homophobic slurs.

According to Smollett’s account, his assailants doused him with a chemical liquid before wrapping a rope around his neck and fleeing the scene. The actor took himself to a hospital but was not seriously hurt, police said. Police said they sought phone records

to independently verify that Smollett was on the phone at the time with his manager, who reportedly told police he heard the attackers saying “This is MAGA country” in an apparent reference to President Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan.

“Cellphone records were not provided to investigators when asked,” Chicago police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said. “The victim didn’t provide them.”

However, he also said the police had “no reason to doubt” the accounts of both Smollett and his manager that they were on the phone together at the time of the alleged attack.

Another police spokesman, Officer Michael Carroll, said in a later email: “The victim is working with police as we investigate the circumstances of the incident.”

NEW YORK (AP) — Best-selling historical novelist Ruta Sepetys is setting her next work in Spain during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Philomel Books, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers, announced Friday that “The Fountains of

Silence” will come out Oct. 22. The story tells of an American teen who visits Madrid in 1957 and his discovery of the atrocities committed by Franco’s regime. Sepetys said in a statement that the book was inspired by people she had met while promoting

her books in Spain.

The author’s previous novels include “Salt to the Sea” and “Between Shades of Gray.” Sepetys has placed her narratives everywhere from 1950s New Orleans to the Baltics during World War II.