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trade with Iran: German official CONOMY TEHRAN — Thousince the U.S. is more focused on big companies whose transactions with Iran companies whose transactions with Iran

Thousands of German SMEs eager to

panies are eager to trade with Iran, an official with the Iran-Germany Chamber of Commerce told WirtschaftsWoche - a German weekly business news magazine — on Saturday.

"Between 5000 and 7000 small and medium-sized German enterprises are still willing to continue trade with Iran, companies whose transactions with Iran are conducted through Iranian banks or shipping lines." IRNA quoted Michael Tockuss, the co-chair of Iran-Germany Chamber of Commerce, as saying.

Tockuss noted that the Europe's payment mechanism (known as INSTEX) is going to enable the European companies to continue trade with Iran.

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Three arrested for disrupting petrochemical market

POLITICS

d e s k telligence Ministry
announced on Sunday that its forces
have dismantled a major group of dealers in the central province of Yazd for
disrupting the petrochemical market,
Mehr reported.

Three elements of the group have been arrested, the ministry said, adding that

the group had bought subsidized raw materials used in the petrochemical industry and sold them with higher prices in the market.

The proceeds from the group's financial crimes are estimated to amount to 3 trillion rials, it said, adding that further investigations are underway.

Yemen ceasefire talks start aboard UN ship

A United Nations-appointed committee tasked with monitoring a ceasefire in the Yemeni city of Hudaydah has started its new meeting aboard a ship anchored off the key port city because representatives of forces running Yemen have refused to enter areas controlled by the House of Saud regime-led aggressor forces.

The Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), which is chaired by retired

Dutch General Patrick Cammaert, gathers members of Yemen's former regime and the country's popular Ansarullah (Houthi) movement.

According to a UN statement, Cammaert boarded the vessel on Saturday and picked up representatives of the former regime at a rendezvous in the Red Sea before returning to Hudaydah to await Ansarullah envoys, who arrived later on Sunday.



Rarely has the world been so challenged by U.S. hubris

ho knows, but it may be that the people of Venezuela, beset with upheaval and possible civil war if not an invasion by the U.S. or proxies, will become the sacrificial lambs who finally sink the U.S. thoroughly in world opinion and the U.S. could get bogged down there to some extent the way they did in Vietnam and Iraq, not to mention the real costs in money and lives.

Maduro may well fight, it's just hard to say how MUCH support he has in his country, but a recent poll suggests that he has a majority of the country behind him, at least to the extent that Venezuala's people despise the U.S coup attempt. And it does appear that many Americans are not, and would not be, keen on seeing Trump ignite another war.

Trump, under the thumb of the troika of Pence, Bolton and Pompeo (and other Neocons like Eliot Abrams, who has been tasked with directing the coup in Venezuela), lurches from one dramatic, hysterical move to the next, including yet another treaty abrogation, the INF, which regulated some missile defense balances between the U.S. and Russia.

National security advisor to Trump, John Bolton, has proven his complete insanity (as if further proof were needed) by threatening to send Nicolas Maduro to the U.S. prison base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, if Maduro does not quietly retire and leave Venezuela. It would make sense for Maduro's Cuban allies to shut down the Guantanamo base and reclaim the far east of Cuba, whatever the reaction. Imagine, if you will, war on Cuba, too, and never forget the Bay of Pigs debacle decades ago, a losing bid to topple Fidel Castro.

Caracas has anyway committed the ultimate "sin" — really by attempting to bypass the U.S. dollar and trade its resources for other assets or currencies, perhaps even the "Petro". But the attack on Maduro at bottom also constitutes an attack on Eurasian integration between key countries: Russia, China, Iran and Turkey, all of whom are, to one degree or another, trading or beginning to trade without the fiat dollar.

The ambiguous future of European Union

By Hanif Ghafari
TEHRAN — Economic, security, social and political crises in Europe continue. On the other hand, the next four months will be the European Parliamentary elections: elections that are expected to be successful in those nationalist and extremist groups.

Under these circumstances, the "future of the European Union" has no clear prospect! Many analysts and experts in the field of international relations are cautious about the political existence of the European Union and the Eurozone.

Meanwhile, the political situation of European leaders is not clear. What is happening today in France, Germany and the United Kingdom reflects this fact. Although French President Emmanuel Macron has withdrawn from the fuel tax laws, the "Yellow Vests" continue to follow their demands of the Elysees Palace, taking out to the streets of Paris and other cities. Indeed, what is happening in Europe? Is "the collapse of the United Europe" still an "abstract idea"? Or has it become an "objective reality" under the influence of past years' events in Europe? In this regard, there are some points that should be taken into consideration:

1-As emphasized at the beginning of this note, The European Union is now under a critical pressure! The constant political, social and security crises have raised the vulnerability of this block. On the other hand, European leaders have clearly lost control over issues such as "Brexit" and "European economic crisis". It shouldn't be forgotten that ten years of austerity policies and a reduction in the general budgets of the Eurozone member states had bad results for the European citizens, and the signs of the economic crisis can be still seen throughout Europe.

2-Many European leaders feel incapable of solving existing crises. It should be noted that EU leaders like Merkel and Macron do not have a common understanding of what is going on in this series! On the other hand, if the nationalist and anti-European parties achieve absolute or relative victory in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, the situation in the European Union and the eurozone will become harder.

UN believes MBS prime suspect in Khashoggi murder

An investigative team led by the United Nations (UN) believes the House of Saud regime's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, MBS as he is also known, is the prime suspect in the state-sponsored assassination of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey, an adviser to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says.

Yasin Aktay made the remark on Friday following a meeting with the UN investigative team that is probing the brutal murder of Khashoggi inside Saudi regime's consulate in Istanbul last

The team, led by Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, arrived in Turkey on Monday to probe Khashoggi's killing.

She held talks with Turkish foreign and just ministers and the prosecutor in the case.

"The UN team considers the crown prince of Saudi Arabia the main person responsible for the killing of Khashoggi. The team held a number of meetings in Turkey, including with Khashoggi's fiancé, and she (Callamard) also intends to listen to the audio recordings related to the crime," Aktay, the Turkish presidential adviser, told the Turkish NTV broadcaster.

Callamard has been barred from the Saudi regime consulate in Istanbul, where she had requested access to as part of the investigation.

Omer Celik, a spokesman for Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalk?nma Partisi), has denounced the Saudi move to prevent the UN team's entry into the consulate as "a scandal."

Khashoggi — a late but vocal critic of Crown Prince Mohammed — was killed and his body was dismembered by a Saudi hit squad after being lured into the consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018

Turkey, which said it was in possession of audio evidence of Khashoggi's murder soon after he failed to exit the consulate, has indirectly suggested that Mohammed ordered his killing. The Washington Post, for which Khashoggi was a columnist, reported in November last year that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) had also concluded that Mohammed ordered his killing.



Royan pioneering infertility treatment in Iran

Royan Institute is a public non-profit organization which is affiliated to the academic center for education, culture and research. Established in 1991, Royan is a research institute for reproductive biomedicine and infertility treatments.

According to Royan official website the institute also acts as leader of stem cell research and is one of the best clinics for infertility treatment. It has 46 scientific members and 186 lab technicians.

Royan consists of three research institutes including Royan Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Technology, Royan Institute for Reproductive Biomedicine and Royan Institute for Biotechnology.



Space technology, future market for Iranian entrepreneurs

bout half a century ago, human left footprints on the moon. For years, space technology was associated in the mind of public with launching satellites, astronauts in their weird costume exploring other planets. Space technology was unreachable and done behind closed doors!

However today the space is not limited to looking to stars and space centers. Nations face private funding, advances in technology and growing private-sector interest in space technology, which make it different from what we previously perceived.

Iran, as a country which has made several achievements in space technology in recent decades, is not an exception. Now, the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) promotes space-based businesses as one of the main factors for development of the country.

In an interview with YJC, the director of ISA space-based businesses development department Shabnam Yazdani said that the agency encouraged entrepreneurs to provide space-based creative solutions for challenges and problems Iran deals with.

She said that ISA provides necessary data as well as some ideas for entrepreneurs to start their business for solving problems.

Smart agriculture and space technology

The space-based business and technology have a great impact on smart agriculture, which leads to a better process from seeding to harvesting.

The space-based business and startups can give consult to farmers in order to modify their cropping pattern and farm management, which leads to improvement of their harvest and increase its quality.

In mid-January, an agreement was signed between the agriculture research and development technology fund and ISA, in order to provide some facilities and data for the startups active in the field of smart agriculture.

However the startups need some meteorological data as well as some information provided by drones for their services and the government can lay infrastructure for them to use these data. >10

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Defense Ministry to produce 44 modern civil vessels

POLITICS TEHRAN — Under a contract with the Transport Ministry, the Defense Ministry is going to manufacture 44 advanced vessels for civil purposes.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami and Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami on Sunday signed the \$500 million contract, which aims to cut Iran's reliance on foreign countries to supply its needs for civil vessels, Tasnim reported.

According to the contract, the Defense Ministry will manufacture various types of vessels with civil application, including rescue and relief vessels, dredging ships, fireboats, marine pollution skimmers, as well as passenger boats for promoting tourism industry.



Economy minister hails Basij's efforts to bypass sanctions

POLITICS TEHRAN — Economy Minister Farhad Dejpasand said on Sunday that Basij is tasked with a heavy responsibility to bypass the enemies' economic sanctions and thwart their anti-Iran plots.

Speaking to Basij commanders, Dejpasand said Iran is suffering from the sanctions and Basij is expected to devise timely plans to reduce the effects of sanctions, IRNA reported.

Basij played a significant economic role during the eight years of Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the 1980s, the minister added.



Minister: Satellite launches not linked to missile program

POLITICS TEHRAN — nication Technology Mine s k ister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said on Sunday that Iran's satellite launches have never been meant for military purposes or linked to the Islamic Republic's missile program.

Addressing a ceremony in Tehran to mark National Space Technology Day, Azari Jahromi said some Western states lie by claiming that Iran aims to develop its missile program through launching satellites, Tasnim reported.

Two international organizations monitored Iran's space program and confirmed that the program is meant for peaceful purposes, but the space program has been targeted with sanctions, he added.



Russian diplomats discuss Syria, Yemen with Jaberi Ansari

POLITICS TEHRAN — A delegation of ranking Russian diplomats visited Tehran on Saturday to hold talks with Hossein Jaberi Ansari, a senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister for political affairs, about the latest developments in Syria and Yemen.

The Russian delegation included Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin, Tasnim reported.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the upcoming conference in Russia's Sochi on the settlement of the Syrian crisis, as well as obstacles to the formation of a Syrian constitutional committee.



MPs praise Air Force war games

TEHRAN — 223 members of the Iranian parliament have lauded the Air Force for holding Fadaian-e Harim-e Velayat (Defenders of Velayat Sanctuary) drills in central Iran.

In a Sunday statement, the lawmakers pointed that the two-day military exercises were aimed to boost the Army's defense capability and to send the message of peace to regional countries, Mehr reported.

We, the members of the Majlis, appreciate the sincere efforts and indefatigable endeavors of commanders, officers and other staff of the Army's Air force for the successful holding of the war games," the statement read.



📙 Iran was hit hard whenever it trusted Americans: ex-diplomat

TEHRAN — Sadeq Kharrazi, a former Iranian diplomat, believes whenever Iran trusted the Americans it suffered a severe blow, ISNA reported on Sunday.

He said the United States has harmed Iran in different ways, including through sanctions and supporting Iraq when it waged a war against Iran back in the 1980s.

Kharrazi, who was Iran's ambassador to France from 2002 to 2006, also said since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has been pursuing a confidence building approach in its foreign policy with the aim of expanding relations with other countries.

"Our foreign policy has always been based on common sense and saying otherwise is ahistorical," he concluded.

All should laud IRGC efforts: Larijani

POLITICS TEHRAN — Majlis d e s k Speaker Ali Larijani on Sunday called on the people and authorities to appreciate the efforts made by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), saying the IRGC has played an "effective role" in countering threats and protecting Iran's border areas.

He made the remarks at the Combat Casualty Care (CCC) exercise, which kicked off earlier in the day to showcase the IRGC's tactical surgery systems, rapid health response systems, field hospitals, expandable hospital containers, and other medical equipment for rendering relief and assistance to the injured.

"Today, I became familiar with a small part of the Guards' casualty care capabilities and those who are active in this field as well as the valuable services of the Guards Ground Force," Larijani said, Mehr reported.

The IRGC's heavy responsibility toward the Islamic Revolution is one of its characteristics since it was formed, he said, hailing the IRGC's high morale in serving the people.



The speaker further underlined the necessity of broadcasting the IRGC's services to the country, saying, "It is unfair if such massive amount of services does not receive sufficient reportage.

"I personally saw the efforts and sacrifices the Guards made in the aftermath of [last year's] earthquake in the country's western region," he recalled.

Larijani was referring to the November $2017\,earth quake\,in\,Kermanshah\,province$ which left over 600 people dead and destroyed hundreds of residential buildings. The quake measured 7.3 on the Richter scale.

The parliament speaker went to say that the IRGC has been doing valuable works in providing services to people in underdevel-

oped regions.

The IRGC is still filled with the spirit of the first days of the Islamic Revolution, added Larijani.

Larijani called on other bodies such as the Health Ministry and Budget and Planning Organization to help reduce poverty and help the IRGC in this mission.

U.S. will fail to help Israel if Zionists start new war: general

Hossein Salami says Zionists will get close to death if they start war

POLITICS TEHRAN — Brigadier General Hossein Salami, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps second-in-command, has warned that the Zionists in the occupied territories will make themselves close to death if they start a new war.

"If the Zionists make a mistake and do something that wage a new war, they should be sure that this war will end in their elimination," he said in a televised interview aired late Saturday.

He noted that the Zionists should not think that the United States can save them if they take adventurous moves.

'The Zionists should not rely on the U.S., because they will be annihilated before the U.S. arrives and should search for cemeteries outside the occupied Palestine," he said.

Elsewhere, he pointed to Iran's missile power and said that the country's missile program is "deterrent" and non-negotiable.

The IRGC official also noted that Iran has no technical

limitation to increase range of its missiles or their precision. Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, said on Tuesday that "Iran has no scientific limitation to extend the range of its military missiles" however, Iran has "no will not the will to extend the range of missiles based on its defense doctrine"

Iran is working to increase the "precision" of its missiles, remarked Shamkhani, who served as defense minister during the Khatami administration.

Military threats against Iran have always backfired: IRGC chief

POLITICS TEHRAN—Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Mohammad Ali Jafari said on Saturday that posing military threats against Iran has always backfired.

"Experience has proved that military threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran backfires," he said during a conference.

The top commander said that in the economic and cultural wars which have been waged against Iran by the Trump adminis-

tration, officials should focus on solving the people's problems.

He also attached great importance to the people's role in resolving the problems and eaving behind the current situation.

"The youths have been able to solve problems in all areas through creativity,' the general remarked.

Despite repeated confirmation by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran is abiding by the terms of the 2015 nuclear

agreement, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew his country from the international deal and ordered sanctions against Iran. Trump labeled new sanctions on Iran as the "toughest ever"

The IRGC chief also said, "Enemy has entered ideological area and has targeted our people-based system. The motivated youths should take action in responding such threats.

In remarks in December 2018, Jafari

said Iran has reached a degree of power that the U.S. does not dare to consider military option against it.

"It's been for many years that we have distanced from security threats and no superpower imagines aggression against us," he noted.

The top military official though the U.S. has launched an economic war against Iran, the situation in the country is far much better than the war-stricken regional countries.

Youths are Iran's greatest asset, scholar says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Modjtaba Sadria, a prominent scholar, has said that the people between ages of 25 to 40 are the main social group in the Iranian society which form the main wealth of the country.

"Today, for the first time over the last 200 years, the youths between 25 and 40 years of age are the main group in the society. Today, our society has the youngest and most qualified population. It is a great and extraordinary situation," he said during a speech at a conference in Isfahan on Thursday.

He said the youths and their capabilities should be used to boost the country's economy and counter the

"We should invest on our youths," the scholar suggested. Sadria added, "We should accept this fact that we should not rely on oil revenues anymore. The youths should be allowed to create jobs through relying on their own abilities and creativity.

It is through small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that Iran can improve its economic situation, the scholar pointed out.

You have heard about Japanese corporations such as TOYOTA, NISSAN, MAZDA and SONY. The biggest
Japanese corporations constitute only 7 percent of Japan's agreements and organizations are "cry of desperation".



economy. Small and medium enterprises form the main part of Japan's economy," he explained.

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

Trump's policies are cry of U.S. desperation' Sadria also said that policies being adopted by U.S.

"I believe that Mr. Trump is not an expression of the U.S. power. I deeply believe that he is cry of desperation of the U.S.," remarked Sadria, a psychoanalyst. He added, "A year before the end of the Second World

War, the representatives of Britain and the U.S. held a meeting in Bretton Woods and organized the international system after the war. This system includes the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund." However, he said, the U.S. is aware that its influence

on international affairs through these organizations has been weakened and that is why Trump decides to quit international deals and organizations such as the Iran nuclear deal (officially called the JCPOA) and UNESCO. "The U.S. failures and inability should be an oppor-

tunity and lead us to become more capable. We should want to become capable. The U.S. lack of power should lead us to strengthen our greatest wealth which is our youths," he noted.

During his presidency, Trump quit a number of international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and Trans-Pacific Partnership, the UN Human Rights Council. UNESCO. JCPOA. On February 1. the Trump administration also announced that the U.S. will leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Marzieh Hashemi briefs journalists on her detention in U.S.

Press TV anchor Marzieh Hashemi, who has been recently released from a U.S. jail and arrived in Iran, has talked to reporters about her days in detention without any charge. Hashemi, who arrived at Tehran's

Imam Khomeini International Airport on Wednesday night, is an American-born Muslim convert who has lived in Iran for years. She was detained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at St. Louis Lambert International Airport in Missouri on January 13 while in the U.S. to visit her ill brother and other family members.

She read a statement on Saturday before speaking to Iranian and foreign reporters at the Press TV headquarters in Tehran.

In her statement, she expressed gratitude to Press TV staff, Iranian officials and "tens of thousands of people across the world, whom I have never met, who mobilized to raise awareness of my imprisonment.'

She also criticized her ill-treatment in the prison and slammed the U.S. for the so-called material witness law that allows detention of innocent people without any charges.

"It is a highly controversial law. For almost two decades, this law has been used to systematically target innocent Muslims in America, including political activists, the statement said.

It added that rights organizations and even the United States' own court of laws have called the law "unconstitutional and illegal.

Later in her press conference, Hashemi further talked about reasons behind her imprisonment, saying there was nothing significant or specific about it and that it was merely "a fishing expedition."

Asked about the details of her charge, she once again reiterated that she faced no charges.

"There were no charges. I was never charged. That's the whole point. I was shackled and taken there as a material witness and I answered the questions they asked. As for ... giving the evidence, there was nothing to give anything about, Hashemi said.

She added that "it was just a matter of trying to intimidate me," stressing there was "nothing concrete" and that "there was no case to give evidence about."

Hashemi was released on January 23 after some 10 days of detention without charge at a Washington, DC, facility.

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

Hashemi's detention prompted condemnation in the U.S. and abroad, sparking rallies in several countries, including the United States.

In an address during demonstrations in Washington, DC., Hashemi recounted her ordeal during her time in jail and mistreatment by the American justice system. (Source: Press TV)

Bahrain's senior cleric Sheikh Isa **Qassim visits Mashhad**

Bahrain's most prominent Shia cleric Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim has arrived in the Iranian holy city of Mashhad after visiting the revered Iraqi city of Najaf.

According to Almuqawim, the institute for preserving and publishing works by the senior cleric, Sheikh Qassim arrived in Mashhad, which serves as the spiritual capital of Iran, on Saturday.

Late in December, the top cleric trave led from the UK to Najaf, where he visited the holy shrine of Imam Ali (peace be upon him), the first Shia imam, after nearly half a century since his last visit.

He also met with Iraq's top Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Ammar Hakim.

Under house arrest since May 2017, the Bahraini cleric was flown to Britain in July 2018 for medical treatment.

Bahrain Foreign Minister Khalid Al Khalifah wrote on Twitter at the time that King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa had allowed Sheikh Isa Qassim to travel to the United Kingdom for medical care.

The online newspaper Rai al-Youm had quoted informed medical sources in London as saying that the top cleric is suffering from cancer, adding that the disease is in an early stage.

Late in 2017, Sheikh Qassim was taken to a private hospital in critical condition and underwent surgery in February.

The Al Khalifah regime seeks to si-

lence the opposition and put its leaders in jail, send them into exile or revoke their citizenship.

On May 21 last year, a Bahraini court convicted Sheikh Qassim of illegal collection of funds and money laundering, and sentenced him to one year in jail suspended for three years. It also ordered him to pay \$265,266 in fines in a ruling which sparked widespread demonstrations across the kingdom.

Bahraini authorities stripped the cleric of his citizenship on June 20, 2016. They later dissolved the Islamic Enlightenment Institution founded by Sheikh Qassim as well as the opposition al-Risala Islamic

Anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain regularly since February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khal $if ah\, dy \overset{\circ}{n} as ty\, relinquis\overset{\circ}{h}\, power\, and\, allow$ a just system representing all Bahrainis

to be established. Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the crackdown.

(Source: press TV)

Turkey: Countries supporting Guaido fuel Venezuela crisis

Trump says sending military to Venezuela 'an option'

Turkey's foreign minister said on Sunday countries which have recognized Venezuela's self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaido were fueling Venezuela's troubles and punishing millions of its people.

Turkey has backed Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro in contrast with NATO allies the United States and Canada, and several right-leaning Latin American countries which have recognized Guaido's move to declare himself interim leader.

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, who has strengthened economic and political ties with Caracas, called Maduro last month to urge him to stand tall against what he described as "anti-democratic developments".

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Sunday the countries which were supporting Guaido should instead have worked for negotiations to resolve Venezuela's crisis.

"There is a problem in a country, there is a spark that can turn into a fire at any moment. In this case, they should have contributed to the solution of the problem through dialogue, Cavusoglu told reporters in Istanbul.

"But is that how they handled things? No. On the contrary, the event was fueled from the outside. The people of Venezuela are

being punished by such approach," he said. Cavusoglu said Turkey had tried to initiate talks on Venezuela last year between Washington and Latin American countries. "But today, none of the countries that have taken these steps against Venezuela has sought dialogue."

Disagreement over Venezuela could become another serious point of friction between Washington and Ankara, which are also divided over policy in Syria, Iran sanctions and Turkey's plans to buy Russian missile defense system.



On Friday Marshall Billingslea, U.S. assistant secretary for terrorist financing at the Treasury, held talks with Turkish officials about sanctions on Venezuela and Iran.

A senior U.S. official said last week Washington was looking at Turkey's commercial activities with Venezuela and would take action "if we assess a violation of our sanctions".

Turkish officials say Ankara's trade is in accordance with international laws and regulations. In his remarks on Sunday Cavusoglu also reiterated Turkish criticism of what Ankara sees as a weak international response to the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul

"Recently Western countries - you know they are very sensitive about human rights, trying to teach everyone about human rights are silent," he said suggesting they were more interested in protecting commercial ties with Riyadh.

"They are making deals and selling arms," Cavusoglu said.

sending military to Venezuela 'an option'

U.S. President Donald Trump Sunday said that sending the military to Venezuela was "an option" and that he had turned down President Nicolas Maduro's request for a meeting.

"Certainly it's something that's on the it's an option," Trump said in an interview

broadcast on the CBS "Face the Nation" program. "Well he has requested a meeting and I've turned it down because we're very far along in the process.'

France, Austria to recognize

Austria and France Sunday announced they will recognize Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president if Nicolas Maduro does not announce a pres-

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said on Twitter his country would acknowledge Guaido if Maduro does not respond to the European Union's call for a free and fair presidential election.

"I just had a very good phone call with President @jguaido," Kurz tweeted. "He has our full support to restore democracy in Venezuela." Venezuelans had suffered too long from mismanagement and a disregard for the rule of law under Maduro, he said.

Kurz's message on Sunday echoed a statement by France's European Affairs Minister Nathalie Loiseau, who dismissed Maduro's election proposal as a "farce."

"If by tonight [Sunday night], [President] Maduro does not commit to organizing presidential elections, then France will consider Juan Guaido as legitimate to organize them in his place and we will consider him as the interim president until legitimate elections in Venezuela [take place]," Loiseau told LCI television Sunday.

President Maduro proposed an early parliamentary election Saturday, seeking to shore up his crumbling rule after a senior general defected to the opposition and tens of thousands thronged the streets in protest at his government.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. sees contours of peace accord with Taliban to end war in Afghanistan

The United States and the Taliban have sketched the outlines for an eventual peace accord to end 17 years of war in Afghanistan, a U.S. special envoy said on Monday, but there was no sign the insurgent group had accepted key

"We have a draft of the framework that has to be fleshed out before it becomes an agreement," U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad told the New York Times in an interview in Kabul after six days of talks with the Taliban.

'The Taliban have committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or

There was no sign, however, that the Taliban had agreed to U.S. demands such as committing to a ceasefire before the withdrawal of U.S. troops or that it engage in direct talks with the U.S.-backed government in Kabul, analysts said.

"While the progress in Doha has been the most significant to date, reaching a final agreement is far from guaranteed, as (these) two major sticking points could still derail the process," Ahmad Majidyar, a fellow at the Middle East Institute, wrote on the Washington think tank's website.

Another U.S. official in Kabul, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, described "significant progress" in the talks in Qatar, but said more negotiations were needed on the issue of the timing of the ceasefire, which looms as a sticking point in the next round of talks on Feb. 25.

Taliban negotiators want a full withdrawal before a ceasefire, but the Americans want the reverse, the official said. "Of course we don't seek a permanent military presence

in Afghanistan," the official said. "Our goal is to help bring peace in Afghanistan and we would like a future partnership, newly defined with a postpeace government," the official said. "We would like to leave

U.S. forces in 2001 toppled the country's hardline leaders for harboring the al Qaeda militants responsible for the Sept.



11 attacks that killed about 3,000 people.

A senior Trump administration official who also spoke on condition of anonymity said the Taliban would have to agree to talk to the government in Kabul to make a lasting deal.

The president has made clear that his priority is ending the war in Afghanistan with an agreement that ensures the country never again serves as a base for terrorists to attack the U.S. or any other country," the official said.

"To achieve such an agreement, the Taliban must engage with other Afghans and all sides must agree to resolve their differences through peaceful means," he added.

Taliban officials have repeatedly refused to talk to the Afghan government, which they regard as a U.S. puppet, throwing into question how effective a peace deal could be. The Taliban do want, however, to join an interim govern-

A State Department spokesman said that while the talks were "positive," no agreement was reached and "a number

of issues remain on the table ... including an intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire.

These are integral to a negotiated political settlement," said the spokesman on condition of anonymity.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan told reporters outside the Pentagon he had been briefed on the talks but had not been asked to plan for a full withdrawal

"It's encouraging," Shanahan said of the talks. Asked whether he had been tasked with planning a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan, he said: "I have not."

Despite the presence of U.S.-led foreign forces training, advising and assisting their Afghan counterparts, the Taliban control nearly half of Afghanistan and stage near-daily attacks against the government and its security forces.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said last week that 45,000 members of the country's security forces had been killed since he took office in 2014.

A U.S. official said in December that President Donald Trump was planning to withdraw more than 5,000 of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the latest sign of his thinning patience with America's longest war and overseas military interventions. Trump last month decided to pull U.S. troops out of Syria as well.

Both U.S. officials and the Taliban hailed progress after the talks with Khalilzad ended on Saturday. Taliban sources told Reuters that the United States had agreed to withdraw foreign troops within 18 months of the signing of a pact, but the U.S. official said a timeline was not

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

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

(Source: Reuters)

Algeria ruling coalition backs Bouteflika, 81, for fifth term

Algeria's ruling coalition named President Abdelaziz Bouteflika as its candidate in elections slated for April, although the ailing incumbent has yet to officially confirm he will run.

"The parties of the presidential coalition nominate Abdelaziz Bouteflika for the upcoming presidential elections," the four coalition partners said in a statement on Saturday.

The meeting was attended by Mouad Bouchareb, speaker of the lower house of parliament and coordinator of Bouteflika's National Liberation Front, as well as by Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, head of the National Rally for Democracy.

The leader of the Rally for Hope in Algeria party Amar Ghoul and Amara Benyounes, who heads the Popular Algerian Movement, also attended.

In power since 1999, Bouteflika, 81, uses a wheelchair and has rarely been seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013. For the last presidential election in 2014, Bouteflika only

declared his intention to run a few days ahead of the deadline. Prime Minister Ouyahia has said "there is no doubt" the president will seek a fifth termon April 18.

Ouyahia said earlier this week that Bouteflika's health was not "an obstacle" to performing his duties as president. Presidential candidates have until midnight on March 3 (23:00

GMT) to submit their applications. Retired General Ali Ghediri, 64, was the first to announce his

candidacy after the presidency set the election date. Algeria's main Islamic party, the Movement for the Society of Peace, will also take part in the poll, backing its candidate Dr

Abderrazak Makri. The country's oldest opposition party, the Front of Socialist

Forces, announced on January 25 that it would not field a candidate and called for an "active, intensive and peaceful boycott"

On Friday, the secular Rally for Culture and Democracy party said it would also boycott due to its objection to a fifth term for the ailing Bouteflika.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Netanyahu's Likud uses Trump photo in Israeli election billboard

A giant billboard of a smiling Donald Trump shaking hands with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu loomed over a main entrance to Tel Aviv Sunday, part of the Israeli leader's re-elec-

Trump is popular in Israel because of his tough policies towards the Palestinians and Iran and his transfer last May of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which he recognized as Israel's capital in a break from long-standing U.S. policy.

'Netanyahu. In another league," read the Hebrew-language billboard, in a swipe at the caliber of the veteran prime minister's opponents in the April 9 national election.

A spokesman for Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, whose logo adorns the sign over Tel Aviv's busy Ayalon highway, did not immediately respond to a Reuters query on whether the White House had authorized it to use the photograph.

Netanyahu is favorite to win the election but opinion polls show one of his toughest challengers, former general Benny Gantz, making gains.

The prime minister is facing possible charges in three graft cases. He denies any wrongdoing and has called the investigations a witch-hunt. On Friday, Israel's attorney general said there was no legal reason to prevent him from announcing, before the election, any intention to indict Netanyahu on corruption charges should he decide such a move was warranted.

Formal indictment in court would depend on pre-trial hearings, likely to be held only after the poll.

(Source: Reuters)

Thousands join protest in support for Turkey hunger strikers

Thousands of protesters Sunday joined a rally in Istanbul called by a pro-Kurdish party to show support for hunger strikes against prison conditions of Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The protesters gathered at a square in Bakirkoy on the European side of Istanbul, with police tightening security measures. "I am saluting my friends resisting in prisons. They are our honor, they are not alone," Fahit Ulas, a supporter of the Peoples'

Democratic Party (HDP). "If needed we will sacrifice our bodies for this cause. We have no fear," he added.

Some 250 prisoners all over Turkey have launched hunger strikes in support of HDP lawmaker Leyla Guven, who wants to pressure the Turkish government to allow Ocalan to hold regular meetings with his lawyers and family members.

Ocalan, one of the founders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been serving a life sentence on a prison island off Istanbul since his 1999 capture.

The 55-year-old Guven was jailed in January 2018 for her criticism of Turkey's military operation against a Syrian Kurdish

Last week, a Turkish court in Kurdish majority city Diyarbakir freed her under judicial supervision. Guven, who entered the 88th day of her hunger strike on Sunday, launched the protest move on Nov. 8 while in jail.

She told AFP in an interview on Wednesday that she would press on with the hunger strike at home.

Garo Paylan, an HDP MP who joined the Istanbul protest, said choosing a hunger strike was a "last remedy," hoping Guven's demand would be met as soon as possible.

"We want this demand to be fulfilled before any death," he told AFP.

In 2012, hundreds of Kurdish prisoners ended a 68-day hunger

strike after Ocalan urged them to do so. The HDP party remains under the scrutiny of Turkish authorities, which accuse it of links to the PKK. Several of its MPs are behind bars, including former party leader Selahattin Demirtas.

Queen Elizabeth to be evacuated in case of Brexit unrest

British officials have revived Cold War emergency plans to relocate the royal family should there be riots in London if Britain suffers a disruptive departure from the European Union next month, two Sunday newspapers

"These emergency evacuation plans have been in existence since the Cold War, but have now been repurposed in the event of civil disorder following a no-deal Brexit," the Sunday Times said, quoting an unnamed source from the government's Cabinet Office, which handles sensitive administrative issues.

The Mail on Sunday also said it had learnt of plans to move the royal family, including Queen Elizabeth, to safe locations away from

Britain's government is struggling to get parliamentary support for a Brexit transition agreement with the EU before the departure date of March 29, and the government and businesses are preparing contingency plans

for a 'no-deal' Brexit.

Business groups have warned of widespread disruption if there are lengthy delays to EU imports due to new customs checks, and

even possible shortages of food and medicine. Last month an annual speech by the 92-year-old queen to a local women's group was widely interpreted in Britain as a call for politicians to reach agreement over Brexit.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, a Conservative lawmaker and keen supporter of Brexit, told the Mail on Sunday he believed the plans showed unnecessary panic by officials over a no-deal Brexit, as senior royals had remained in London during World War Two bombing.

But the Sunday Times said an ex-police officer formerly in charge of royal protection, Dai Davies, expected Queen Elizabeth would be moved out of London if there was unrest.

"If there were problems in London, clearly you would remove the royal family away from those key sites," Davies was quoted as saying.

EU 'irresponsible' to refuse to reopen Brexit deal It would be irresponsible for the European

Union to refuse to reopen negotiations over Britain's exit deal, British trade minister Liam Fox said in an interview aired Sunday. British Prime Minister Theresa May has

said she is seeking changes to the Withdrawal Agreement she agreed with Brussels last year in order to win the support of parliament. The EU has said the deal cannot be renegotiated.

"Are they really saying that they would rather not negotiate and end up in a 'no-deal' position?" Fox told Sky News in a pre-recorded interview. "It is in all our interests to get to that agreement and for the EU to say we are not going to even discuss it seems to me to be quite irresponsible." With less than two months until Britain is due to leave the European Union on March 29, the opposition Labor Party has said it is now inevitable that the government will have to request an extension to the Article 50

exit negotiation period.

Fox, who has previously spoken out strongly against delaying the exit date, said extending the negotiations without a deal in place would not solve anything, but it was "a very different argument" if Britain just needed more time to get the necessary legislation in place for a smooth exit.

He is the second senior minister to suggest such a delay may be needed, after Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said on Thursday Britain may need time to get legislation through.

"There is a big difference between if we had an agreement and we need some time to get the legalities done, that is one thing," Fox said. "I think to extend simply because we hadn't reached an agreement would not provide any impetus for that agreement to be reached."

with leaving the bloc without an agreement but it would not be in the country's interests.

Fox said Britain would "be able to deal"

(Source: agencies)

TEDPIX	157355.2
IFX	1909.47

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

$\mathbf{C}\mathbf{U}$	RREI	NCI	ES

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
Platinium	\$828.89oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

BRIEF



Tehran hosting intl. exhibition of airport, related industries

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Tehran is hosting Iran's 4th

d e s k International Exhibition of Airmont Airmland S k International Exhibition of Airport, Airplane Flight, Industries & Related Equipment until Tuesday, IRIB

The four-day event, which kicked off on Saturday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, is mainly aimed at boosting cooperation between the producers and service offering units of the airport sector.

It is also a platform to showcase new technology as well as domestically manufactured products.

Thousands of German SMEs eager to trade with Iran: German official

1 -> He called the launch of this transaction channel a positive step and said, "Expecting the trade exchanges with Iran to be completely stopped is clearly a mistake.

According to the official, the U.S. is trying to halt all EU trade with Iran through pressuring European companies not to conduct

"The U.S. is trying to create a sense of threat among European companies to force them to choose between trading with Iran

or the U.S." he said. "Sometimes, German businessmen, who conduct transactions with Iran, call me and ask if they will be arrested or tried if they travel to the U.S." Tockuss added.

General Motors says in talks to invest \$2.73b in Brazil till 2024

General Motors Co said on Saturday it is negotiating "feasibility conditions" to invest 10 billion reais (\$2.73 billion) in Brazil from 2020 to 2024, after having warned last month that new investments would depend on returning to profit.

of 13 billion reais between 2014 and 2019.



"As market leaders, we are taking on the responsibility of facing the challenges of competitiveness that the industry is experiencing in order to make a sustainable future possible for our businesses and the proper return to shareholders," said Carlos Zarlenga,

chief executive of GM Mercosul, in a statement. "We continue to work with unions, dealers, suppliers and the government in order to enable this new and additional 10 billion reais investment in the factories of São Caetano do Sul and São

José dos Campos," he added. Newspaper Valor Economico reported on Friday that General Motors Co was in talks to invest 9 billion reais (\$2.5 billion) in the state of Sao Paulo over the next three years in return for tax

GM has in recent weeks warned its employees in Brazil that "sacrifices" would be necessary for the company to return to profit in the country, raising concerns about layoffs or shuttered assembly lines. Last month, the carmaker told public officials and unions it was in talks with Sao Paulo state about

Valor reported that GM would invest in its product line until 2022, and then the following year, the company would start to enjoy tax rebates. Valor, which also reported that GM's losses in Brazil last year totaled 1 billion reais despite being the country's market leader, did not specify the exact amount GM would expect to generate in tax incentives

(Source: Reuters)

India's 2019 budget allocates \$21m to invest in Chabahar development

ECONOMY TEHRAN—The Indian d e s k government in its budget for 2019 has allocated 1.5 billion rupees (\$21 million) for development of Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar, the Financial Express reported on Saturday.

"For Chabahar port, New Delhi's key connectivity plan with Afghanistan and central Asia remained unchanged from the previous

year at Rs 150 crore", the report read. In October 2018, Iran, India and Afghanistan inked an agreement on transit of goods via Chabahar.

The agreement was signed in Tehran during the first meeting of coordination council of agreement on the establishment of an international transport and transit corridor among Iran, India and Afghanistan (Chabahar Agreement).

These three countries had signed a trilateral transit agreement in Tehran in May 2016, which allows them open new routes to connect among themselves via converting Chabahar Port into a transit hub bypassing

Pakistan. Then during the visit of the Iranian president to India in February 2018, the lease contract for Shahid Beheshti Port-Phase 1 was signed between Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) and India's Ports Global Limited (IPGL).

India then inaugurated a headquarters called India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ) at the port to help it commit to its part in the accord.

India's commercial operations began at Chabahar with the arrival of a Cyprus registered bulk carrier bearing 72,458 million tons of corn (imported from Brazil) at the port on December 30.

U.S.' attempt to halt Iran's trade with world futile

ECONOMY TEHRAN—"The U.S. sought to impede Iran's international trade by imposing cruel and unilateral sanctions on the country but our trade with the world is being done easily and we are not in lack of any type of basic goods," Mehdi Mirashrafi, the recently appointed head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), announced in a news conference, IRIB reported on Sunday.

"During the first 10 months of the present Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 - January 21, 2019), Iran exported \$36.3 billion of [non-oil] goods and imported



\$35.6 billion," Mirashrafi said, "which is equal to a positive trade balance of one billion dollars.'

'This happened under the conditions that the U.S. tried to avert our exports and impede imports," he added.

IMIDRO to inaugurate 10 industrialmining projects worth \$455m in 9 days

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian Mines and Mining **Industries Development and Renovation** Organization (IMIDRO) will put 10 industrial-mining projects worth 19.117 trillion rials (about \$455 million) into operation during the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).

IMIDRO Head Khodadad Gharibpour will inaugurate these projects in the southern province of Fars and southeastern province of Kerman, IMIDRO Public Relations Department announced on Sunday.

As reported, the projects will create

direct jobs for 1,933 persons.

IMIDRO has accomplishing semifinished projects as its top priority, the head of organization stressed on January 20.

Addressing the difficulties for financing such projects, Gharibpour, who is also the deputy industry minister, added that domestic mining sector has the capacity to absorb 16 quadrillion rials (about \$380 billion) of the wandering liquidity.

"Mining sector relies on domestic knowledge and production equipment so it will be least affected, in comparison with other sectors, by U.S.-led sanction,'

Eurozone economies: as Italy struggles how are other countries faring?

By Richard Partington

Italy's recession has raised doubts over the strength of the eurozone. Here is a health check on some of the key eurozone economies – and the UK.

Germany

The German economy has been flirting with recession in recent months, as vehicle emissions tests – introduced in the wake of the VW scandal – and a drop in car sales in China act as a drag on industrial output. While official figures are yet to be published, analysts believe the eurozone's largest economy probably contracted for the second quarter in a row in the final three months of 2018 – enough for a technical recession. Jobs growth has, however, remained strong. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates the economy expanded by 1.5% last year, while growth will slow to 1.3% in 2019.

France

The country's economy ended 2018 on a stronger footing than expected, despite the headwinds from the gilets jaunes anti-government protests, first started as a backlash against plans to

raise fuel taxes. Rising export volumes offset sluggish household consumption in the final quarter of the year. GDP rose by 0.3% in the three months to December, contributing to annual growth of 1.5%. The IMF forecasts growth will remain steady at that level in 2019.

United Kingdom

Like much of Europe, Britain has suffered from a downturn in manufacturing linked to new vehicle emissions tests and faltering demand in China. However, Brexit poses additional problems. Despite this, unemployment is the lowest since the mid-1970s and wage growth has accelerated to the highest level in a decade. After robust growth in the summer, GDP growth is expected to ease to about 0.3% in the fourth quarter as mounting Brexit fears act as a drag on activity. The IMF forecasts GDP growth of 1.4% in 2018 and 1.5% should Brexit pass smoothly. The Bank of England warns that a disorderly no-deal Brexit could trigger an immediate recession worse than the 2008 financial crisis.

Portugal Like Italy, Greece, Ireland and Spain, the Portuguese economy tanked during the 2011 eurozone debt crisis, with the country needing a bailout from the IMF and the EU as unemployment soared. Since then the socialist government under prime minister António Costa has overseen a robust recovery. Unemployment has fallen to 6.7%, below the eurozone average, while GDP growth of 1.8% in 2018 is forecast by the European commission, expected to moderate to 1.7% this year. However, debt-to-GDP levels - at 120% - remain the highest in the EU apart from Italy and Greece.

Still bearing the scars of a decade of austerity, Greece raised money last week on the bond markets for the first time since exiting its support programme from the EU and IMF late last year. Real wages remain as much as 3% below their pre-crisis peak, though GDP growth has gradually returned and is projected to reach 2.4% this year. Unemployment remains at an eye-watering 18.1%; however, it is falling slowly. Greece's prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, announced the first increase in the country's minimum wage in nearly a decade last week.

Ireland

In a dramatic recovery from the financial crisis, when its banks went into meltdown, Ireland is set to record the strongest growth in the EU for 2018. After an international bailout and unemployment hitting 16%, the jobless rate has dropped to 5.3% and is forecast to improve further. GDP growth is forecast at 6% for last year and 4.1% in 2019. However, there are risks from Brexit, given Ireland's close links to the UK, with the central bank warning that a no-deal scenario may knock four percentage points off the growth rate in the first year.

Spain

Now the strongest performer of the big four euro economies, Spain saw GDP growth of 0.7% over the final three months of 2018, up from 0.6% in the third quarter, in a marked contrast to the slowdown elsewhere. GDP in 2018 was 2.4%, versus average growth in the eurozone of 0.2%. But household spending is expected to ease - meaning growth is forecast to slow to about 2.2% this year, according to the IMF. (Source: The Guardian)

JPMorgan says 2020 might not be year to think about recession

The Federal Reserve's change in tone may mean investors should reconsider the timing of the investment cycle, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co.

That means investors shouldn't be driven by fears of recession for now, JP Morgan analysts said.

The Fed signaled last week that it's done raising rates for at least a little while, and that it'll be flexible in reducing bond holdings. The Fed's changes have already been welcomed by equity investors who boosted the S&P 500 2.5 percent over three sessions, while rates traders have been working to figure out the implications of the newfound caution about shrinking the balance sheet. Demand for gold has increased as well.

Apart from the immediate implications, the Fed's adjustments may warrant changes to JPMorgan's previous outline that investors should consider moving fully to neutral and tilting defensive in the second half of 2019 to reposition for "durable challenges in 2020," the firm said.

"If the Fed is less spooked by full employment, more tolerant of an inflation overshoot and less anxious to reach

restrictive policy, then 2020 might not be a year to think about recession and so late 2019/early 2020 would be premature to position defensively cross-asset," strategists led by John Normand wrote in a note dated Feb. 1.

Many global measures of assets are pricing in slower

economic growth than the current pace, the report said, including on risk premiums:

 $Cyclically \ oriented \ gauges \ like \ the \ S\&P \ 500, \ European$ Autos, Chinese Equities, Topix, Emerging-Market Equities and MSCI Mining "still seem to trade as if global growth were running about a percentage point weaker than its roughly 2.6% current pace," the report said.

JPMorgan arrived at the figure by regressing annual returns on a PMI index, comparing actual to predicted returns, and backing out from this risk premium an implied global growth rate.

This framework is quite crude in that a single variable like the global PMI explains only about half of the variation in most of these assets' returns," the strategists wrote. "But as the signal is consistent with those of other fundamental frameworks, we are comfortable asserting that even modest improvements in global growth can push markets higher, because there is no evidence of overvaluation.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Bitcoin makes a new record today

Bitcoin today has officially entered the longest bear market ever in the 10-year history of Bitcoin. But the crypto space has never been better with developments going at a fast pace.

Officially enters the longest bear market

The leading cryptocurrency has officially entered the bear market in the 10-year history of Bitcoin that has already seen three bear cycles. The longest one till now has been the last one between the period of December 2013 to January 2015 that lasted about 13 months.

Now, we have set the record of the longest bear market as after Bitcoin hit \$20.000 in mid-December 2017, BTC hit its 2018 lowest in December 2018 at \$3,150. In these past 411 days, Bitcoin has been on a

downward slope.
Though Bitcoin has seen the longest stretch of declining prices, it is expected to test even more lows and see more pain moving forward. Currently on an 82 percent decline from its 2017 peak, at the time of writing, Bitcoin has been trading at \$3,479, as per the data provided by Coinmarketcap. Bitcoin price is expected to hit bottom in 2019 but during that process, it can easily see \$2,000, \$1,700 or even by some analysts \$1000.

Now, all the eyes are on the Bitcoin reward halving coming in 2020 that could take the prices to another all-time high (ATH). We just might get to see some upward movement this year as well if history is any indication.

However, this bear market is different from the previous ones in the way that

development and innovation have never been this high in the crypto market.

But things haven't been better For the starters, Lightning Network is progressing at a fast pace with its network capacity rising to 629 BTC and 5,848 number of nodes. The second layer to make bitcoin and blockchain payments instant and scalable, it has more developments coming in 2019 that will make things even better.

Economies like Venezuela among others in South American are also moving to Bitcoin. Moreover, crypto ATMs around the world have crossed the 4000 mark.

Big players in terms of Bakkt by Nasdaq's parent company ICE and Fidelity Investments are constantly working on their crypto products and expect to launch this year.

Now. Twitter founder Jack Dorsey has yet again called for the Internet currency which he thinks could be Bitcoin. On Joe Rogan Experience podcast that has over 4.4 million subscribers, Dorsey stated, "I believe the Internet will have a native currency and I don't know if it's Bitcoin. I think it will be [Bitcoin] given all the tests it has been through and the principles behind it, how it was created. It was something that was born on the Internet, was developed on the Internet, was tested on the Internet, [and] it is of the Internet."

Restricted by no borders and restrained by no government or financial organization, Bitcoin has already paved the way for a decentralized economy.

(Source: CoinGape)

How Donald Trump plays havoc with OPEC policy

If timing is everything, why does OPEC seem to keep getting it so wrong? The group's 2019 oil output cuts got off to a flying start in January and they're going to get bigger, just as U.S. sanctions on Venezuela start to bite.

The problem for the producers, and their allies in the wider OPEC+ group, is that they don't wield nearly as much control over the market as some people accuse of them of doing. And that makes getting the timing of their actions right almost impossible. Unexpected external factors just seem to keep cropping up and, at least recently, many of them seem to originate with Uncle Sam.

The surge and then crash in oil prices in the second half of last year is a case in point.

Back in June, Donald Trump tweeted that he had asked Saudi Arabia's King Salman to boost the country's production to counter the "turmoil & disfunction [sic] in Iran and Venezuela." The king duly obliged, but prices kept on rising, driven in part by Trump's avowal to cut Iran's oil exports to zero when sanctions came into effect in early November.

Saudi production levels — which are pretty much locked in at least a month in advance, once customers have submitted their orders for how much they want to buy — hit a record 11.07 million barrels a day to coincide with the start of the Iran sanctions. Imagine their surprise when Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced that the U.S. had granted waivers from sanctions to eight of Iran's top customers, allowing them to



continue buying more than a million barrels a day of the nation's crude and condensate.

But that wasn't the only thing that tipped market sentiment from fear of shortage to concerns about a glut. Much less widely reported was the change in the assessment of U.S. production over the summer. An end-October report, which fed into November projections by the Energy Information Administration, showed output had increased by 670,000 barrels a day between June and August. Before those reports, the picture was

very different — the data had shown growth slowing to a crawl over the summer.

That may not seem like a huge amount in the grand scheme of things, but it was enough to add more than 45 million barrels of unanticipated supply in the five months to November. That's more than an entire year's worth of production from OPEC's smallest member, Equatorial Guinea.

Add that volume to historical balances and the output increases from Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, and it's no surprise that by November the market was starting to look oversupplied.

Roll forward to December, when OPEC and friends — after a hefty push from Russia — agreed to pare production by a combined 1.2 million barrels a day from the start of January, with a starting point that was, for most countries, their level in October.

No sooner had they started to implement those cuts than Trump slapped sanctions on exports of crude from Venezuela and purchases by the Latin American nation of the diluent it needs to blend with its heavy oil to make it flow. The U.S. was the only supplier last year of the heavy naphtha that works best. If President Nicolas Maduro can't find a replacement somewhere else — and he won't find one easily — the impact on the country's output will be swift.

Even if he does find willing suppliers, they will be much further away than the Gulf coast of America. Given that his country has little diluent in storage, a shortage is almost inevitable. Don't be surprised if Venezuela's production falls by another 500,000 barrels a day over the next couple of months under the present government. And if that government is replaced, don't expect the recovery to be as quick.

And when that recovery does come, don't be surprised if it follows hard on the heels of a decision by OPEC+ to raise output. If the timing goes awry again we can expect another roller-coaster year for oil prices.

ter year for oil prices.
(Source: Bloomberg)

Supply concerns push Dubai crude oil above ICE Brent for first time since Aug. 2015

 $Concerns \ over \ medium \ and \ heavy \ sour \ crude \ oil \ supply \ pushed$ $Dubai \ crude \ prices \ above \ ICE \ Brent \ on \ Friday \ for \ the \ first \ time$ $since \ August \ 2015, \ S\&P \ Global \ Platts \ data \ showed.$

Platts assessed April cash Dubai crude at \$60.85/b, one cent above the front-month ICE Brent assessment of \$60.84/b at 4:30pm Singapore time on Friday.

Cash Dubai was last above ICE Brent values on August 14, 2015, when it was assessed at a 27 cents/b premium to ICE Brent, Platts data showed.

Platts assessed April cash Oman crude at \$61.19/b on Friday, 35 cents/b above the front-month ICE Brent assessment at the Singapore close. The spread was the highest since July 31, 2015.

Market participants attributed the strength in the Middle East crude benchmarks to concerns over supply of medium and heavy crudes as a result of OPEC production cuts and uncertainties over the implications of U.S. sanctions on Venezuela.

"It is mainly supply driven... I think [the strength is] primarily [due to] tight sour [crude supply] due to uncertainty over Venezuela," a Singapore-based crude trader said. "That probably accelerated the process [of strengthening the Middle East sour crude benchmarks] a bit."

U.S. sanctions on Venezuela could block about 500,000



bpd of Venezuelan crude exports to the U.S., and potentially result in increased demand from U.S. refineries for substitute crude from the Middle East, diverting supplies that would typically go to Asia.

In the Middle East, OPEC and non-OPEC production cuts have tightened availability of medium and heavy sour crudes, traders said.

OPEC members, Russia and nine other non-OPEC allies have committed to slash a combined 1.2 million bpd from January to June in a bid to balance the market.

It is unclear how the output cuts will be distributed across the different grades that countries produce, but it is expected that heavier, sour grades will be cut more, as they usually trade at discounts to lighter, sweet crudes.

"[There are concerns about] Saudi cutting medium heavy [crude grades]," a crude trader said.

Traders also pointed to uncertainties over whether the U.S. will extend sanction waivers on Iranian crude granted to eight countries, including key buyers China and India. The waivers, which came into force on November 5, are due to end on May 5.

In addition, relatively strong gasoil and fuel oil margins have kept demand for medium heavy crudes firm, traders said. "Product cracks for gasoil and fuel oil are holding the

"Product cracks for gasoil and fuel oil are holding the margins," a crude oil trader with a North Asian refining company said.

The second-month gas oil swap crack averaged a premium of \$14.82/b to Dubai in January, up from \$14.66/b in December, Platts data showed.

The second-month 180 CST fuel oil swap crack to Dubai crude averaged minus \$0.61/b in January, slightly wider than minus \$0.58/b in December, down from a record high \$1.70/b premium in November, but still well above the 2018 average.

(Source: Platts)

Crude oil to be volatile as the Venezuela crisis deepens

Initially, crude oil prices were under pressure on concerns about the outlook for the global economy. The prospect of higher crude oil production in the U.S. due to the shale revolution kept crude oil prices under pressure.

Recently, the IEA projected that U.S. crude oil production would keep setting annual records until 2027 and will come at more than 14 million barrels per day through 2040.

However, short-covering after a sharp fall contained losses in crude oil prices. The ongoing tension in Venezuela also supported crude oil prices.

The U.S. imposed sanctions on Venezue-

la's state-run company PDVSA, leading to a sharp jump in crude oil prices on expectations of supply disruption. Both the API and EIA reported a minor build-up in inventories compared to what was expected. As a result, crude oil prices extended gains.

Sentiment was bullish in the second half of the week as Saudi Arabia's crude oil supply to the U.S. declined. But U.S. President Donald Trump said he may soon meet China's Xi Jinping to finalize details of a possible trade deal as he said negotiations in Washington were making progress.

This raised doubts about a trade deal and

contained gains in crude oil prices.

Base metals moved sharply higher this week on optimism about a trade deal between the U.S. and China. A steep decline in the dollar pushed base metals sharply higher.

LME nickel climbed to a three-month high on signs of increased demand. Investors worried that one of the world's largest producers, Brazilian miner Vale, could curtail nickel supply in an already tight market.

Hence, nickel was positive this week. However, aluminum was under pressure this week after the U.S. lifted sanctions on Russian company Rusal, removing the threat of a major supply disruption that has lingered since April last year.

The U.S. targeted Chinese technology giant Huawei, with charges of fraud, which put trade talks in an uncomfortable position. Base metals came under pressure as China's Caixin manufacturing PMI faltered sharply.

Ahead, the ongoing crisis in Venezuela is a matter of concern for the crude oil market. The escalation in the issue with the U.S. imposing sanctions on Venezuela's PDVSA could lead to supply disruption. Venezuela's crude oil production declined to 1.34 million bpd in 2018, from 1.91 million the previous year. The issue is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon due to the entry of Russia into the picture.

(Source: moneycontrol.com)

Breakneck LNG demand surge in China is history

The world's main liquefied natural gas (LNG) demand growth market, China, will continue to be the single largest source of LNG demand globally in 2019.

However, the breakneck demand surge of the past two years is expected to slow down this year as China is determined to avoid severe shortages by boosting pipeline connectivity, building more storage and import terminals, and raising domestic natural gas production.

To be sure, LNG demand in China will still grow, just at a slower pace than it did in 2017 and 2018, analysts say.

slower pace than it did in 2017 and 2018, analysts say.
In the 2017/2018 winter season, China gobbled up spot cargoes to meet soaring natural gas demand in freezing temperatures, upending the LNG market, which was thought to be on the verge of oversupply just a year ago.

The Chinese coal-to-gas switch policy for millions of households backfired with severe gas shortages last winter, lifting domestic Chinese LNG prices to more than US\$20/mmBtu and driving Asian spot LNG prices up.

This winter season, China's authorities have been determined to avoid another natural gas supply crunch. And they are handling supplies much better than past winter—domestic natural gas production is rising, state energy giants are boosting gas pipeline infrastructure and connectivity, and the coal-to-gas switch is more measured and moderate, taking into account expectations of demand.

This winter, Asian LNG spot prices fell last week for a fifth consecutive week amid above-average temperatures and ample supply. Major Asian buyers—especially China—had stockpiled gas well ahead of the winter. Milder winter weather in some



parts of Asia and high stockpiles mean that there is currently little appetite for spot cargoes.

The improved pipeline connectivity and increased storage capabilities are expected to remove some bottlenecks across China and address seasonal demand shortages this year, according to S&P Global Platts Analytics.

In 2018, China's natural gas imports—including pipeline and LNG imports—soared by nearly 32 percent from 2017 to a record 90.39 million tons, solidifying China's position as the world's biggest importer of the fuel.

China became the world's top natural gas importer—including LNG and pipeline—in October last year, overtaking Japan which imports all its gas as LNG.

According to Platts Analytics, China—currently the world's

second-largest LNG importer behind Japan--is set to overtake Japan as the top global LNG importer by 2022 as China will continue to be the largest growth factor behind global LNG demand growth.

China's total natural gas demand is expected to rise by 11.4 percent in 2019 over 2018, slower than the growth in previous years, according to analysts at the country's largest oil and gas producer China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

More than half of China's expected 308 billion cubic meters (Bcm) of natural gas demand this year is set to be met by domestic production, which is seen rising by 6 percent on the year to 171 Bcm, according to CNPC's analysts.

In 2018, China's natural gas production increased by 7.5 percent on the year, with December output up 10 percent from December 2017, data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China showed last week.

Rising domestic production and improved pipeline infrastructure will surely help China to ration natural gas flows to avoid last winter's severe gas shortages, but its LNG demand growth—albeit at a slower pace—is still set to be the key driver of global LNG demand growth.

"Economic slowdown, a more considered approach on coal-togas switching and increased domestic infrastructure availability will mean LNG demand will slow in 2019, from the 40-45% growth we have seen in 2017 and 2018," energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie said in its 2019 LNG outlook earlier this month.

"But China will still grow at around 20%, by far the largest source of LNG demand growth in the global market," according to WoodMac. (Source: oilprice.com)

Venezuela oil output to drop by 18% on U.S. sanctions: Woodmac

Venezuela's oil production will likely fall 18 percent to around 900,000 barrels per day due to pressure from U.S. sanctions and lack of materials for workers, compared to a current output estimate of 1.1 million barrels per day, according to Ann-Louise Hittle, an oil analyst at Wood Mackenzie.

However, waivers will ease the full impact of the sanctions until they expire, Hittle said in an emailed note dated Feb. 2.

Compliance with sanctions will leave a void as international companies exit the country, according to Elena Nikolova, Latin America upstream analyst at Woodmac.

Gasoline shortages within Venezuela are likely to accelerate amid limited storage and lack of blending components, according to Ixchel Castro, Latin America refining and oil products analyst at Woodmac. (Source: Bloomberg)

Georgia, Gazprom to renegotiate gas transit deal

The two-year contract between the government of Georgia and the Russian energy giant Gazprom on natural gas transit from Russia to Armenia expired on December 31, 2018 (Georgia Today, January 21, 2019). And talks are now ongoing about extending or renegotiating this arrangement.

Tbilisi and Moscow had reached the previous deal on gas transit to Armenia back in January 2017, after long and difficult negotiations (see EDM, January 19, 2017). In December 2015, the then—minister of energy, Kakhi Kaladze (now the mayor of the Georgian capital), told this author that Gazprom presented Georgia with a particularly onerous demand: the South Caucasus country had to agree to "monetize" the payments it was receiving from Russia for allowing the transit of gas via its territory. Kaladze considered Moscow's ultimatum to be particularly difficult and "heavy" for Georgia to accept (Author's Interview, December 15, 2015).

For almost 25 years, since 1992, Gazprom paid Tbilisi for the shipment of gas to Armenia not with money, but with a portion of this transited energy fuel: Georgia was receiving 10 percent of the Russian gas in lieu of a monetary transit fee. Kaladze noted that the previous contract was much more profitable because under a "monetized" transit fee scheme, Tbilisi would have had no guarantees of still being able to purchase the same volume of Russian gas—that is, the 10 percent of gas shipped to Armenia (Author's Interview, December 15, 2015). The energy minister promised to "protect Georgian interests" in the negotiations with Gazprom. But ultimately, he was forced to sign the new contract with a monetized transit fee scheme (effective after one year) after Moscow threatened to divert all of its Armenia-bound gas from Georgian pipelines to the Iranian network (see EDM, January 27, 2016; January 19, 2017).

The Georgian government feared that, under the new transit payment regime, it would not be able to procure enough substitute gas from Azerbaijan to satisfy domestic demand. Georgia consumes approximately 2.7 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. And as a transit fee, the country received 200 million–250 million cubic meters of gas from Russia. The previous contract was also quite "comfortable" since it did not depend on international energy prices.

Nonetheless, during 2017–2018, Azerbaijan was able to find an opportunity to increase the volume of natural gas supplied to Georgia. As a result, Georgia did not buy a single cubic meter of gas from Russia last year. But the costs incurred by Azerbaijan's State Oil Company (SOCAR) forced it to increase prices for Georgian consumers, which Tbilisi refused to pay. The disagreement over the price of gas has not yet led to serious tensions between Azerbaijan and Georgia, but bilateral relations could start to suffer as the growing Georgian economy starts to need ever larger energy inputs (Vestnik Kavkaza, December 20, 2018).

Many Georgian observers argue that, under such a situation Gazprom could attempt to take advantage and propose a new ultimatum to Georgia-proposing even less favorable terms for future gas transit payments. "Gazprom is the Kremlin's geopolitical instrument, and if Georgia finds itself in a difficult situation due to a lack of fuel in the spring, Moscow could put forward new, tough conditions," an expert with the weekly Georgian newspaper Prime Time, Keti Khatiashvili, told this author. According to her, Moscow could try to offer the Georgian side better payment terms and, crucially, the opportunity to buy more Russian gas, in exchange for the consent of the Georgian government to begin direct negotiations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia on land transit from Armenia to Russia (Author's Interview, January 22, 2019). Recently, during his visit to Georgia, the prime minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, discussed precisely the "development of trade" and further transit opportunities (Vestnik Kavkaza, January 17, 2019).

The opposition considers the government's agreement to "monetize" the gas transit fee in 2017 as a crime against the interests of Georgia. One of the founders of the European Georgia party, parliamentary deputy Sergo Ratiani, noted that the opposition parties are demanding an investigation into why then-minister Kaladze had agreed to the unfavorable Russian conditions on transit fees. "The new contract has caused tremendous damage to Georgia and gave Moscow [new] tools to use against us," the lawmaker argued (Author's interview, January 20, 2019).

The opposition is demanding that the authorities not renew the contract with Gazprom and return to negotiations on an in-kind payment for gas transit. But as energy expert Georgi Khukhashvili explained, making such demands now is both unlikely and unrealistic: "The contract on the monetization of transit fees is very disadvantageous for Georgia, but it complies with international norms and international transit payment tariffs." As he stressed, according to international practice, if the parties do not break the contract, its prolongation occurs automatically. "The government does not have the resources to terminate the contract with Gazprom, so it will be extended for another year," Khukhashvili predicted (Author's interview, January 22, 2019).

Economy Minister Georgy Kobulia assured journalists in a recent interview that the Georgian government will try to "improve the contract." Negotiations with the Russian energy giant will begin soon. But Kobulia did not specify how Tbilisi would react to Moscow's likely refusal to pay Georgia more for gas transit (Accentnews.ge, January 21, 2019).

Georgia has never considered the radical step of terminating the transit across its territory of Russian gas to friendly Armenia. Whereas, Moscow wields multiple military and economic instruments with which it can influence Tbilisi, such as by exacerbating at will the situation on Georgia's de facto borders with the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia or by threatening to cut off access to the Russian market. In this lopsided bilateral relationship, the current government in Tbilisi is, thus, unlikely to stand firm against Gazprom. (Source: oilprice.com)

The U.S. and Russia are sleepwalking toward nuclear disaster

Reengagement with Russia is too important to wait for the Mueller probe to end. That means it's time for Congress to take the lead.

By Sam Nunn and Ernest J. Moniz

Friday morning's announcement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that America will withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty because of Russian violations is the latest wake-up call that relations between the world's nuclear superpowers are dangerously off the rails.

The fear of nuclear confrontation was once omnipresent in Washington and Moscow.

National leaders recognized the real risk that a military conflict could quickly emerge and escalate, and that they would be forced to calculate in minutes whether survival required "going nuclear first," with catastrophic consequences.

The grim horror of this reality was understood. It provided the foundation of decades of nuclear dialogue between the U.S. and Russia, including a mutual recognition of vital interests, red lines and methods to reduce the chance that accidents or miscalculations would lead to conflict.

Many mechanisms atrophied

Today, many of those mechanisms have atrophied. The relationship between the U.S. and Russia is fraught and communications are feeble.

Western sanctions placed on Russia in response to Vladimir Putin's acts of aggression have further frozen relations, special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in America's 2016 elections continues to roil American politics, and Donald Trump's administration is imperiled if it touches anything related to Russia.

But it's not just the means of managing risk that have withered; it's the will.

Arms control efforts have been eroded and, some suggest, should be eliminated. U.S. and Russian leaders publicly boast of their respective nuclear arms and preparedness to use them possibly in response to non-nuclear attacks.

Military technologies are advancing rapidly, and the risk that cyberattacks could target nuclear warning and command-and-

control systems is ever-increasing.

The threat of catastrophic terrorism has greatly increased

Meanwhile, U.S. and Russian military forces are again operating in close proximity, with increased chances that an inadvertent collision — or a deliberate act of aggression, accident, or terrible miscalculation — could lead to the fatal use of nuclear weapons for the first time in nearly 75 years.

Sleepwalking toward nuclear disaster

The U.S. and Russia are sleepwalking toward a nuclear disaster, and America's best hope of avoiding catastrophe is reengaging with Russia now — with Congress taking the lead.

Reengagement cannot wait for the special counsel's office to complete its work, or for new leadership to take office in the Kremlin or White House — the stakes are simply too high. Congressional leaders from both parties must help create the political space to steer the world's nuclear superpowers away from catastrophe.

In this moment of unprecedented circumstances, Congress must develop a governance agenda — shared by a broad consensus of Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate, and between Congress and the White House — that successfully challenges the now-prevailing assumption that we have no choice on Russia policy except self-imposed paralysis.

First, getting to safer and more stable ground with Russia requires urgent action to establish a working bridge between the Trump administration and Congress on Russia and nuclear policy. With the support of Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, this should begin with the creation of a new bipartisan liaison group of House and Senate leaders and committee chairs to work with senior administration officials designated by the president.

A strong precedent for this type of congressional-executive cooperation can be found in the bipartisan Arms Control Observer Group of the 1980s, its creation led by Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, which dealt with the secretary of state and other leading administration officials.

Second, the liaison group and Congress should strongly encourage the Trump administration to pursue a Russia policy that reduces unnecessary nuclear dangers while protecting the security interests of the U.S. and its allies.

Crisis-management discussions

Congress should back bilateral crisis-management and nuclear stability discussions, including among uniformed military leaders in charge of nuclear forces and military and civilian professionals in the defense and foreign ministries. This should include NATO-Russia crisis management dialogue in the Euro-Atlantic region to increase transparency, decrease military risks, and examine the consequences of unraveling arms control agreements.

Third, Congress and the White House must coordinate efforts to make our sanctions policy both effective and flexible. The sanctions imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea and in response to Russian interference in the U.S. elections are certainly justified. At the same time, Congress must give the president the flexibility to lift sanctions when and if progress is made on restoring security in Ukraine and to our elections.

If the Russians conclude they will never get out of the penalty box, they will have little incentive to change their behavior.

Finally, Congress should increase its dialogue with Russian legislative, business and civic leaders. The liaison group could provide a foundation for dialogue, initially in a third country, with Russian parliamentary counterparts to discuss grievances and opportunities.

Our Constitution mandates a vital role for Congress in matters of war and peace. Senators and representatives cannot wish away dangerous truths and growing risks from a "muddling through" policy towards Russia which discounts and discourages the im $portant\ role\ of\ communication,\ even-perhaps\ especially-with$ adversaries.

The United States, NATO and Russia must decisively confront $these\ existential\ problems\ that\ threaten\ global\ security-or\ risk$ a catastrophic conflict. Congress has a crucial role to play and a duty to act to reduce these nuclear risks.

(Source: politico.com)

How has Bolsonaro done in his first 30 days in office?

Brazil's new President, Jair Bolsonaro, is yet to complete his first month in office and cracks have started appearing in his eclectic

INTERNATIONAL

Bolsonaro, a former military officer who was a member of the Brazilian Congress for nearly three decades without leaving a legislative trace, rose to prominence last year after securing significant support from discordant right-wing groups.

From the free market-loving members of the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) to religious fundamentalists, from the followers of the far-right "philosopher" and astrologer Olavo de Carvalho to the traditionally conservative, promilitary interventionists, almost all of Brazil's prominent right-wing activists united behind the populist politician. Even Integralistas, a fascist movement founded in Brazil in the 1930s, and the monarchists declared their support for "Bolsonarism".

Bolsonaro managed to unite groups with such diverse political, economic and social objectives by promising to fight corruption, "gender ideology" and "cultural Marxism". He pledged to deliver a right-wing utopia - defined by machismo, nationalism, Christian fundamentalism and aggressive capitalism - but refrained from disclosing exactly how he was going to bring about this transformation.

Foreign policy agenda

Throughout his election campaign, the populist politician never put forward a detailed economic or foreign policy agenda or explained how he would fulfil the largely contradictory expectations of the groups that made his presidency possible.

Now, 30 days into his first term, Bolsonaro still doesn't seem to have a clear plan of action that would allow him to maintain his popularity, keep all his supporters happy and change the fortunes of Latin America's largest economy. As a result, despite favourable opinion polls and a stock index reaching record highs, the united right-wing base that gave Bolsonaro the presidency appears to be slowly disintegrating.

After taking office, Bolsonaro immediately made a series of cabinet appointments to please all the groups that supported his

The president made anti-corruption judge Sergio Moro his justice minister to satisfy those who voted for him with the hope ȟe would end corruption. He appointed liberal banker Paulo Guedes the economy minister in line with the demands of the big business lobby.

Bolsonaro gave evangelical pastor Damares Alves the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights to please his most conservative supporters. He also had right-wing scholar Ricardo Velez Rodriguez take up the position of minister of education and Ernesto Araujo, a diplomat who believes he is fighting a crusade in defense of Christianity, become foreign minister to please various other conservative groups,



Now, 30 days into his first term, Bolsonaro still doesn't seem to have a clear plan of action that would allow him to maintain his popularity, keep all his supporters happy and change the fortunes of Latin America's largest economy.

including de Carvalho's followers.

However, even these strategic appointments could not stop his electoral base from fracturing and some of his allies from questioning the president's ability to deliver on his promises. The business circles in Brazil put their support behind the far-right politician mainly because he promised to revive the country's "sluggish" economy, pass business-friendly reforms, downsize the public sector, reduce the fiscal deficit and tackle its unsustainably expensive pen-

However, a month into his term, Bolsonaro still has not presented any details of his proposed economic reforms and policies, which has caused jitters in the market and a sense of alarm within the president's inner circle. Moreover, he continues to make controversial and contradictory statements. leading many to question his commitment to making Brazil "business friendly".

Only three days after taking office, for example, Bolsonaro said that he would increase the minimum retirement age to 62 for men and 57 for women - numbers significantly lower than the ones promised by his predecessor - signaling that he is planning to water down his campaign promises on radical pension reform.

On the same day, the president also announced that he has reservations about the planned sale of a stake in local jet-maker Embraer to U.S. aircraft maker Boeing, causing the value of its stock to plunge by

five percent. Days later, however, his government approved the sale.

In mid-Ĵanuary, Bolsonaro faced a mini ideological crisis. An official visit of MPs from Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party to China angered some of his supporters. While doing business with China is good for the big capitalists backing the government, de Carvalho, his supporters and many others saw that business trip to a communist country as a "betraval".

They emphasised the fact that many right-wing Brazilians voted for Bolsonaro because they believed he would pursue an anti-communist, right-wing agenda. The president had indeed made his anticommunist stance a major speaking point during his election campaign, even declaring that he is supporting U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war against China.

Yet, as much as Bolsonaro admires Trumpism and hates communism, he can't do away with the fact that China is Brazil's top trading partner, importing more than twice as much Brazilian goods as the U.S. does. How the Brazilian president is going to keep his anti-commie and pro-business supporters happy at the same time is anyone's guess. Bolsonaro's election victory

The widespread public disenchantment over a series of mega corruption scandals that tarnished two Workers' Party governments was a major factor that contributed to Bolsonaro's election victory in October. However, in his first month in office, the new president has failed to make much progress in the fight against corruption. On the contrary, Bolsonaro and his family have faced a series of corruption scandals, leaving many of his supporters disturbed and disillusioned.

An investigation by the Financial Activities Control Council (COAF) recently unearthed suspicious financial transactions worth hundreds of thousands of dollars made to the bank accounts of the president's oldest son and elected Senator, Flavio Bolsonaro, and the first lady, Michelle. The payments were made by Flavio's former driver Fabricio Queiroz, who claimed that he obtained the money he transferred to the president's family legally, by selling used cars.

Another series of suspicious cash transfers worth nearly \$30,000 were also made to Flavio's bank account. The COAF report on these payments showed that 48 payments of 2,000 reais (\$531) each were deposited into his bank account between June and July 2017, when he was a Rio de Janeiro state legislator.

The report said the origin of the money was unclear, but the fact that all transfers were made at a bank at Rio's state legislative assembly, where Flavio worked, made them suspicious. The senator defended himself by saying the money he deposited was from the "sale of an apartment"

The corruption scandals

In light of the corruption scandals surrounding the Bolsonaro family, the MPs' "ill-advised" trip to China and the president's apparent lack of vision regarding the future of Brazil's economy, some of his support-ers appear a bit less enthusiastic about his presidency now.

Many of those who had been vocal on social media previously are staying silent about these mishaps. Some are even saying that they are ashamed of their vote.

For those of us who saw through Bolsonaro's act last year, neither the corruption scandals, nor his lack of vision and consistency seems surprising. After all, he has long been a textbook case of what is known in Brazil as "lower clergy" (baixo clero): politicians with little power, vision or clout, motivated not by a desire to influence the future of the country, but by a determination to stay in office at any cost so as to line their pockets.

Last year, Bolsonaro took advantage of the people's search for an alternative to mainstream politicians and the rise of farright populism across the globe and managed to catapult himself to the front line of Brazilian politics. However, now that he is president, he has nothing to offer to the nation other than corruption, hate speech

Perhaps the fact that he has already started shedding supporters might spring him into action and get him to finally come up with an actual plan of how to govern the country and restart the economy. Or perhaps he'll keep going with his "lower clergy" ways until 2022 or until the country collapses.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

Racism props up America's richest — here's how we fix it

By Dedrick Asante-Muhammad and Chuck Collins

It's no secret that most Americans haven't kept up with the ballooning wealth of the 1 percent. Most of us have fallen behind over the last few decades, as wages have stagnated and housing, health care, and education costs have gone through the roof.

Underlying the yawning gap between the rich and the rest, however, is another divide: America's persistent racial wealth divide between whites and people of color.

As the U.S. diversifies, people of color make up an ever larger share of the population, even as they remain largely locked out of wealth-building opportunities. As a result, although median white wealth has increased somewhat over the years, America's overall median wealth is actually going down.

While wealth at the middle falters, it's skyrocketing at the top: In effect, the richest Americans are profiting off the racial wealth divide. That's bad for the entire economy, and it demands a robust policy response.

Enormous gaps in wealth

Importantly, this trend persists despite black and Latino unemployment rates reaching historic lows in 2018 — and even despite overall median income slowly inching up in the last year or two. That's because those modest gains in income are completely insufficient to close our enormous gaps in wealth.

In Dreams Deferred, a new study for the Institute for Policy Studies, we catalogued just how deep the racial wealth divide has become.

We found that with just \$3,600 to their name, the median black family today owns only 2 percent of the \$147,000 owned by the median white family. The typical Latino family does only a little better, with just 4 percent of the median white family's assets.

"Median wealth," by the way, refers to the exact middle



— with half of households above and half below. That's a more useful measure than "average wealth," which skews dramatically toward the very wealthiest households. (Average white wealth, for example, was \$930,000 in 2016 — over six times the median, and nowhere near typical.)

In the decades since 1983, changes in median wealth tell a dramatic story about our economy. Since then, median household wealth has fallen by 3 percent for all U.S. households — and stunningly, we found, by over half for the median black family.

Over the same period, the number of households worth

over \$10 million ballooned by more than 850 percent.

If these trends continue, the gap between whites and Latinos will be virtually unchanged by mid-century. And it will grow even wider between whites and blacks, whose median wealth is actually decreasing — and, alarmingly, on track to reach zero in a few decades.

Unfortunately, rampant inequality in the larger economy has given a small segment of the population enough clout to thwart efforts to close these gaps. Outfits like the Koch brothers' political network, for example, have poured millions of dollars into efforts to cut their own taxes, which

benefits the overwhelmingly white families at the top who are already extremely rich.

How can we combat that inequality? We maintain that creating a more equitable economic system for everyone requires bold policy ideas to close the racial wealth divide.

Such policies could include the expansion of first-time homeownership programs for those that have been historically excluded from building housing wealth by discrimination in mortgage programs. Homes are the single biggest source of wealth for ordinary families, but black families were left out of the postwar housing boom almost entirely. Down payment assistance and favorable tax treatment for first-time buyers could narrow this gap considerably.

Ambitious programs

Additional initiatives to reduce the \$1.5 trillion in student debt-like loan forgiveness, interest rate adjustments, or more ambitious programs for debt-free university access would assist young people to save, build wealth, and invest in homes and enterprises.

Another promising idea is to create a children's savings account program, which would seed an asset account for every newborn in the United States, ensuring that none of them start from \$0. Senator Cory Booker has proposed just such a "baby bond" program in the United States Senate.

According to a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, if Congress had implemented a robust universal "baby bond" in 1979, the wealth gap between Latinos and Whites would have been entirely closed by now, and the wealth gap between blacks and whites would have shrunk 82 percent in young adult households.

Other remedies include familiar ideas like raising the minimum wage, expanding affordable health care, and of course — taxing the 1 percent to fund education and

(Source: Newsweek)

Iran's Islamic Revolution: The real Islamic alternative

By Kevin Barrett

"Islam was and is not only a viable option, but is the only alternative to an Occident that is increasingly troubled by social and ideological crises." – Murad Hoffman

In his 1992 book Islam the Alternative, German career diplomat Murad Hoffman argued that far from having reached an "end of history" in secular capitalist paradise, the West was heading for trouble. The only viable solution to the coming crisis, as Hoffman saw it, was authentic, corrected Abrahamic monotheism: namely, Islam. Hoffman expected that by the mid-21st century, Islam would be the majority religion in the West, not because of immigration, but because Westerners would embrace it.

Zionist arch-Islamophobe Bernard Lewis likewise understood that Islam offered a tempting alternative civilizational model. Lewis found this terrifying. In his 1990 essay "the roots of Muslim rage" Lewis coined the term "clash of civilizations" to describe the alleged long-term incompatibility of Christian and Islamic forms of Abrahamic monotheism. Lewis' lifelong crusade to cast Islam as a dangerous "other" was, among other things, a psychological overreaction to his repressed realization that Islam could save Christian civilization. And that, to a committed Zionist, must be a terrifying prospect.

Reacting against Hoffman, while echoing Lewis, Samuel Huntington published his essay "The Clash of Civilizations" in 1993. Like Lewis, Huntington exaggerated the differences between Islam and Christianity, predicting that an immanent "clash" between Islam and the West would be central to the coming era of inter-civilizational warfare.

The truth, of course, is that the differences between Islam and Christianity are miniscule compared to the differences between universalist Abrahamic monotheism (Islam/ Christianity) and other dins including secular materialist humanism, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, paganism, and so on. In reality, there is only one traditional Western religion, universalist Abrahamic monotheism, and it is shared by all of the world's 2.5 billion Christians and 2 billion Muslims, who together make up a majority of the world's 7.5 billion people — and who have been disenfranchised in their own Holy Land by a few million Zionists. But Zionist-influenced Western elites threw all of their international-banker-financed weight behind the Lewis-Huntington prophecy that the West would soon go to war with Islam. On September 11, 2001, they rolled out the "most perverse publicity stunt in the history of public relations" (in the words of National Medal of Science winner Lynn Margulis) and made sure their prophecy came true.

In the post-9/11 world, proposing Islam as "the only alternative to an Occident that is increasingly troubled by social and ideological crises" is even more subversive than it was in 1992. Indeed, the Global War



In short, 40 years after Iran's liberation from the Shah, we still need Islamic revolutions. Meanwhile the Islamic Republic of Iran endures as a source of inspiration to Muslims everywhere, while the lessons of the 1979 Revolution remain more relevant than ever.

on Islam (GWOI) was designed to throw a monstrous roadblock into the peaceful and natural Western path toward Islam proposed by Murad Hoffman. Today we cannot help but see that the highest-level Western elites, who dominate the world through weaponized usury, will stop at nothing to maintain their power and the riba system that sustains it.

Today Murad Hoffman's liberal yet vaguely salafist approach seems a bit dated. His belief that the secret rulers of the West would allow individuals to discover Islam for themselves the way he did, through free inquiry protected by Enlightenment liberalism, now appears naive (perhaps that is why Hoffman's excellent books are now in the discount bin at IslamicBookstore.com).

Hoffman apparently did not fully understand that even in 1992, the only functioning "Islamic alternative" society was the Islamic Republic of Iran. Today, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, we should take time to ponder the experience of Iran's Muslims in their ongoing efforts to realize an Islamic civilizational model.

The first lesson of the Iran's Islamic revolution is: think pan-Islamically, act locally! Though Imam Khomeini sparked an Islamic Revolution, not a Shi'i revolution or a purely Iranian revolution, his was nonetheless a "revolution in one country" (as

the Russian Bolsheviks started calling their project after 1925). Both Imam Khomeini and his successor, the Rahbar, Imam Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, have been devoted to supporting Islamic movements as well as other justice movements in various countries that embody values compatible with Islam, while at the same time focusing on building viable long-term institutions in Iran. And those institutions, for obvious reasons, have to be compatible with the local religious and ideological orientation of the population. So just as Islamic Iran is naturally going to have religious institutions dominated by Persian speakers of the Twelver Shi'i (Ja'fari) school of thought, those seeking to Islamize Turkish society will have to work with Turkish speaking Hanafis, those working in Morocco will be among Arabic-speaking Malikis including quite a few Sufis, and so on (and of course everyone, everywhere, will have to be able to communicate with those who have unthinkingly absorbed the secular-materialist progressivist humanism that is the de facto hegemonic religion imposed by the West on much of the world).

While the above observations may seem obvious, the unfortunate reality is that too many Islamic activists have been hindered by the sectarian delusion that their own approach is the only acceptable one. These folks need to remember the Qur'anic edict,

"For every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works. Wherever you may be, Allah will gather you all unto Himself: for, verily, Allah has the power to will anything" (2:148, Muhammad Asad's interpretation).

The Islamic Revolution succeeded in part because Iran nurtures high-quality Islamic scholarship, and many of those scholars are willing and able to apply their knowledge to real-world social and political problems. It succeeded because a nucleus of the Iranian 'ulama', led by Imam Khomeini, refused to do what so many Islamic scholars have done, which is sell their souls and their services to corrupt rulers. Instead, Imam Khomeini and his allies spoke truth to power, sparking a popular revolution that institutionalized a role for religious scholars in a democratic-republican political order, under the doctrine of walayah al-faqih.

Should Muslims be working to impose the Iranian walayah al-faqih model in other Muslim-majority countries? Probably not. The conditions in most countries will not permit an exact duplication of the Iranian experience. But other Muslim communities can certainly "compete in goodness" with Iran by developing and empowering communities of first-rate Islamic scholars who speak truth to power. They can heap scorn on sellout pseudo-scholars who lick the boots of tyrants. And they can engage politically, wherever they happen to live, focusing on the most important issues from the standpoint of authentic Islamic values. Among those issues are: the fight against the international bankers' usury-based currency system; the struggle for truth against official lies and cover-ups; the struggle to liberate Palestine; other struggles on behalf of oppressed people (mustad'afin); and the larger struggle to re-establish God rather than man (or his emerging replacement, the post-human cyborg) as our focus of

All of the above issues require revolutionary rather than reformist approaches. Usurious currency creation by private bankers must be completely abolished, not reformed. The most subversive truths of "hidden history" must be fully unveiled, destroying public confidence in the lying rulers. Palestine must be completely liberated from Zionism. Neo-liberal capitalism must be overthrown and replaced by a system that cares for the poor and oppressed. And the idolatrous conformity to the human and/or post-human must cede to the conformity to God.

In short, 40 years after Iran's liberation from the Shah, we still need Islamic revolutions. Meanwhile the Islamic Republic of Iran endures as a source of inspiration to Muslims everywhere, while the lessons of the 1979 Revolution remain more relevant than ever.

(Source: crescent.icit-digital.org)

The curious case of China's Huawei with U.S.

TEHRAN (FNA) — This week, the U.S. will hold trade talks with China, which the White House is insisting is totally unrelated to the 23 charges the Justice Department has just filed against major Chinese telecom Huawei.

The White House claims charges center on violating U.S. sanctions against Iran, and 'stealing trade secrets.' It's more than that. These charges are part of a growing Trump Administration effort to contain China, mostly focusing on hiding the fact that America is now officially bankrupt and isolated, as well as containing a rising China and keeping it from bidding on major technological and infrastructure contracts around the world. It is also the pretext for having Canada capture the company's CFO and try to extradite her to America.

The detention of Meng has fueled tensions between China and Canada, and forced Canada's Ambassador to China to be sacked over the weekend. The ambassador was fired for saying that Meng could make a case against being extradited to the U.S., which is inconsistent with the ani-China position of the government of Canada.

Think about it. This is no longer about Iran or China violating unilateral sanctions imposed by the U.S. in great violation of the 2015 nuclear deal and the UN resolution endorsing that. America's trade war began last year with what was essentially a punitive raid not just against China but the European Union, Canada, Mexico, and a host of other nations that had said no to Trump's one-man foreign policy.

Let's start with always over there. The U.S. government has already lost the trade war with the world community with remarkable consistency. America's officials and grunts at the bottom, warmongers and regime change addicts are hardly to blame. The fish, as they say, rots from the head, which in this case means Trump and his immediate advisors, including Mike Pompeo and John Bolton.

They all know that the White House cannot turn this defeat into victory. The only way to win the trade wars is by ending them, but isolationist Trump seems unable to recognize this. So the illegal Iran sanctions notwithstanding, the future, the surest way to turn defeat into victory would be to avoid such needless wars. On the other hand, a surefire way to defeat is to persist in them out of fear, greed, opportunism, careerism, or similar political motives. These are lessons Trump's gung-ho experts and advisors have little incentive to absorb, let alone act upon - and because they won't, the



Washington's traditional allies in Europe and Asia also have no interest in U.S. sanctions or trade deals with just the U.S. They continue to resist U.S. efforts to create bilateral free trade deals or violate UN resolutions.

world community must.

At any rate, just like its illegal wars and regime change fantasies, Washington's sanctions regime, detention of Chinese CEOs and extreme trade protectionist measures inhibit fair competition and multilateralism. Washington abuses national security laws to obstruct the normal investment activities of foreign companies - including China's - on American shores. In contrast, Beijing continues to be the global standard-bearer for fair trade through its "Made in China 2025" policy and the \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, China does not want to enter into a trade battle, "but it will fight one if necessary" and it can't lose:

Trump once tweeted that the U.S. is not in a trade war with China - and "that war was lost many years ago" by previous U.S. leadership. He said, "We are not in a trade

war with China, that war was lost many years ago by the foolish, or incompetent, people who represented the U.S."

The irony is that China as an economic superpower, is being punished for hard work and innovation. But it will not roll out a white flag. There are reams of data to support this position. In 2017, China's total spending on research and development hit \$257 billion, ranking second globally. China continues to reform its economic system through innovation and domestic demand - not through alleged intellectual property theft.

China's rise as a global technology powerhouse is acknowledged in the West, where not even one nation backs Trump's trade battle, desperate moves and shenanigans. Last but not the least, China's trade flows are more balanced than Trump would like to acknowledge in his tweets. They are in line with the rules of the World Trade Organization. China's trade and investment practices are anchored in international law and economic reason. Beijing even stands ready for a win-win compromise. The same cannot be said of Washington.

In summation, the trade wars have affected every economic sector in the U.S. and beyond. According to U.S. scholars and businesses, China is a net-seller of U.S. debt. The U.S.'s biggest creditor is doing just enough to let the Treasury and Trump know that they can send yields soaring and can't afford it if China unloads the whole \$1+ trillion amount. It's no doubt a financial weapon of mass-destruction that China could easily use.

Washington's traditional allies in Europe and Asia also have no interest in U.S. sanctions or trade deals with just the U.S. They continue to resist U.S. efforts to create bilateral free trade deals or violate UN resolutions. Even the Group of 20 countries have pushed back against the Trump administration. They are pressing the U.S. to end its trade wars and sanctions regime in the best interests of all countries.

On balance, the Trump administration needs to kick its sanctions addiction and change its "might-makes-right" mindset, because it only fuels isolationism, protectionism and anti-globalization tendencies. The world is stirring up together, adjusting to Washington's protectionism by developing regional trade agreements and diversifying trade partners. In between, the U.S. is losing, and it is losing hig

Rarely has the world been so challenged by U.S. hubris



1 → China, in particular, may eventually buy all its oil imports with the "Petroyuan". China is Saudi Arabia's number one oil customer, and if Saudi Arabia were ever to do anything positive, it would accept other currencies for its oil, too. (There must be some kind of curse on countries that have oil, given the U.S., nonetheless.)

Key is what China and Russia might do going forward. China is apparently Venezuela's largest creditor. Last year Maduro visited China and received an extra \$5 billion in loans and signed a score of bilateral agreements. And Russia is also invested in Venezuela, having recently been given access to mine that country's gold resources, for one thing, and last December Putin infuriated the U.S. when it flew a couple Russian bombers to Caracas for a friendly visit.

Putin has given full support to Maduro, citing that interference in Venezuela by the U.S. "violates the basic norms of international law". No question about that. The U.S. has been violating international law for decades, thinking it IS "international law". Interesting to note that the best expert on Russia in the U.S., Dr. Stephen Cohen, claims that the current situation between the U.S. and Russia is more dangerous than the post-World War 2 Cold War ever was.

The U.S. has made its move against Maduro, but it has not been a kill shot (as imagined it might be) and the situation may well stabilize. It did when the Saudis, for example, tried to overthrow Qatar's government with a financial and military blockade. Every day that Maduro manages to hang on in Caracas raises the odds of a failed coup as the panic diminishes and Venezuela may eventually get on with selling oil for the so-called "Petro", not the buck, and relying on China and Russia to help renovate infrastructure.

As for Iran, it's hard to know whether the attack on Venezuela and apparent efforts to ignite a civil war there involves a capitulation of sorts whereby the U.S. is going after control of Venezuelan resources because of the realization that it may not be able to grab dominance over and control of Middle East and Eurasian resources as it desires.

If, for example, Trump is aiming for U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria – despite huge efforts by U.S. politicians demanding the Trump not withdraw – then the move on Venezuela and its resources makes some sense to the Neocons, and perhaps to the eventual benefit of Iran, which so far has not made stupid moves especially with its adherence to the JCPOA and with its measured appeals to Europe to erect the SVP and make it work.

And also, IF the U.S. gets bogged down in South America, it's quite likely that the mere concept of war with Iran or war with yet another country will look increasingly insane and so stretch a virtually bankrupt U.S. as to make it impossible. Overreach and hubris have always finally proven to be the bane of every historical "empire" that has fallen, and the U.S. "won" none of its major military engagements in decades, especially the Vietnam War despite all the horrific carnage and destruction it has wrought in so many places.

The ambiguous future of European Union



Eu is faced with a serious problem called the growth of nationalism and Right extremism. These anti-immigration movements, which, after the failure of European governments to resolve the economic crisis as well as the imminent crisis of immigration in 2015, have gained a lot of supporters, are planning to conquer the European Parliament and government, and then put an end to the "United Europe" and its symbols such as "the Euro currency" and "Schengen Agreement.

At the moment, EU leaders are worried about the outcome of this year's parliamentary elections.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, more than 100 nationalist and far-right extremists managed to find way to the European Parliament. This time, nationalists may win even more seats in the European Parliament. In this case, the social and political power of nationalist and anti-immigration movements in Europe will be increased. Consequently, the existence of the United Europe's foundation will be directly targeted. This is a threat that has already shadowed Brussels (the headquarters of the European Union).

Finally, the fate of the European Union and the Eurozone are tied to the European Parliamentary elections. Will these elections mean the revival of the European Union or the beginning of its collapse? The answer to this question will be determined in the near future.

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Cigarette smoking responsible for 60,000 deaths annually

H E A L T H TEHRAN — Annually about 60,000 deaths linked with cigarette smoking occur in Iran, the Iranian Anti-Tobacco Association has announced.

 $90\,percent\,of\,the\,lung\,cancers\,develop\,in$ people who either smoke cigarette or people exposed to second-hand smoke, the report added, ISNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Smoking two cigarettes or any other tobacco products in an enclosed space can increase pollution level to 10 times above Tehran's most polluted areas, the report warned.

In Iran around 12 percent of the population aging 15 to 69 consume tobacco. Smokers spend 100 billion rials (nearly \$2.4 million) on a daily basis on cigarettes and twice as much as the amount is spend on treatment of tobacco-related diseases annually.

In mid-January Tehran University of Medical Sciences vice chancellor for social affairs Abdolrahman Rostamian said that tobacco use in Iran has increased by seven times over the past decade, growing from 2,000 tons to 15,000 tons.

In most countries, tobacco duty rate is up to 75%, but in Iran it is only 20%. This is among the issues that the members of Iranian Parliament (Majlis) should pay special attention to, he highlighted.

World Health Organization (WHO) warns that tobacco kills up to half of its users. Tobacco kills more than 7 million people each year. More than 6 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 890 000 are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke. Around 80% of the world's 1.1 billion smokers live in lowand middle-income countries.

Studies show that few people understand the specific health risks of tobacco use. For example, a 2009 survey in China revealed



that only 38% of smokers knew that smoking causes coronary heart disease and only 27% knew that it causes stroke.

Among smokers who are aware of the

dangers of tobacco, most want to quit. Counselling and medication can more than double the chance that a smoker who tries to quit

Cardiovascular deaths on the rise in the U.S.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), nearly half of all adults in the United States have cardiovascular disease. It caused more deaths in 2016 than previous years, despite rates of cardiovascular deaths having declined worldwide.

The amended hypertension guidelines explain the high prevalence of cardiovascular disease in the U.S., say the AHA.

Heart disease is the leading cause of mortality in the United States, followed closely by cancer and chronic respiratory diseases.

In fact, heart disease causes almost 1 in 4 deaths in the U.S. Staying abreast of the latest statistics on the prevalence of this condition is key for prevention.

Physicians, governmental organizations, and patients alike can benefit from information on heart disease death rates and risk factors that stave off cardiovascular conditions.

In this context, the American Heart Association (AHA) have just published their 2019 updated Heart and Stroke statistics in the journal Circulation.

The report is a compilation of the latest statistics on the prevalence of cardiovascular disease both in the U.S. and across the globe. The AHA worked in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other governmental organizations to put the report together.

According to the report, about 48 percent of all U.S. adults — or almost half of the adult population — are living with a form of cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular disease is an umbrella term for several

conditions, including atherosclerosis, heart disease, heart failure, stroke, heart attack, arrhythmia, and heart valve problems.

Hypertension and cardiovascular risk

The updated AHA report found that in the U.S., cardiovascular deaths have increased significantly in recent years, despite the fact that across the globe, the number of cardiovascular deaths has declined.

Specifically, in the U.S., $840,\!678$ cardiovascular deaths were registered in 2016, a number that has gone up from 836,546 deaths in 2015.

However, worldwide, 17.6 million people died from a cardiovascular condition in 2016, compared with 17.9 mil-

Importantly, the recently reported high prevalence of cardiovascular disease is mainly due to the fact that the definition of what constitutes high blood pressure has changed.

According to the AHA's updated 2017 hypertension guide-lines, a reading of 130/80 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) or above counts as high blood pressure, whereas previously this reading was 140/90 mm Hg.

Dr. Ivor J. Benjamin, the president of the AHA and the director of the Cardiovascular Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, comments on the importance of high blood pressure for cardiovascular risk.

As one of the most common and dangerous risk factors for heart disease and stroke," he states, "this overwhelming

presence of high blood pressure can't be dismissed from the equation in our fight against cardiovascular disease.

"Research has shown that eliminating high blood pressure $could\,have\,a\,larger\,impact\,on\,[cardiovascular]\,deaths\,than$ the elimination of all other risk factors among women and all except smoking among men."

Fewer people smoke and more are exercising

The recent report also notes some encouraging improvements in risk reduction. The proportion of teenagers who do not smoke, for example, has increased by almost 20 percent in 1999–2016.

Meanwhile, 94 percent of adolescents aged 12-19 did not smoke in 2015-2016, whereas only 76 percent did not smoke in 1999–2000.

Additionally, the number of teenagers aged 12-17 who smoked in the past month decreased by two-thirds between 2002 and 2016.

Approximately 80 percent of adults did not smoke in 2015–2016, and the number of male adults who smoke has dropped from 51 percent in 1965 to 16.7 percent in 2015. Also, 34 percent of females smoked in 1965, while only 13.6 percent smoked in 2015.

Namely, over half of U.S. students engage in muscle-strengthening exercise on 3 days per week or more, and the number of physically inactive adults has dropped by over a third between 2005 and 2016.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Tehran to host nursing courses for digestive, liver diseases care

HEALTH TEHRAN — Professional nursing courses for e s k digestive and liver diseases care will be held by the Tehran University of Medical Science Digestive Diseases Research Institute and the nursing directorate at the Ministry of Health in the Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht (April 21-May 21), deputy health minister Reza Malekzadeh has said.

Nurses can play an influential role in conducting researches on digestive and liver diseases, ISNA news agency quoted Malekzadeh as saying on Sunday.

In research centers worldwide nurses carry out research programs, so that we are also planning on including nurses in more research projects, he concluded.

Inflatable puffer fish pill 'could track patient's health'

Scientists say they have designed a jelly-like pill that inflates to the size of a ping-pong ball when it reaches the stomach, and could be used to monitor tumors or ulcers.

The soft, squishy device was inspired by the puffer fish, which inflates quickly like a balloon when threatened.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology team behind the pill says it can last for a month.

The pill has been tested in pigs but not yet in humans.

The pill is made from two types of hydrogels - an inner layer of absorbent particles and an outer protective membrane.

This gives it the consistency of jelly, helping it to expand quickly in the stomach and therefore stopping it from passing out the other end.

Soft and strong
The inflated pill could be removed at any time by drinking a solution of calcium that makes it quickly shrink to its original size, the scientists claim.

It can then pass safely out of the body.

In the lab, researchers put the pill in solutions of water resembling gastric stomach juices and found it inflated to 100 times its original size in 15 minutes. But they also found it was strong enough to survive regular contractions in the stomach.

The researchers say the pill is softer and lasts longer than current alternatives, which are often made of hard plastic or metal.

When temperature sensors inside pills were fed to pigs which have very similar stomachs and intestines to humans - the team was able to track the animals' daily activities for up to 30 days.

The dream is to have a smart pill, that once swallowed stays in the stomach and monitors the patient's health for a long time, such as a month," says Xuanhe Zhao, associate professor of mechanical engineering at MIT.

(Source: BBC)

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Sanctions no hinder for Iran's space technology progress: **ICT** minister

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Despite the sanctions that have e s k slowed down the country's space technology development, there are no specific problems and the national space program is well progressing, the information and communication technology minister has said.



"Iran is seeking further cooperation with other countries within the framework of space diplomacy as the country pursues peaceful space technology," Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi added.

He made the remarks during the National Day of Space Technology celebration on Sunday, IRNA reported.

The U.S. tries definitely to impede Iran's space technology and the European countries do not have any cooperation with Iran, he said.

Our absolute message is that space technology improves lives of Iranians and people worldwide, he said.

"Despite all hardships, we try to consider sanctions not as a threat but an opportunity for self-improvement," he said.

He said that space-based data is available for public on the website of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA).

Space knowledge in not limited to a special country and is a human right for all people worldwide, Azari Jahromi said.

Natural resources like environment and water do not belong to a single country, when they are endangered, the world faces problem, he explained.

Hence, space technology as one of the modern solutions to these problems, is considered as a global knowledge, he said.

Due to sanctions, Iran faces several limitations for expanding space technology during recent years, he said. He pointed to Mesbah satellite as one of the samples of Iran

cooperation with other countries, he said. Mesbah satellite was built in collaboration with Italy's Carlo Gavazzi Space SpA (CGS) in 1998 and was unveiled in 2005. The

satellite has been ready for launch for more than ten years in Europe. Iranian young generation has the capacity for development

in the field of space technology, he said. He said that although Iran has not a high speed in space development, the professionals do their best.

During his speech, he talked about the improvement of e-government in Iran saying that more organizations are connecting to e-government.

As a part of digital transformation, the first phase of e-government services project in Iran officially came on stream under the title of 'Mobile Government' in mid-May 2018.

The project aims to facilitate some government services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

It is based on the Iran's National Information Network (NIN), an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure

Up to 15 new nano products are manufactured per month: official

TEHRAN — Iranian knowledge-based companies manufacture 12 to 15 new nano products per month, the secretary of Iran Nanotechnology Initiative

Council announced, Mehr reported on Saturday. All nano products in different fields of water, medicine, textile, vehicle, education, industrial services and products are verified by the council, he said.

He said that Iran have made great achievements in the field of nanotechnology and nano products in comparison with 12 years ago. The council focuses on training of professional human resources, by which the academic development and technology improvement are fulfilled and pave the way for industrial development of the market, he said.

Iran already exports nano products to 40 countries and is seeking to expand the international market, he explained.

According to a report released by the StatNano, a comprehensive statistical database portal, in January 2019, Iran ranks first in 2018 in terms of local share of nano-articles, which is the ratio of the nano-articles carried in a country to the total articles of that country.

In November 2018, Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council announced that it is predicted that 30 billion rials (about \$175 million) of nanotechnology products will be sold by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 20, 2019).

There are 194 companies active in the field of nanotechnology in 2018 out of which, 60 percent were initiated as nanotechnology companies and the rest changed or developed as such companies.

'counter-drone' tech can keep the bad drones at bay

In Atlanta, unauthorized drones inundated air space over the stadium set to host the Super Bowl, days ahead of the game on Sunday. Now, counter-drone tech is popping up everywhere to keep the bad drones away.

The Federal Aviation Administration estimates that in 2017, there were 1.2 million commercial and hobbyist drones in the US. By 2022, they expect that number to more than double, to 2.9 million.

That's because drones are enormously helpful. They can create beautiful aerial photography, help fight fires, detect leaks in oil and gas pipelines, and deliver medical supplies where road access is limited.

While most drone operators fly in good faith, bad actors can do tremendous damage. At the extreme, militias, drug cartels and others are using commercial and consumer drones as weapons.

In January, The Associated Press reported, Houthi rebels used a drone equipped with explosives to attack people at a military parade killing six in Yemen. And last summer, assailants used drones armed with explosives to attack Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro at an event where he giving a speech outdoors in Caracas.

(Source: cnbc.com)

Space technology, future market for Iranian entrepreneurs

been launched providing services for farmers with some space-based data on meteorology and smart agriculture.

Smart city is fulfilled through space technology

The urban development nowadays is link with smart cities. The future cities are the places in which, the facilities and services are provided by hi-tech solutions, hence, no one can undermined the role of space-

According to statista, smart cities, also commonly known as cyberville, digital cities, intelligent cities, and wired cities, are urban areas that collect electronic data from citizens, devices, and assets to manage available resources more efficiently.

A wide range of information and communications technology (ICT) applications are executed to enhance, reduce costs and resource use, as well as increase the communication between government and citizens. Ideally, these applications can enhance knowledge and innovations, promote working environments, and connect technology and society.

Space-based data and service can provide information with public transportation and energy efficiency.

Besides, driverless cars and electronic identity are main factors for having a smart city and can manage air pollution as a part of urban development through space-based technology.

Some navigation apps and startups has recently launched in the country to boost the concept of smart city.

Natural disaster and space technology Measuring and anticipating the effects of is important in order to implement measures to mitigate the effects of disasters.

The space technology through satellite-derived information can have a crucial role in all phases of crisis management. The spacebased technology also provides information for post-disaster response, recovery and reconstruction planning.



today the space is not limited to looking to stars and space centers. Nations face private funding, advances in technology and growing privatesector interest in space technology, which make it different from what we previously perceived.

The satellite data can provide information about the places with concentrations of population, which are more vulnerable during disasters and decrease the risk.

Rapid damage assessment maps of affected area can be provided for civil protection and emergency response with timely and accurate measures for recovering after disasters.

Through satellite-driven data the urban planners and other organization can decrease the risk of natural disaster.

This is an untapped market for Iranian startups who can benefit from this market, which can save lives of several people and is beneficial for entrepreneurs as well protecting environment through space technology

The space technology has a crucial role $\,$ in protection of the environment we live in.

Through monitoring forests and other natural resources, the space-based technology would save the environment and reduce the environmental harm.

In mid-January, the Department of Environment (DOE) and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to contain natural technologies in Golestan National Park,

Protecting Mirza-Bayloo plain in Golestan national park using fences, equipping the protected areas with security advances sucĥ as fire detection sensors, surveillance drones, modern motorcycles, night vision cameras to detect and deal with illegal hunters are among the subjects addressed in the MOU

Startups and entrepreneurs can have a crucial role in protecting the environment through providing several services and plans to save endangered area.

Future of space-based businesses

According to Morgan Stanley, it is estimates that the global space industry could generate revenue of \$1.1 trillion or more in 2040, up from \$350 billion, currently. Yet, the most significant short- and medium-term opportunities may come from satellite broadband Internet access.

Morgan Stanley estimates that satellite broadband will represent 50% of the projected growth of the global space economy by 2040—and as much as 70% in the most bullish scenario. Launching satellites that offer broadband Internet service will help to drive down the cost of data, just as demand for that data explodes.

Packages today delivered by airplane or truck could be delivered more quickly by rocket. Perhaps private space travel could become commercially available. Mining equipment could be sent to asteroids to extract minerals—all possible, theoretically, with the recent breakthroughs in rocketry.

To have our share of such a global boom, we should invite the space technology to our daily life and find solutions for our national challenges in different fields through this newly emerged technology. Iran is on track and has gained good results. It may take time but well worth it.

Tehran, Baghdad to expand scientific, technology cooperation

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iraq's e s k Higher Education Minister Qusay Abdul Wahab al-Suhail and the Iranian vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari discussed ways to boost cooperation in the field of science and technology during a meeting on Sunday, Mehr reported.

The two sides also discussed cooperation in the field of nanotechnology, medical sciences and stem cells.

The Iranian young generation of entrepreneurs can establish cooperation with other countries, Sattari said.

Iranian young entrepreneurs pave the

way for development of their country and create added value by their actives, he said. Startups provide high quality services



have a great capacity for cooperation with other countries, he said.

 $However, an \, appropriate \, infrastructure \,$ should be provided by the government for cooperation between countries, he added.

Sattari also pointed to knowledge-based companies which are connecting univer-

Iranian knowledge-based companies to take part in Erbil Building expo

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — A e s k number of top Iranian knowledge-based companies in

the field of construction will take part in the Erbil's international trade fair for construction equipment, known as Erbil Building, which will be held from April 1 to 14, Mehr reported

Organized by the Tech-Export Services Corridor, the companies will offer their products at Iran's pavilion, which will set up by the Iran International Exhibition Company.

Erbil Building is an international construction fair and will take place in Erbil. Exhibitors show on it building materials, building



numerous machines and tools for building applications.

The latest developments, trends, products and services from different areas will be introduced during the

ICT Ministry provides office spaces for 270 startups

d e s k munication Technology (ICT) Ministry has provided office spaces for 270 startups in the cities of Tehran and Mashhad, ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi wrote on his Twitter account. During past two months, the ICT Ministry provided office

for 120 startups in Mashhad and 150 ones in Tehran, he said. "May be there is no money, but creation is here. We

equipped some office spaces for startups," he wrote. Azari Jahromi said that the Ministry is providing office

spaces for entrepreneurs in other provinces. "The youth know how to create jobs, if we don't pick on them.



The ICT Ministry announced in September 2018 that over 93,700 job opportunities were created in the field of smart transportation system, e-commerce and mobile applications in Iran during the previous Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017- March 2018).

The head of innovation department of science and technology vice presidency Hessam Zand-Hessami announced in September 2018 that there were about 4,000 startups operating in Iran which provide IT-based services to the public.

He said that the government has provided 120 trillion rials (some \$2.8 billion) for around 1400 knowledge-based companies during the past five years.

Where are you in your innovation journey?

Digital transformation has gone from trendy best practice to survival prerequisite. Every business worth its salt has a hand in the game. But "getting it" is one thing, and getting it done is another. Adapting to new technologies, developing new skill sets, and keeping up with customers poses a set of pretty complex challenges.

As an organization that exists to help businesses create opportunities from new and emerging technology, navigating this landscape of continual change is fundamental to our role in the world. And one thing we've learned is it's a lot easier to get where you're going if you know where you are. So, let's break it down.

First and foremost, let's define innovation. At our company, and in many corners of the design and technology world, we define it as the realization of these three factors:

- Invention: The discovery, prototyping, testing and iteration of a product idea to serve an unmet need.
- Commercialization: The alignment of the product with its audiences through multiple channels and through a continual feedback loop, which in turn leads to ongoing product development. • Scale: Service of and distribution to global
- audiences through partnerships, continued development at speed through alliances and

an exponential number of data points.

The ability to innovate directly depends on a company's level of digital transformation. The more digitized it is, the more it can serve its customers where they increasingly are. So, to know next steps, an organization needs to map its position on this journey. We measure an organization's digital transformation maturity level - and its consequent ability to innovate — across three broad categories: emerging, coordinated and transformative. And, to define that maturity level, we take measurements across three dimensions: business process, people, and insights and analytics.

Within those three dimensions, there is a lot of detail to help understand your current organizational capacity, but here is a quick

Emerging

In emerging organizations, innovation is proactive but siloed in a separate team or lab, and processes are not yet integrated.

- Business process: There's a separate function for innovation. Processes are proactive but unfocused and one-dimensional, and there are a limited number of partnerships available.
- People: Innovation is driven by specialists. There is some, but minimal, job

training; and there are department-specific performance metrics.

• Insights and analytics: Data is siloed, and decisions are often made on the basis of experience, gut instinct or advice.

Coordinated

In coordinated organizations, some innovation processes exist across departments, but it's still not multidimensional.

 Business process: Innovation methodologies are understood and valued throughout the company. Processes are multidimensional, and a commercial return is being realized. • People: Managers across departments

come together to set goals. There are mixed performance metrics, and continuing education opportunities and hybrid skills are embraced. • Insights and analytics: Decision-ready

data is more widely available. There is growing comfort and reliance on analytics for deci-

sion making. Transformative

 $In\,transformative\,organizations, innova-\\$ tive methodologies set the standard across the organization, and multiple partnerships and engagement models support the ability to reach customized goals

• Business process: Methodologies are widespread and standardized. There are a number



of partnerships available, and innovation and commercial strategy are tightly coupled.

 People: Teams are highly adaptable and diverse. Career transformation opportunities exist. The workforce is fluid and on-demand,

and performance metrics are user-centric. Insights and analytics: Data is cleansed, consolidated and unified in one page, and

insight is on-demand. This framework highlights strengths and weaknesses across different areas. It identifies the advantages organizations can leverage right away for competitive differentiation and pinpoints the places teams should work harder to build competency and stronger organizational habits.

That distant horizon of digital transformation? It gets a lot closer when you know the fastest way

(Source: forbes.com)

Study captures one of the clearest pictures yet of evolution in vertebrates

What do you get when you put together several tons of steel plates, hundreds of mice. a few evolutionary and molecular biologists and a tiny Nebraska town near the South

Led by Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology and Molecular and Cellular Biology Hopi Hoekstra, a team of international researchers conducted a years-long study in which hundreds of mice were released into massive, custom-built outdoor enclosures to track how light- and dark-colored mice survived in light- and dark-colored habitats.

The results not only confirmed the intuition that light-colored mice survive better in light-colored habitats, and vice versa for dark-colored mice, but also allowed re $searchers \ to \ pinpoint \ a \ mutation \ related \ to$ survival, specifically that affects pigmentation, and understand exactly how the mutation produced a novel coat color. The study is described in a February 1 paper published

"This project has been many years in the making, and part of the inspiration for it came from the experimental evolution studies people have been doing for many years now using microbes in the lab," Hoekstra said. The "idea has been that you start with a particular population, genotype it, and then give it environmental challenges and watch how the population evolves over generations. Then you genotype it at the end and you can



see, at the genetic level, what changes.

The natural environment "We were interested in replicating that approach but doing it in vertebrates, and doing it in a natural environment," she continued. "And letting them evolve in habitats that — importantly — are open to predators, or at least visually hunting, avian predators."

been observed that mice living in the sand hills — a large area of contiguous sand dunes To do it, then postdoctoral fellow Rowan with sandy, light-colored soil — are lighter

"We were interested in replicating that approach but doing it in vertebrates, and doing it in a natural environment," the research professor says.

in color than those living in the surrounding areas with dark, loamy soil.

To understand what underlies those differences, Hoekstra, Barrett and colleagues came up with an ambitious plan to build a series of eight enclosures-each 2,500-meters-square, or just over a half-acre-four on the light-colored sand hills and four on the darker soil.

Sand hills

They then "seeded" each enclosure with 100 mice — half trapped from the sand hills and half trapped from the surrounding dark soil — after marking each with a tiny, embedded RFID tag and taking the very tip of their tails for genetic sequencing. Three months later, researchers returned and set to identify which of the mice survived.

The "idea was to start with the maximum amount of phenotypic variation, because that would give us the most power," Hoekstra said. "For this study, we asked, of those mice we started with ... which ones survived after three months of natural predation?

"So the first thing we did was to look at phenotypes, and we asked if the average color of a mouse in an enclosure changed over time" she continued. "And what was very clear was that, in the light enclosures, the average mouse became lighter and in the dark enclosures they got darker, so already we could see there had been phenotypic change."

(Source: phys.org)

Researchers claim even kids can understand that algorithms can be biased



Earlier this month, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez suggested that algorithms, because they are designed by humans, can perpetuate human biases. While some people are still resistant to the idea, it has been widely accepted for some time by experts in the field. There is an entire Machine Bias beat at ProPublica, as science journalist Maggie Koerth-Baker pointed out. I wrote the following article about algorithmic bias and some ways computer scientists are trying to combat it for the November/ December 2017 issue of Muse Magazine, whose audience is kids around 9-14 years old.

But studies show that people evaluate the same resume differently if the name at the top is Jennifer instead of John, or Lakisha instead of Laurie. Whether we intend to or not, humans have biases. These are likes and dislikes that make it hard to see our world to want to hire John than Jennifer or Laurie than Lakisha for many jobs. These folks would not describe themselves as sexist or racist, but they unconsciously favor some groups of people over others.

Not so fast. Computers don't have free will or feelings, but a growing number of computer scientists, data scientists, and other researchers are drawing attention to the fact that algorithms can reinforce biases in society even without a programmer inserting any clearly racist or sexist rules. "A lot of people think that because algorithms are mathematical they're automatically fair," says data scientist Cathy O'Neil. "That's just

A setoff instructions An algorithm is kind of like a recipe. It's a

set of instructions that tells a computer how to answer a question or make a decision. (Sadly, the result will not be as tasty as the end result of a recipe.) Artificial intelligence is one specific type of computer algorithm. "Anything that tries to make computers act like humans" is artificial intelligence, says Suresh Venkatasubramanian. He is a computer scientist at the University of Utah. Computer scientists, software engineers, and programmers work on different aspects of computing. These aspects include artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithms. Computer scientists generally concentrate on more theoretical aspects of the field, while software engineers design programs for computers to run. Programmers do the hands-on work of creating algorithms. If algorithms are

authors that write them down. One popular artificial intelligence technique is called machine learning. "It's an algorithm for making algorithms," says Venkatasubramanian. A machine learning algorithm looks at data about how decisions were made in the past and uses it to make future decisions.

For example, when you go to Amazon or YouTube and browse for the next book you want to read or video you want to watch, you see a list of recommendations. Those recommendations are the result of a machine-learning algorithm that has looked at millions, if not billions, of clicks and figured out what books or videos people with your preferences tend to choose.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

Study reveals wildlife is abundant in Chernobyl



A scavenger study that used fish carcasses as bait provides additional evidence that wildlife is abundant in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, University of Georgia researchers said.

Barrett (now a faculty at McGill University)

and colleagues traveled to the tiny town of

Valentine, Nebraska in order to take advan-

tage of an important natural habitat — the

As early as the 1930s, Hoekstra said, it had

A one-month camera study prompted the sighting of 10 mammal and five bird species, according to James Beasley, associate professor at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural

"These animals were photographed while scavenging fish carcasses placed on the shoreline of rivers and canals in the CEZ," he said. "We've seen evidence of a diversity of wildlife in the CEZ through our previous research, but this is the first time that we've seen whitetailed eagles, American mink and river otter on our cameras."

Beasley is referring to a 2015 study that including gray wolves -- exists in abundance in this ecological zone of about 1,000 square miles that was abandoned by humans after the 1986 nuclear accident.

The new results, published in the journal Food Webs, provide evidence that aquatic nutrient resources can flow to terrestrial landscapes and become available to terrestrial as well as semiaquatic wildlife, like otter

Connecting various food webs Lead investigator Peter Schlichting, an SREL postdoctoral researcher at the time of the study, said previous studies reported that scavenging activity can connect various food webs, but scientists don't fully understand

In the current study, fish carcasses were

placed at the edge of open waters at the Pripyat River and in nearby irrigation canals, mimicking the natural activity that occurs when currents transport dead fish carcasses to the shore, according to Schlichting, now a postdoctoral research associate at Arizona State University

The results show that 98 percent of the fish carcasses were consumed within one week by a multitude of scavengers.

"This is a high rate of scavenging, and given that all our carcasses were consumed by terrestrial or semi-aquatic species, it verifies that the movement of nutritional resources between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems occurs more frequently than often recognized,"

"We tend to think of fish and other aquatic animals as staying in the aquatic ecosystem. proportion of dead fish make it to shore, there is an entire group of terrestrial and semi-aquatic species that transfer those aquatic nutrients to the terrestrial landscape.

Scavenger activity

The team compared scavenger activity at the river with scavenger activity at the canals, evaluating parameters including the percent of carcasses consumed and how quickly they were consumed; the number of species that showed up; and how frequently each species was detected.

The team found that scavenger efficiency was higher in the river because the limited shoreline cover increased the visibility of the fish carcasses, making them easier to find. But, as the team predicted, richness was higher in (Source: eurekalert.org)

Boeing Starliner test flight scheduled for March

Boeing's CST-100 Starliner will make its first test flight to the International Space Station next month. Named Orbital Flight Test, this space mission will launch on United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. Starliner, Boeing's new astronaut taxi to the International Space Station, will be ready for its very first flight in March.



NASA had entered into a formal agreement with SpaceX and Boeing to transport U.S. astronauts to ISS from the American soil. The U.S. Space Agency marks its first to launch a crew to space once again since the time it halted the space shuttle program.

Boeing spokesperson Maribeth Davis revealed to Space during the company's future vision for space travel that if the test flight goes as planned, then Starliner is all set to launch the first batch of astronauts to the space station in August.

Named Orbital Flight Test, this space mission will launch on United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. Boeing initially scheduled the launch on Aug. 27 last year but it pushed back the test flight due to an anomaly that took place during a test of the launch abort engines.

While it is Starliner's first test flight to space, it already successfully completed the parachute drop tests within the outer limits of

Meanwhile, SpaceX Crew Dragon is one of the two new astronaut taxis contracted by NASA to launch astronauts in nearly eight years. The Starliner is scheduled for its maiden voyage in March, shortly after the Crew Dragon's first unmanned test flight on Feb. 28. The SpaceX spacecraft will then again launch a test flight, with a crew

Boeing and SpaceX serve as the first two private spaceflight companies that will begin launching astronauts to the space station. The contract between the United States and Russia to ferry U.S. astronauts to the ISS using the Soyuz rocket capsule concludes in April. (Source: techtimes.com)

Membraneless protocells could provide clues to formation of early life

Membraneless protocells -- called complex coacervates -- can bring together molecules of RNA allowing the RNAs to perform certain reactions, an important step in the origin of life on Earth. The Image shows droplets of complex coacervates as seen under a microscope.

The inset shows RNA molecules (cyan) are highly concentrated inside the droplets compared to the surrounding (dark). At roughly 2-5 micrometers in diameter, the droplets are about 14-35 times thinner than human hair.

Membraneless assemblies of positively- and negatively-charged molecules can bring together RNA molecules in dense liquid droplets, allowing the RNAs to participate in fundamental chemical reactions. These assemblies, called "complex coacervates," also enhance the ability of some RNA molecules themselves to act as enzymes -- molecules that drive chemical reactions. They do this by concentrating the RNA enzymes, their substrates, and other molecules required for the reaction.

The results of testing and observation of these coacervates provide clues to reconstructing some of the early steps required for the origin of life on Earth in what is referred to as the prebiotic "RNA world." A paper describing the research, by scientists at Penn State, appears January 30, 2019 in the journal Nature Communications.

'We're interested in how you go from a world with no life to one with life," said Philip C. Bevilacqua, Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Penn State and one of the senior authors of the paper.

Life as we know it today generally requires genetic material --DNA, which is first transcribed into RNA. These two molecules carry information for the production of proteins, which are in turn required for most functional aspects of life, including the production of new genetic material. This sets up a "chicken and the egg" dilemma for the origins of life on early Earth.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Solar probe begins its second orbit of the sun

NASA's Parker solar surveyor became a record-setter at the beginning of its mission when it took the title of fastest spacecraft in history from the wildly successful New Horizons probe. It made history again a few weeks later by flying through the sun's corona and beaming back data.

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

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

NASA says it expects Parker to reach perihelion (the closest approach to the sun) on Apr. 4. This will be the second of 24 planned orbits that promise to advance our understanding of the sun. Parker's mission has been in the works for years. NASA has long wanted to study the sun's corona, but the technology to protect a probe was beyond our abilities until just recently.

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

(Source: extremetech.com)

BMI Takes Giant Strides for Strengthening, Boosting Cultural-Economic Ties of Countries

Bank Melli Iran (BMI) has taken giant strides in line with strengthening and developing cultural-economic ties of countries, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Cultural representatives of ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) member states, a number of ambassadors and senior officials of embassies of different countries visited the Museum of Bank Melli Iran and familiarized with the national heritage of the country in this museum as well as historical-cultural sites of Sardar As'ad Building and Zurkhaneh of the bank.

Today, the museum of the bank hosted the head of ECO Cultural Institute, a number of representatives of member states, ambassadors and some senior officials of embassies of different countries including Norway, Finland, Germany, India, Turkey, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Britain, etc.

The visiting delegation visited old and ancient objects, exquisite collections such as gold coins, calligraphy works, carpets, modern and classic painting, etc. in this museum.

For his part, Dr. Mohammad-Reza Hosseinzadeh CEO of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) said, "Bank Melli Iran is after



streamlining and facilitating trade-business activities of merchants and traders of various countries significantly."

"We are duty bound to link traders and merchants to each other in order to provide suitable ways for easing

trade and business activities."

He reiterated, "Bank Melli Iran (BMI) is the oldest and ancient bank in the country with 3,350 branches in the

Moreover, the bank has branch offices and brokerage companies in 20 different countries, he said, adding, "the bank has established fair economic and trade cooperation with different European, Asian and African countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he reiterated, "moreover boosting trade and economic relationship, we have tried to take giant stride in line with supporting cultural heritage of the country as well as development of cultural ties.'

Mohammad-Mehdi Mazaheri Chair of ECO Cultural Institute was the other speaker who expressed his special thanks to hosting Bank Melli Iran for this prestigious meeting and added, "today, museums play a key and leading role in protecting culture and civilization as well as development of culture of tourism of countries.

In other words, museums are the mirror of real identity

'Cloud seeding increase rainfall by 25%'

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Cloud seeding has resulted in a 25-percent increase in precipitation rates over the country, Farid Golkar, head of the National Cloud Seeding Research Center has announced.

This is while Iran's Meteorological Organization (IMO) director, Davood Parhizkar, stated on January 24 that cloud seeding is not a solution to the country's recurrent drought, not compensating for the water scarcity.



Cloud seeding, a form of weather modification, is a method to change the amount or even type of precipitation. Rainfall occurs when super cooled droplets of water - those that are still liquid but are at a temperature below the usual freezing point of zero centigrade – form ice crystals. Now too heavy to remain suspend in the air, these then fall, often melting on their way down to form rain.

Despite of low costs paid to implement the projects, the country has received above normal rainfall this year as a result of cloud seeding, Golkar stated, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Even If cloud seeding operations led to one percent increase in rainfall, so that would not be futile or pointless, he said, adding, the country met a 25 percent rise in precipitation rates due to cloud seeding operations.

Pointing out that numerous studies claim that cloud seeding can increase rainfall, he added that many countries are reportedly undertaking cloud seeding efforts worldwide. He went on to say that cloud seeding is a relatively cheap

method to bulk up the water supply and increase rainfall amounts, but there are costs to every success.

"We need to constantly carry out cloud seeding operations as a way to manage water resources," he stated, highlighting, Iran has the potential to domestically conduct the operations; while the neighboring countries need advanced

Due to lack of funds along some shortcomings, the cloud seeding plan will be performed by the next two weeks, while must have been performed earlier in November

He went on to add that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard $Corps\,Aerospace\,Force\,will\,carry\,out\,the\,plan\,using\,an\,aircraft,$ in case of success two other plane will add to the project.

Initially, the operations will be performed in the provinces of Markazi, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Kermanshah and South Khorasan, he noted.

Parhizkar being the outspoken opponent of the project for long, said that cloud seeding does not significantly add to the average annual rainfall, thus only forms expectations among the residents to ask about the ineffectiveness of the method.

So, it makes more sense to use proper water management methods and promote water consumption patterns, he added.

He went on to explain that the country's average annual rainfall is less than one-third the world average, and even if the rainfall increases in the country, it still faces water shortages and water resources needs to be managed.

Over the past 50 years, the average annual precipitation in the country has been reduced by more than 50 millimeters and the temperature has risen by more than two degrees

If cloud seeding is done without appropriate researches and equipment, not only does the precipitation not increase, but the cloud will become sterile and do not rain

LEARN ENGLISH

Difficult Customer

A: Good evening. My name is Fabio. I'll be your waiter for tonight. May I take your order?

B: No, I'm **still working on** it. This menu isn't even in English. What's good here?

A: For you, sir, I would recommend spaghetti and meatballs.

B: Does it come with coke and fries?

A: It comes with either soup or salad and a **complimentary** glass of wine, sir.

B: I'll **go with** the spaghetti and meatballs, salad and the wine. A: Excellent choice. Your order will be ready soon.

B: How soon is soon?

A: Twenty minutes?

B: You know what? I'll just go **grab** a burger across the street.

Key vocabulary

still working on: not yet completed, need more time would recommend: suggest

complimentary: free

go with: to choose, pick

grab: get quickly

Supplementary vocabulary

impatient: uncomfortable waiting, wanting to go fast food: food prepared and served quickly

waitress: female server at a restaurant or bar

fancy: nice, expensive, upscale

casual: relaxed, not dressy



Without water, everything withers

Tehran Municipality proposes new plan to tackle air pollution, traffic jam

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Tehran Mus k nicipality has prepared a new traffic scheme for the capital in an attempt to address persistent air pollution and traffic congestion in the metropolis, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday

If Tehran city council approves the proposal the new scheme will go into effect by the beginning of summer.

According to an announcement made by the Tehran transportation and traffic council affiliated to the municipality traffic and transport affairs directorate the newly proposed scheme will replace odd-even traffic scheme in the city.

Odd-even traffic scheme

For many years the city center has been closed to all cars except for a certain number of cars which have permits issued by the municipality as well as public transport means. And the odd-even traffic scheme, as a method of rationing in which access to the streets for private vehicles is granted on alternating days, according to whether the last digit on their license plate is even or odd, was being implemented in zones further from the city center from Saturday to Thursday (Fridays and public holidays excluded).

The aforesaid traffic schemes, aimed to cut the emission generated by the vehicles mostly in traffic-congested areas of the capital especially during the peak periods or during peak pollution events. Except for public transportation, including taxis and buses, the scheme was aimed at capping the number of private passenger cars allowed on streets based on their registration number.

However, all drivers could enter both city center and odd-even traffic zone by paying fixed fees to the Musicality regardless of their plate numbers every day.

Traffic scheme revised

Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), however, the payment system for entering the



Based on the new scheme all vehicles, regardless of their registration numbers, are allowed to enter the traffic zones 20 days during each season (80 day all year round) for free without paying any fees.

traffic zone in Tehran changed. Drivers are charged depending on the time of the day they are entering the zone (either it is during peak hours or not) and how long they are staying in the zone. The time of traffic scheme also increased from 10 hours a day to more than 12 hours a day from 6.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays, and public holidays excluded.

Those who lived in traffic zones were also allowed to leave the zone an hour later and enter the zone at 5 p.m.

Furthermore, all vehicles including heavy-duty vehicles are required to pass vehicle inspection and comply with emission standards to release less pollutants in the congested areas or they will face fines.

Those vehicles which pass the emission standards with top score can benefit 20 percent discounts to enter the zones.

Since the beginning of the current year citizens can pay their fees for entering traffic zones via an e-payment service by charging their accounts online.

The newly proposed scheme

And now it is decided to replace odd-even traffic scheme with another scheme which is said to be more effective

Based on the new scheme all vehicles regardless of their registration numbers, are allowed to enter the traffic zones 20 days during each season (80 day all year round) for free without paying any fees and those who are planning on entering the zone more should pay taxes to the municipality.

The fees are again calculated depending on the time of the day they are entering the zone and how long they are staying in the area. Also those living in traffic zones will be provided with 50 percent discounts for entering the zone and top scorers in vehicle inspections will be given 25 percent discounts as well.

A need for an efficient plan So far traffic schemes seem to be ineffective in controlling air pollution.

As per the data released by Iran's Meteorological Organization with increased precipitation in Tehran air quality have noticeably enhanced in the capital.

While last year in autumn Tehran only received 13.6 millimeters of rain, this year in the same period the amount of rain increased almost 8 folds amounting to 111.5 millimeters.

Consequently, the number of days with good air quality increased from 44 in last autumn to 68 this year and days with clean air quality increased from 3 days to 7 in the same period.

Additionally, the number of slightly polluted days causing discomfort for sensitive groups being 39 days also were cut in more than half this autumn.

While last autumn 4 days were reported as highly polluted, this year not one day did the pollutants hit high levels.

The city may face decreased precipitations for the next year and only an efficient traffic scheme, limiting the presence of cars in highly congested and polluted areas, can curb air pollution.

Soil erosion reaches 16.7 tons per ha annually

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Soil erosion and pole s k lution are the two major important environmental problems in the country, as some 16.7 tons of soil per hectare erodes annually, head of soil protection unit of the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization has announced.

Soil erosion is the displacement of the upper layer of soil, one form of soil degradation, which is caused by the dynamic activity of erosive agents, including, water, ice, snow, wind, plants, animals, and humans. In accordance with these agents, erosion is sometimes divided into water erosion, glacial erosion, snow erosion, wind erosion, zoogenic erosion, and anthropogenic erosion.

Soil erosion may be a slow process that continues relatively unnoticed, or it may occur at an alarming rate causing a serious loss of topsoil. The loss of soil from farmland may be reflected in reduced crop production potential, lower surface water quality and damaged

Soil, which is the landscape for the ecosystem and the basic resource for food production, is now threat-ened by soil pollution, ISNA quoted Hooshang Jazi as saying on Saturday.

The soil acts as a habitat helping vegetation con-

servation, which increases the permeability of the soil to rainwater, he said, adding it also shelters the soil from winds, which results in decreased wind erosion, as well as forming a more solid mass less susceptible to water erosion and absorbing more rainfall water to the underground resources.

So, vegetation removal contributes to the increased rate of surface erosion, he further added.

He also lamented that the rate of evaporation from surface water resources in Iran is three times above the global average, so dam construction as the only way to address water storage is inefficient due to high evaporation rates, implying that to meet demand for



water, soil protection and aquifers level increase can play a more effective role.

He also noted that being a great source of storing rainwater, soil is of great importance in the country, while it hardly forms consuming long period of time.

Soil erosion rate in the country equals 16.7 tons per hectare per year, he stated, adding that some 125 million hectares of the lands are also exposed to water rosion and wind erosion hits 32 million hectares. So, the point to be noted is soil erosion prevention

on the catchment area of the mountainous and agricultural land must be taken into consideration, Jazi Referring to soil pollution as part of land degrada-

tion, he noted that it is typically caused by industrial proper waste disposal, which poses serious threat to the food and agricultural production. Pointing out that several measure are being taken

to contain soil erosion growth at an alarming rate, he added that one of the most important one is vegetation $cultivation\ on\ the\ slopes\ to\ both\ promote\ and\ hinder$ the stability of the soil against heavy rainfall or flooding.

Moreover, fiber logs creating a natural control area helps establish growth and control soil erosion, he added.

is done in many agricultural lands across the country, Jazi stated that when the plowed land is harvested, the soil is washed off immediately, therefore, the soil erosion rate is much higher in agricultural lands. The Ministry of Agriculture is the responsible body

Criticizing plowing regardless of how steep the slope

for the agricultural lands protection, while protecting the country's total soil is on the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization, he stated, adding, currently, some 26 million hectares being exposed to water erosion are under researches, on which water management operations will be implemented as soon as the budget is provided.

According to the Sixth Development Plan (2016-2021), the Ministry of Agriculture must conduct watershed and aquifer operations on 10 million hectares of lands, which requires an annual budget of 20 trillion rials (around \$480 million), he also said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he lamented that natural resources and soil conservation have been neglected since recent years, however, some 7 trillion rials (about \$166 million) from the National Development Fund has been earmarked in this regard, which is only one third of the needed funding for the implementation of watershed management projects.

Unfortunately, 250 million cubic meters of soil annually enter the country's dams, due to improper watershed management and neglected soil conservation, Jazi concluded.

According to Eurostat website, approximately 11.4 % of the European Union (EU) territory is estimated to be affected by a moderate to high level soil erosion (more than 5 tons per hectare per year).

However, Science Direct wrote that that erosion of agricultural soils in the United States is responsible for loss of an average of 30 tons per hectare per year, about eight times greater than the rate of soil formation in the human lifetime.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

DOE's next year budget seen to rise by 47%

The Department of Environment (DOE) will receive a budget rise by 47 percent as proposed in the budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 21, 2019), an official with the DOE has said.

"We received a total budget of 2.54 trillion rials (nearly \$60 million) over the current Iranian calendar year, which will increase to 3.73 trillion rials (around \$88 million) for the next year," Mina Ebrahimi, deputy director of DOE's budget and planning center said, DOE's official website reported on Wednesday.

افزایش ۴۷ درصدی اعتبارات سازمان محیط زیست

معاون مرکز برنامه ریزی، تحول اداری و بودجه سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: اعتبارات بودجه سال ۹۸ سازمان محیط زیست ۴۷ درصد

مینا ابراهیمی روز چهارشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار علمی ایرنا اظهار داشت: این سازمان در سال ۹۷ حدود ۲۵۴ میلیارد تومان بودجه دریافت کرد که امسال در لایحه بودجه به ۳۷۳ میلیارد تومان رسید.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"-escent, -escence"

Meaning: slightly, beginning or resembling For example: Fluor escent lamps are about 2 to 4 times as efficient as incandescent lamps.

PHRASAL VERB

Monkey around

Meaning: to behave in a stupid or careless way For example: Stop monkeying around and listen to me!

IDIOM

Cool one's heels

Explanation: If you are left to cool your heels, someone keeps you waiting

appointment, I was left to cool my heels in the waiting

For example: After rushing to be on time for my room for an hour.

Yemen ceasefire talks start aboard UN ship

1→ RCC meetings have so far been held on Ansarullah-held territory in Yemen. The latest meeting, which is the third, is now being held on the vessel because the Ansarullah have refused to attend any gathering on territory controlled by the Saudi regime-led forces, who have invaded Yemen in support of the former regime.

The House of Saud regime and some of its vassal states invaded Yemen four years ago to restore a Riyadh-aligned regime that had resigned and fled the country. The Ansarullah movement and their allies — who have since been running state affairs — have been defending the country against the Saudi-led invasion.

The onslaught has killed tens of thousands of people and driven the entire Yemen close to the edge of famine.

The RCC was formed on the back of an



agreement reached under the auspices of the UN in Sweden last December.

The breakthrough deal calls for a ceasefire in Hudaydah — which has been under a Saudi regime-led siege — the withdrawal of both Saudi-backed forces and the Yemeni defense units from the city, and the deployment of UN observers there

The warring sides disagree over who should control Hudaydah once combat forces withdraw.

The Ansarullah also say the other side has repeatedly violated the truce

A former regime official anonymously told AFP that the meeting on the ship would address the implementation of the Sweden agreement.

(Source: Press TV)

Australia to move child refugees on Nauru to the U.S.

Australia has announced the last four children still in Nauru detention center will soon be moved to the United States after the two countries reached an agreement.

Nauru is a tiny island country, covering just 21 square kilometers, located northeast of Australia and close to the equator where hot and humid temperatures prevail all year.

It was one of two camps where refugees and asylum seekers were put after Australia announced, five years ago, that anyone who tried to claim asylum after arriving by sea would never be allowed to settle.

"Every asylum seeker child has now been removed from Nauru or has had their claim processed and has a clear path off the island," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Sunday.

Women, families and children were held on Nauru, while single men were kept on Manus, an island belonging to Papua New Guinea, where some of them have stayed for five years. At least 46 children were born on Nauru.

"Over the past five months, we've been working quietly and methodically to remove children from Nauru. Today, there are only four children on Nauru and they will resettle permanently in the U.S.," David Coleman, Australian Immigration minister, told reporters.

When Morrison took over as prime minister last August, there were 113 asylum-seeking children on Nauru.

The U.S. agreed in 2016 to accept up to 1,250 refugees from Nauru and Papua New Guinea, but the vast majority of them have not yet been accepted.

New Zealand has also offered to take some of the refugees, but Australia has declined the offer because it fears that would allow asylum seekers to enter through the "back door". Australia has stopped publishing data on the number of refugees held in the centers. Local media and refugee advocates estimate close to 1,000 people are currently held.

According to David Manne, legal expert with the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, Sunday's announcement is good news for the children but said Australia still had no policy on what to do with ones who might arrive in the future.

"After years and years of around 200 children being sent from Australia to Nauru and being held in cruel and degrading conditions, finally they can rebuild their lives after the devastating harm that has been caused to them," Manne told Al Jazeera.

"Any future arrivals under the Australian policy would resolve in other children being held in the same kind of inhuman conditions. What we don't have is any significant and detailed shift in Australian policy if asylum seekers were to assert their fundamental human rights to seek asylum."

He added that although the children now have somewhat of a future, more than 1,000 people remain at the centers.

Horrid conditions

In 2017, Australia closed its Manus detention center and tried to resettle those present in the PNG communities, but the asylum seekers are still not allowed to travel off the island.

Human rights organizations have criticized Australia for its hardline policy towards asylum seekers, saying the conditions on both Nauru and Manus are horrible.

"Medical experts have reported very significant levels of depression, anxiety and other medical conditions," said Manne. "A lot of the prognoses are saying that the effects will be long term, that they will have a long-lasting effect."

High levels of mental illness among those held in immigration detention facilities on the Australian mainland, Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru have been known



for years

The Forgotten Children report published by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2014 documented serious levels of mental illness, trauma, depression, self-harm, sexual assault and suicide among asylum seekers.

At least five people have committed suicide on Nauru since 2013. Seven have died on Manus during the same period, but several more have attempted suicide.

Earlier this month, Iranian Kurd Behrouz Boochani won one of the most important Australian literature prizes, the Victorian Prize for Literature for his work he wrote about his detention on Manus.

However, Boochani, who is still on Manus, was not able to collect the award as he remains on the island.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Haniyeh visits Egypt for talks on Israel truce

The political chief of Hamas resistance movement, Ismail Haniyeh, has left Gaza on a trip to Cairo on Sunday as part of a high-ranking delegation to hold talks with Egyptian officials about developments in Palestine, a Hamas statement said.

Officials from the political office of Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian group, are included in the delegation, local media reported.

The delegation had accepted an invitation extended by Egypt, which has been attempting to broker a lasting truce between the Palestinian factions and Israel, according to the reports.

Hamas spokesman Khalil al-Hayya population

said discussions would address a variety of "important issues" with the Egyptians.

Hamas governs the Gaza Strip, a densely populated coastal enclave that shares borders with Egypt and Israel, with which it has fought three wars since 2008. The Gaza Strip has been under siege by Israel and Egypt since 2007.

Media reports say talks will also include details of a lasting ceasefire with Israel in return for the opening of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, which is the main exit point for the majority of Gaza's two million population.

The Rafah crossing opened briefly last week for three days after the Palestinian Authority (PA) withdrew its staff from the crossing and accused Hamas of "arresting and abusing" their staff last month.

Egypt has since kept the crossing completely shut to outbound Palestinians.

The Ramallah-based PA had taken over the Rafah crossing in November 2017 as part of a reconciliation deal brokered by Egypt. At the time, Hamas said the decision was part of a PA policy to tighten the blockade on Gaza.

That deal has since collapsed and relations between the parties have worsened.

The visit comes days after a meeting between Hamas members and Egyptian intelligence officials met in the Gaza Strip. The meeting, reportedly attended by the United Nations' Middle East envoy Nikolay Mladenov, addressed ongoing efforts to achieve reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, as well as a proposed Hamas-Israel truce.

Gaza has been under a land, sea and air blockade imposed by Israel since 2007 when Hamas took over power in the coastal enclave after the Palestinian faction won the parliamentary election.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Countries rap Israel for expelling group protecting al-Khalil

Countries contributing to an international observer group tasked with safeguarding Palestinians in the flashpoint city of al-Khalil (Hebron) in the West Bank have denounced Israel's unilateral decision not to renew the mandate of the test force.

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) would not be extended, claiming that the monitoring mission "acts against" Tel Aviv.

In a joint statement released on Friday, the foreign ministers of the countries that provide observers to the TIPH—Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, and Turkey—stressed that Netanyahu's move "undermines one of the few established mechanisms for conflict resolution between Israelis and Palestinians and may therefore have a negative impact on the situation."

"We regret the unilateral decision," they said. "The Israeli decision to withdraw from the agreement with the PLO and thereby terminate the TIPH constitutes a departure from the Oslo II Accord of 1995," referring to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The mission was established following an agreement reached between Tel Aviv and the PLO in 1994, when an Israeli settler killed 29 Palestinian worshipers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in al-Khali

The group did not start its work in the city until 1998, after the Israeli military refused to leave al-Khalil following the establishment of an illegal Israeli settlement at the heart of the city.

TIPH's mandate is renewed every six months. Its latest mandate ended on January 31.

In their statement, the countries also stressed that the TIPH had "diligently fulfilled its mandate as requested by both parties, and thus contributed to preventing violence and promoting a feeling of security for the population in Hebron."

They rejected "any claim that the TIPH has acted against Israel," saying that such accusations were "unacceptable and ungrounded."

UN urges protection of Palestinians

On Saturday, the United Nations' Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed hope that an agreement could be reached to protect Palestinians in the occupied West Bank after Israel's expulsion of international monitors from al-Khalil.

UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said Guterres was "grateful" to the countries that had contributed to conflict prevention under the TIPH for the past 22 years.



Similarly, the European Union issued a statement opposing Israel's al-Khalil move, saying it risked "further deteriorating the already fragile situation on the ground."

PLO Secretary General Saeb Erekat also called Netanyahu's announcement "an additional step towards Israel's nullification of all signed treaties." He called Israel a "rogue" regime.

(Source: Press TV)

Hezbollah supporters take to motorbikes to protest Israel

Upwards of 50 Hezbollah supporters on Sunday afternoon rode motorbikes along Lebanon's southern border with occupied Palestine to oppose Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty, the state-run National News Agency reported.

The motorbikes set off in a convoy from

the town of Bint Jbeil, their yellow-and-green Hezbollah flags trailing behind.

According to local TV channel Al Jadeed, the group was riding "cross" motorbikes, which the party has used before for military resistance operations. The state-run National News Agency put the number of

riders at about 60.

The slogan of the demonstration was "To Jerusalem on millions of cross bikes," one of the convoy members told Al Jadeed's correspondent in Adeisseh, and aimed to express fealty to the party's leader, Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah.

"We're ready if you ask. ... If you want us on cross [motorbikes], then we are at your service," the member said.

He added that those in the convoy drove along the border before returning to their homes in nearby villages and Beirut.

(Source: Daily Star)

UN believes MBS prime suspect in Khashoggi murder

After weeks of outright denial, Riyadh eventually acknowledged the murder but has attempted to shift the blame to Mohammed's underlings and away from the prince himself. International suspicion, however, remains largely directed at Mohammed.

Ankara has demanded that Riyadh extradite the suspects in the case to stand trial in Turkey. Saudi Arabia has refused to do so. Riyadh has not yet produced Khashoggi's body, either.

Callamard's findings and recommendations are expected to be reported to the UN Human Rights Council at a June 2019 session.

(Source: Press TV)

Everyone but himself: Macron blames social media & Russia for Yellow Vests

Who is at fault for Yellow Vest protests raging in France since November? For French President Emmanuel Macron it's not actual economic problems or his own decisions, but the right, the left, social media and, of course, "Russes."

Macron blasted the nation's mainstream media for failing to control the narrative and argued that social networks and "the Russians" are driving all content instead, with traditional outlets falling into line. The president's calculated outburst was published by the weekly Le Point, just before the Yellow Vests officially marked the 12th consecutive week of staging large-scale protests against the government.

The president dismissed Eric Drouet, the 33-year-old trucker who emerged as a prominent figure in the protests, as "a media product, a product of social networks," and claimed that the demonstrators are being "advised from outside, "without elaborating. He argued that 90 percent of the chatter online about the Yellow Vests comes from the "[far] rightists, leftists, and the Russians."

First slackers, now trolls

Yet, 18 months after bending the French party system to his will and his triumphant win against bien-pensant pariah Marine Le Pen, Macron's excuses for disappointing expectations are running thin.

His first cannonade in what was intended to be a sweeping march of modernity, was a labor reform that he claimed would help small businesses. It was met with protests from unions, public sector workers who said it made firing easier, and those fearing loss of benefits.

In a preview of what has now become the norm, Macron dismissed the opponents of his policies as "slackers." In spring the following year thousands were back in the streets protesting against an education reform that makes it more difficult for students to attend public universities of their choice, and taxes that favored the rich.

Unlike the Yellow Vests which began on November 17, 2018, these did not become a weekly feature of French political life. Nor did they spill into nationwide discontent.

This time not only are the protesters demanding more, but the dismissive tone of the government is helping to only inflame them, not dampen things down.

It took Macron four straight weeks of clashes, tear gas, and cannons all across France to finally address the nation. He did so only after the rallies descended into violent street battles with police, with injuries on both sides and hundreds of protesters detained.

The government has already suspended the fuel tax hike that caused the traffic law-mandated vests to be put on in the first place, while the president has promised to raise the minimum wage.

But for many demonstrators these actions are belated, and do not address underlying issues. "It's not enough. We still have to fight the current taxes, the ones that have been in place for years. We should have woken up years ago, and now we have to make up for the years we missed," one of the original and most popular Yellow Vests, Ghislain Coutard, told Deutsche Welle, adding that Macron should "come out of his hole and face" the people.

Macron's Houdini move out of this predicament has been the organization of months-long nationwide debates that are intended to both defuse and diffuse the anger. So far, many of the Yellow Vest leaders have turned down the opportunity to talk, particularly with the latest Macron statements suggesting the president is no more prepared to listen.

On Thursday Macron did try to be more understanding, regretting his arrogance when saying he is a "gilet jaune," and claiming the past 12 weeks of protests left him scarred as he talked to three major French outlets. The next day however, he altered his tune, slamming the media and blaming the protests on Russian trolls.

(Source: RT)

Yellow vest protests hit bastion of Germany's car industry

Hundreds of Germans have donned yellow vests to match protesters in France, demonstrating in the bastion of Germany's car industry in Stuttgart against a recent driving ban on older diesels.

The protest came after organizers asked people to hit the streets clad in the yellow high-visibility vests that have defined months of protests in France -- themselves triggered by an increase in tax on diesel.

"The French are an example to us, because they dared take to the streets to protect their rights," organizer Vasilos Topalis told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Stuttgart is home of Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler, Volkswagen subsidiary Porsche and the world's biggest car parts supplier Bosch. Since January 1, only diesel vehicles meeting the Euro 5 emissions standard are allowed into Stuttgart, with efforts underway

to implement similar driving bans in many German cities.

Topalis said tens of thousands of people are affected by the bans and cannot afford to buy a new car. "What's happening to people is unjust," he added.

The protest came as France's yellow vest protesters returned to the streets on Saturday to keep up the pressure on the government and decry the number of people being injured by police during demonstrations.

Multiple protests took place in Paris and other cities to de-

nounce President Emmanuel Macron's economic policies, which they view as favoring the rich, for the 12th straight weekend of demonstrations.

The government says around 2,000 people have been injured

in protests since the movement began Nov. 17 and 10 people have died in traffic accidents related to yellow vest actions.

(Source: agencies)

Napoli record scorer Hamsik set to leave the club



Napoli's all-time leading scorer and player with the most appearances Marek Hamsik is involved in talks over a possible move to a Chinese club, coach Carlo Ancelotti said on Saturday.

The Slovakian midfielder, who has scored 121 goals for Napoli during 12 seasons in all competitions, made his 520th appearance in Saturday's 3-0 win over Sampdoria.

"There are talks in progress and we are weighing it up together with the player," Ancelotti told reporters after the match.

'This club has great respect for this player, he has made history here, and if we wants a new experience, we are inclined to make it happen.'

Hamsik, 31, joined Napoli from Slovan Bratislava in 2007. He became the club's all-time leading scorer in December 2017 when he overtook Diego Maradona's record of 115 goals and he overhauled Giuseppe Bruscolotti's total of 511 appearances

Hamsik was moved to a new position in front of the defence when Ancelotti replaced Maurizio Sarri as coach during the summer and has spent several matches on the bench this season as the squad has been rotated.

"Ĥamsik does not have a substitute in the squad but we have other players who interpret the role with different characteristics," said Ancelotti.

(Source: Reuterso)

Higuain scores first Chelsea goals, Spurs go second

Chelsea's new signing Gonzalo Higuain netted his first two Premier League goals in Chelsea's 5-0 thrashing of Huddersfield Town while Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min struck late for a 1-0 win over Newcastle United as they moved into second place.

At Cardiff, there were a series of tributes to the club's missing striker Emiliano Sala by players and supporters in the 2-0 win over Bournemouth.

 $Wolver hampton\,Wanderers\,won\,3\text{--}1\,at\,Everton\,on\,a\,day\,when$ most of the top teams did not play, while at the bottom Fulham lost 2-0 at Crystal Palace, Burnley drew 1-1 with Southampton and Brighton & Hove Albion and Watford was goalless.

Goals were never an issue at Chelsea where their new loan signing wasted little time in introducing supporters — and reminding coach Maurizio Sarri — of his potency.

First Higuain made space in the area to fire home from a tight angle after 16 minutes and then produced a shot that deflected past the keeper in the 69th.

With Eden Hazard also scoring twice, and David Luiz adding the fifth, Chelsea gave the prefect response to their 4-0 midweek

drubbing at Bournemouth, which had piled pressure on Sarri. "Apart from the goals (Higuain scored), he is really very suitable

to play very close to Eden," said Sarri, for whom Higuain had scored 38 times in their final season together at Napoli in 2015-16.
"I think that on the pitch they are really very suitable to play one close to the other.

The win took Chelsea back to fourth place, three points above Arsenal, who visit third-placed Manchester City on Sunday, while Huddersfield stay stuck in the basement, six points off second-bottom Fulham. Leaders Liverpool visit West Ham on Monday.

(Source: Reuters)

LeBron James: Lakers star causing urgency on Anthony Davis, demanding a trade now

Lebron James is putting pressure on the Los Angeles Lakers to get a trade done for Anthony Davis before the February 7 deadline. That's according to former NBA star Jalen Rose, who suggests

the Lakers need to get a deal done to appease James.

Davis made it clear that he wanted to leave the Pelicans by handing in a trade request last month.

That put the Lakers on red alert to put together a trade offer, and have already contacted New Orleans with a first package.

ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski reports the offer included Lonzo Ball, Kyle Kuzma, Rajon Rondo, Micheal Beasley and a first-round pick. New Orleans were said to be underwhelmed by the offer and have not yet responded.

But with James just getting back from the longest injury layoff of his career and the Lakers currently outside the playoffs, the clock is ticking. And Rose believes the Lakers can't wait any time in making small-time offers.

There can't be any patience," Rose said on the NBA Countdown. "LeBron James is in his 16th season, just had a groin injury and just missed 17 games.

"LeBron James played 82 games last year, he's missing a game tonight because of load management.

That means there needs to be a sense of urgency.

"Which is why you can't pump fake when you're calling the Pelicans. "You can't even mention these names: Rondo, Lance or Beasley. "Here's what's going to get the deal done, give me Kuzma, Ingram, Ball and/or Wagner because I need to take KCP's money.'

He added: "The problem for the Lakers is KCP. His deal ac-

tually makes this happen.

"When he's the major player in a deal, unlike a Clint Cappella, New Orleans has to be patient because you don't want to take him as a headline in theory to get all of these other young players on your squad.

(Source: Express)

Sala plane underwater search begins

An underwater search for the missing plane carrying footballer Emiliano Sala and his

Cardiff City's new signing disappeared with pilot David Ibbotson over the English Channel on 21 January.

The Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) said its Geo Ocean III vessel arrived on Sunday morning to the search area.

Together with a privately-funded vessel, it is conducting sonar surveys off Guernsey.

The AAIB said its search was expected to last three days, while the private search

will continue "until the plane is located".

Cushions believed to be from the plane were found on a beach near Surtainville, on France's Cotentin Peninsula, on Monday.

Argentine Sala, 28, and Mr Ibbotson, 59, from Crowle, North Lincolnshire, were travelling from Nantes, where Sala previously

played, when the flight was lost.

Speaking from Guernsey harbour, Mr Mearns said his team would work jointly with the AAIB's vessel.

They plan to search an area covering four square miles about 24 nautical miles north of Guernsey. The location has been based on the flight path before it lost radar contact, said Mr Mearns, a shipwreck hunter. An official search following the plane's

disappearance was called off after three days with Guernsey officials saying there was little chance those on board survived. It prompted a privately-funded search

to be set-up, with £324,000 was raised in an online appeal. Sala's family arrived on Guernsey following

his disappearance and were taken to see the

area, circling the island of Alderney.

Mr Mearns said both vessels would divide their search area in half, looking for "wreckage" and a "debris field" in a depth of 60-120m (196-390ft).

"We will continue to work until the plane is located," he said.

Sala would be "proud" of Car-

Cardiff City boss Neil Warnock said that

missing striker Emiliano Sala, who is presumed dead following a plane crash, would have been proud of his team following their 2-0 Premier League win over Bournemouth

Bobby Reid scored early in each half in a game that turned into a celebration of Sala, the club's record 15-million-pound (\$19.63-million) signing from French Ligue 1 club Nantes, who disappeared along with the pilot of a small plane on Jan. 21.

The Argentinian striker and the pilot are believed to have died after crashing into the sea, and a privately-funded search is set to

begin on Sunday.

The Cardiff players held up a T-shirt bearing the image of the 28-year-old Sala, who never played a game for the club, after Reid rifled home an early penalty to give the relegation-threatened Bluebirds the lead in the fifth minute.

"I know he's not here today, but Emiliano today, he would have been proud of us," said Warnock, who had struggled to fight back tears as he applauded the crowd on the pitch after the game.

Fans were handed daffodils as they entered the Cardiff City Stadium and a minute's silence was observed, with many holding up coloured cards to form a mosaic in Sala's

The players' tribute after Reid's fifth-minute penalty was followed in the 28th minute by a round of applause that swelled around the ground as fans

Reid added a second goal 15 seconds after the break to put his side two up and seal three valuable points in their battle to avoid relegation but, despite an outstanding performance, they remain third from bottom on 22 points, two behind Burnley.

Bournemouth were a shadow of the side that hammered Chelsea 4-0 in their midweek league clash, and they remain in 10th position in the table on 33 points.

(Source: Staff & Agency)

Leverkusen prove Bayern Munich have lost fear factor



Having survived a strong early penalty shout and taken a first-half lead against the run of play, the Bayern Munich of the last six seasons would have been absolute certainties to beat a bottom-half side still working out how to play under a new coach.

But the cracks that revealed themselves in the autumn were only papered over by Bayern's seven match winning run in the Bundesliga. At the BayArena, the temporary, flimsy solution to serious structural problems was ripped away by a Leverkusen side intent on attacking, full of belief and relentless in their pressing.

"When you're playing against Bayern, it's going to be hard," said Leverkusen head coach Peter Bosz after the game. "What was important was that we didn't let heads hang down. In the second half we played very courageously."

Few demonstrated the home sides's approach better than Leon Bailey. The Jamaican winger was one of the best young players in the league last season but has had a tough time repeating the trick in 2018-19. With just one goal all season and 25 yards from goal, many may have expected his 53rd minute freekick

to lack real intent. Not a bit of it. Bailey's left-footed strike was as true as they come, dipping and swerving its way past Sven Ulreich's right hand.

That equalizer cranked up the home side's tempo still further. Bailey and Julian Brandt were chasing the length of the pitch to help their full backs, Kevin Volland was forcing Bayern's center backs into sloppy errors and Kai Havertz's exit through what looks to be a serious hip injury was barely noticed. Bayern were

Sure enough, two more goals followed. First Volland finished the kind of flowing counterattacking move Leverkusen had been carving out all day. Then Lucas Alario made sure late on, with VAR showing Brandt to be marginally onside by a matter of centimeters in the build up - the opposite fate to that which befell Robert Lewandowski just before the break. The defeat leaves Bayern six points behind Borussia Dortmund.

They've already lost the same number of games they managed in the whole of last season and twice the number they lost the two seasons before that.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Gerrard's Rangers get 4 pens: 'Could've been 5'



Steven Gerrard said after Rangers were awarded four penalties in Saturday's 4-0 win over St Mirren that his team should have had five spot kicks.

Rangers kept the pressure on Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic with the easiest of home wins at Ibrox, which closed the gap to their Glasgow rivals to three $\,$ points. Celtic travel to St Johnstone later

Captain James Tavernier opened the scoring from the spot in the third minute after Jermain Defoe had been tripped in the box, but missed a second penalty in the 26th minute after Defoe had again been impeded.

Referee Andrew Dallas pointed to the spot again in the 55th minute when St Mirren's Greg Tansey blocked Tavernier's cross with his hands, the Rangers skipper making no mistake this time around to put Rangers 3-0 up.
Incredibly, Dallas awarded a fourth

penalty to the home side in the 80th minute when substitute Daniel Candeias was wrestled to the ground, though the infringement appeared to have taken place iust outside the area.

Despite having the chance to score a

hat trick of penalties, Tavernier handed the ball to Defoe, who rifled past the St Mirren goalkeeper to get on the scoresheet in his first home game since arriving from Bournemouth on loan last month. While Gerrard conceded it was highly

unusual to get four penalty decisions in one match he thought striker Alfredo Morelos should have had another late on. "First one is stonewall, a hundred per-

cent penalty. Second is debatable, I'm not sure how much contact there was," he told RangersTV. "Number three was the hand ball and number four right on the 18-yard box was debatable as well. "But two are definites for me and two

are debatable and we feel as if the officials have missed a clear one on Alfredo, so there could have actually been five which is very "So some you get, some you don't." St

Mirren boss Oran Kearney thought Rangers got more than they should have.

"At the time we felt very aggrieved at the decisions that were made, having watched them back," he told the club's website.

"There's one penalty today and there's three that aren't penalties.

(Source: Soccernet)

Explosive DeMarcus Cousins dunk sparks Warriors in win over Lakers

Stephen Curry was in a drought, the Golden State Warriors were sleepwalking through the start of the second half and Oracle Arena felt like it was lifeless.

Then, DeMarcus Cousins, coming off a high pick and roll, took a pass from Kevin Durant and drove toward the rim. Kyle Kuzma slid over in an attempt to take a charge only to watch Cousins rise up and dunk on the Lakers forward with the foul, electrifying Oracle Arena and the Warriors. Cousins stood above Kuzma and glared, drawing a tech-

nical foul. But it would end up being the Los Angeles Lakers who paid, as Cousins' ferocious dunk sparked a 30-10 run that lifted the Warriors to a 115-101 win over the Lakers. "I thought his dunk brought the arena to life," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "It brought the team to life. We

were searching for energy and emotion up until that point. This was a typical game where you let your guard down a little because the other team's best player is not playing. 'There's no life in the building. Our guys weren't gener-

ating any energy. That play changed all of that.' In his seventh game back since returning to action, Cousins had his first double-double, with 18 points, 10 rebounds, four assists and two blocks in 24 minutes

Cousins' biggest regret was the technical foul that came with the dunk and stare.

"I wished it never happened," Cousins said. "I need that tech back. [Andre Iguodala] tried to pull me away kind of last second, but part of the new NBA: no staredowns.



The Lakers played without LeBron James, who was held out due to "load management" after he logged 40 minutes in his first game back from a groin injury in an overtime win against the Clippers on Thursday. But with Curry shooting 0-for-8 through the first three quarters, Luke Walton's team held an 81-71 lead with 6:05 left in the third, and the Warriors looked like they were going through the motions at home.

Cousins was one Warrior who was active in the third

quarter. He scored nine points, seven coming from the free throw line, with his only basket of the quarter on the dunk.

"I thought I did [get over in time to draw the charge], but it's going to happen," Kuzma said of being dunked on. "When you play defense, you're going to get dunked on sometimes. I got a tip-dunk on him, too, so that counts."

The slam over Kuzma was Cousins' most explosive move since returning to the court from a torn Achilles on Jan. 18. It was during that game against the Clippers that Cousins started his comeback with a dunk.

"You've watched me play for a long time, you know I'm not really much of a dunker," Cousins said when asked if a dunk like this can be big for him mentally in his comeback. "But I think that's more for satisfying you guys [in the media] than anything.

"It feels good to be able to finish," Cousins added. "Obviously, I haven't been finishing the way that I would like; that's still a process that I am trying to get through. Just finding my touch and balance around the rim, it was a good finish, I am happy about that."

Cousins says he's still adapting to being on a minutes restriction and trying to get used to the officiating, as well. "Man!" an exasperated Cousins said when asked how difficult it is for him to get used to the way he's being officiated now. "It's tough man. We'll figure it out, though. We got a lot of time to figure it out."

(Source: ESPN)

Iran captain Masoud Shojaei not 'thinking of retirement'

al football team captain $Masoud\,Shojaei\,is\,not\,going\,to\,retire\,\overline{from}$ international duty.

After Iran's heartbreaking exit from the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, Carlos Queiroz stepped down as Team Melli coach and the next head coach might change the team

to build a young team.
In the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, the veteran midfielder wrote his name into the Iran $football\ record\ books\ as\ the\ first\ Iranian$ player who has represented the country in seven major tournaments.

He was a member of Iran national football team in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup and has represented Team Melli in three more editions so far.

Shojaei was also a member of Iran national football team in the 2006 FIFA World Cup and has featured Team Melli in 2014 and 2018 World Cups.

He had previously registered a record as the only Iranian player who has played in three FIFA World Cups.

Shojaei is not going to retire from international duty with Team Melli and says the next coach will decide about his future.



Huge crowds greet the Maroons as they fly home



Qatar's victorious AFC Asian Cup football team returned home to Doha to a rapturous welcome on Saturday, greeted by the country's Ruler and hundreds of thousands of fans.

Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani -- who happily high-fived children while waiting for the team to arrive -- met the players as they landed to kick-start a second straight night of celebrations in Doha.

"I am very happy to see the people celebrating with us, we realize how big what

we did is," said coach Felix Sanchez.

"When you win a trophy like that you feel very proud, to see that the hard work sometimes gives you the reward."

The players were also greeted by other members of the Royal family, and the head of Qatar Airways, Akbar al-Baker, who supplied the plane for the team to travel back from Oman.

Their aircraft was given a fly-past by Mirage jets, there was a military band, and the squad were presented with garlands as they finally disembarked.

Players and staff were mobbed by fans, friends and family before getting on a specially decorated open top bus to begin the long crawl into Doha to meet the huge numbers who had waited patiently for them to arrive.

"I am proud to make these people happy," said Ali Almoez, the tournament's

all the players are. He added: "For 40 years Qatari people did not celebrate, now we will celebrate for the next four years and not stop."

top scorer. "I am proud of this thing and

Captain Hasan Al Haydos (pictured above, second from left) called the unexpected triumph and celebrations "an unthinkable feeling" that would "stay with me for life".

Fans waited patiently for several hours to watch the team's parade through central Doha.

Huge crowds crammed on to the Corniche, the main seafront road in the city, to catch a glimpse of their heroes.

Supporters ran alongside the bus as it crawled through the capital.

An air of jubilation has engulfed Qatar ever since the team defeated the United Arab Emirates in the semi-final 4-0 to ensure their first final.

Since Friday's 3-1 final victory over Japan, celebrations throughout the country have barely stopped.

It was Qatar's first ever AFC Asian Cup

Straight after the victory, thousands of Qataris flooded the streets -- and roads -- to revel in their team's success.

The AFC Asian Cup triumph is the 2022 World Cup hosts' biggest footballing victory, far eclipsing their three Gulf Cup victories. (Source: AFP)

World Para-Taekwondo Championships



The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has announced the Taekwondo Ones to Watch ahead of the 2019 World Championships in February in Antalya, Turkey.

These are athletes who have the potential to make headlines, especially with the sport set to make its Paralympic debut at Tokyo 2020. Their biographies are now available on the IPC website.

Amy Truesdale (GBR)

One of the pioneers of Para taekwondo who celebrated world gold on home soil in 2017, highlighting an unbeaten season in the women's over 58 kg K44. **■**Bolor-Erdene Ganbat (MGL)

From the time he began competing internationally in 2015 until the time he picked up his third straight world title in 2017, Ganbat never dropped a fight in the men's up to 61 kg K44.

Bopha Kong (FRA)

Has captured virtually every title imaginable in the men's up to 61 kg K43 division and will be a strong favourite for the sport's Paralympic debut.

Claudia Romero (MEX)

Stormed onto the scene in 2016 by winning Pan American Championship gold and is a teenage talent not to be missed in the women's up to 49kg K44. Evan Medell (USA)

Only began competing in Para taek-

come one of the most dangerous fighters in the men's over 75 kg $\bar{\text{K44}}$ division.

Kenta Awatari (JPN)

quarter finals at the 2017 Worlds - his first international tournament – in the men's up to 61 kg K43, giving Japan plenty

Lisa Gjessing (DEN)

Four World Championships, four European Championships, and IWAS target is a Paralympic gold in the women's

Mahdi Pourrahnama (IRI)

Since picking up his first Worlds medal in 2009 at 13 years old, Pourrahnama has strung together one of the best resumes. Watch for him in the men's up

Meryem Betul Cavdar (TUR) Knocked off two of the top fighters in the women's up to 49 kg K44 to

claim bronze at her first World Championships in 2017.

Rajae Akermach (MAR)

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Iran's Pourrahnama one to watch at



wondo four years ago but has since be-

Hit the ground running, making the to look forward to in 2020.

World Games titles. The only one left to up to 58kg K44.

to 75 kg K44.

Made history in 2017 when she became the first African woman to earn a world No. 1 ranking in the sport, becoming a threat in the women's over 58 kg K44.

The Numbers Game: Facts and Figures of UAE 2019

Abu Dhabi: After 51 games and a record 130 goals, the AFC Asian Cup has been run and won for another four years, with Qatar making history by winning the title for the first time.

With the ink still drying on another memorable chapter in the competition's proud history, the-AFC. com looks back at some of the notable numbers and statistical highlights of the 17th edition of Asia's biggest football tournament.

1 - Qatar came within 21 minutes of keeping an entire tournament worth of clean sheets, but their final tally of one goal conceded still meant the champions had the most miserly defense 5 in the tournament.

It took 609 minutes for goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb to be beaten, as Qatar became the first team to reach the final by keeping six successive clean sheets.

- Potentially the one statistic of this tournament that will become assumed knowledge for Asian football fans everywhere; tournament MVP Almoez Ali broke Ali Daei's 23-year-old record for goals in a single a tournament with nine strikes in seven matches.

The 22-year-old incredibly scored his nine goals from just 16 shots, well short of the 28 from Sardar Azmoun, who had the most attempts in the competition.

10 - If Almoez Ali was the revelation of the tournament, Akram Afif was surely a close second. The Al Sadd forward earned Player of the Match honors in the final, and lit up the tournament as a whole with 10 assists, the most in recorded history

He provided the final pass for more than twice as many goals as any other player, and also created a whopping 26 chances, with Australia's Chris Ikonomidis his nearest



14 - Kyrgyz Republic won the respect of the Asian football world with their fine displays in the UAE and, in dynamic defender Valeri Kichin, they had the player who executed the most interceptions in the tournament.

The Akshumkar captain intercepted 14 passes from opposition players, one more than Japan's Gaku Shibasaki.

21 - Qatar's Saad Al Sheeb was deservedly crowned the tournament's best goalkeeper, but it was Ignatiy Nesterov, appearing in a record fifth AFC Asian Cup, who made the most saves.

The 35-year-old made 21 stops, conceding three goals, but spare a thought for Jordan's Amer Shafi, who made 20 saves in his side's four matches, and conceded just one goal, only to face Round of 16 elimination via a penalty shootout defeat to Vietnam.

23.85 - Iraq were the AFC Asian Cup's youngest side, with an average age of 23 years and 309 days, or 23.85 years old.

China PR (29 years, 212 days) were UAE 2019's oldest side. The competition's three youngest sides, Iraq, Vietnam and Qatar, all reached the knockout stage, although the next three youngest (India, DPR Korea and Yemen) all finished

bottom of their respective groups. 32 - Jamie Maclaren's opening goal for Australia in their

3-o Matchday Two win over Palestine wasn't only his first at senior international level, but it completed the longest pass sequence for a goal in the tournament. Tom Rogic's final ball was the 32nd pass in the build-up to

the goal, with Qatar's Abdelkarim Hassan's goal against DPR Korea, which ended a 23-pass move, the nearest challenger. 46 - Another Al Annabi star in the UAE was Boualem

praise for his defensive contribution to the Qatari cause, and racked up a competition-high 46 clearances. Khouki also managed to score two goals. One in the 6-0 group stage defeat of DPR Korea, and the other the vital

Khouhki, who fulfilled a variety of roles but earned the most

opener in the 4-0 semi-final win over the UAE. 72.6% - Saudi Arabia kept the ball more than any other side at the AFC Asian Cup, registering an average 72.6 percent possession in their four matches, while DPR Korea had the lowest average at 32 percent.

495 - Korea Republic's Jung Woo-young was officially the competition's pass master, racking up 495 at an accuracy of 89.7%, despite playing only five matches.

Australia had three of the top five distributors, with Trent Sainsbury, Mark Milligan and Milos Degenek all exceeding the 400-mark before the reigning champions were eliminated in the quarter-finals.

(Source: the-afc)

The best is still to come from Alireza Jahanbakhsh: **Chris Hughton**

Brighton & Hove Albion boss Chris Hughton says it might be next season when they see the best of Iranian winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh.

The 25-year-old became Albion's club record signing when he joined for a reported £17m fee in July.

He has made 11 appearances but suffered a hamstring injury in the defeat at Everton in early November. He returned to action last month when he represented Iran at the Asian Cup and is now back with Brighton.

'We are yet to see the best of him but I think that's more circumstance as it's been very much stop-start. He came late, so it's adjusting to us, to pre-season, the division and then he probably got injured at a time when for his progress he didn't want to," Hughton said.

"He was starting to play and the more games he plays,

that longer period, so for his development the Asian Cup came at a bad time but now he's back it's about integrating back into the group again and going again," he added. "Because of the way his season has gone it might be next season when we see the best of him. But I'd like to think it

he's adjusting to how we play and the league. He needed

might be in this final three or four months of the season,' (Source: Brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk)

Iran's Greco-Roman wrestlers rank 2nd in Turkish tournament

IRNA — Iranian Greco-Roman wrestling team ranked second at VEHBI EMRE international competitions held

Mohammad Bana's men gained four gold medals and three bronze medals at the event.

The tournament, which began in Istanbul on Feb 1 with the participation of representatives from 11 countries, wound up on Saturday.

Mick Schumacher blasts fake family pictures on social media

Mick Schumacher set the record straight regarding a series of pictures of his father with children circulating on the web.

The images - shared by many fans on social media -purport to depict Michael Schumacher with son Mick and daughter Gina over the years.

The 19-year-old son of the F1 legend posted a message on Twitter warning people that the children appearing in the shots were neither himself nor his 21-year-old sister.

It's anybody's guess who the children in the pictures actually are, but Mick Schumacher is obviously just as protective of his family's image and privacy as was his illustrious father.

In a recent interview with the FIA's official magazine Auto, the Ferrari junior opened up recently about his seven-time world champion father, how he inspired him to follow in his footsteps.

(Source: F1I)

Rooney hurts ankle in DC United friendly

Wayne Rooney was substituted after suffering an ankle injury in DC United's first preseason friendly this weekend

but is optimistic that he can make a swift return to action. Former Manchester United and England star Rooney cked up the injury in the early stages of his side's match against Bethlehem Steel.

despite returning to the pitch for a short while, was taken off after 18 minutes. Rooney's ankle was treated with an ice pack before being bandaged, but he said was confident he would soon be

The 33-year-old received treatment on the sidelines and,

"I've got a few of them before," he said. "It took longer than I thought to ease down, so no point in taking any chances.

Coach Ben Olsen added: "He's a tough guy -- he'll be fine. It's a bruise. It wasn't a twist or anything. It will be a day or two, then he'll be OK.'

I'm not too concerned.'

Rooney could play a part in his side's next friendly, against FC Cincinnati in Florida on Thursday as preparations continue for the first MLS game of the season at home to Atlanta

He scored 12 goals in 21 matches for the club last season, setting up six others.

(Source: ESPN)

Aston Villa's Tyrone Mings apologizes for Nelson Oliveira facial injury

Aston Villa defender Tyrone Mings has apologized for accidentally stepping on the face of Reading striker Nelson

The incident happened in the 73rd minute of the goalless draw at the Madejski Stadium on Saturday.

Mings, who was making his debut after completing a loan move from Bournemouth, caught Oliveira's face with The Portuguese, who was appearing for the Royals for

only the second time after a loan switch from Norwich, was treated on the pitch and later taken to hospital with a suspected broken nose and serious facial injuries. He is likely to undergo surgery

(Source: Sky Sports)

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Praising more than anyone deserves is flattery, and negligence in praise is either dumbness or envy.

Imam Ali (AS)

FAJR FILMFEST MIRROR

"Orange Days" director dissatisfied with gender biases about his film

TEHRAN – Director Arash Lahuti has said d e s k that he is dissatisfied with those who judge his film "Orange Days" with gender categories.

Speaking at a press conference during the 37th Fajr Film Festival on Saturday, he said that "Orange Days" is not a feministic film. "It is a narrative of a human's life, either a man or a woman,"



Director Arash Lahuti (L) and cast member Ali Mosaffa attend a press conference for "Orange Days" during the 37th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on February 2, 2019. (Mehr/ Mohammadreza Abbasi)

The film which is about Aban, the only female contractor in the cutthroat and male-dominated orange harvesting industry, who enters a competition to win a large contract, has been acclaimed in several international events.

Actor Ali Mosaffa also said that the film shows a different image of Iranian women and that is why the film has been critically acclaimed at the international festivals.

"Orange Days" won three awards at the 67th Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival including the Grand Newcomer Award, FIPRESCI Award and Ecumenical Jury Award last November.

Hedyeh Tehrani, the star of the film, won the best actress award and Arash Lahuti and Jamileh Daroshafai received the best screenplay award at the 4th CineIran Festival in Toronto in November.

"Snake Venom" director asks critics for severe review of his movie

TEHRAN – Iranian comedian Javad Razavian k has asked critics to severely criticize his



directorial debut "Snake Venom". Speaking at a press conference after a screening of the film at the 37th Fajr Film Festival, he said that by his film, he intended to warn about the consequences of poverty and lack of

Tehran concert to celebrate 40th anniversary of Islamic Revolution

cultural awareness

TEHRAN – The Alborz Symphony Orchestra d e s k will give a concert tonight at the Sacred Defense Garden Museum in Tehran to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Vocalists Salar Aqili, Vahid Taj and Mario Taqadosi will ac-

company the orchestra, which will perform under the baton of Homayun Rahimian.

A repertoire of the Iranian revolutionary anthems and popular songs will be performed during the concert entitled "Chelcheleh".

"When the Moon Was Full" depicts how extremism frustrates ambitions: actor

TEHRAN – Fereshteh d e s k Sadr-Orafai, the actor of "The Night When the Moon Was Full", has said the drama shows how extremism frustrates human ambitions.

The film directed by Narges Abyar based on a true story is competing in the 37th Fajr Film Festival, which is currently underway

It is about Abdul-Hamid Rigi, the younger brother of Abdul-Malik Rigi, the founder and leader of the Jundallah terrorist group in southeastern Iran, who marries Faezeh Mansuri, a woman from Tehran. He forces Faezeh to leave her homeland along with her brother to live in Pakistan where they find themselves $involved\ in\ the\ Jundallah\ terrorist\ activities.$

"This film depicts how fundamentalism and extremism victimize love and beautiful ambitions and replace them with hatred, rage, hostility and pessimism," Sadr-Orafai, who stars as the mother of the Rigi brothers, told the Persian service of MNA on Saturday.

"Women and children are the major victims of wars and fundamentalist and extremist thoughts," she added.

Sadr-Orafai spent two weeks living with families in the Sistan-Baluchestan region to get close to her role in the movie.

"They warmly received me into their homes and invited me to their wedding ceremonies as I learned a lot about their culture and behavior that were very helpful," she said.

The Rigi brothers were arrested by Iranian security forces and were hanged in 2010 after a court found them guilty of dozens of criminal charges.



Actress Fereshteh Sadr-Orafai in an undated photo.

Theater elites to receive lifetime achievement honor at Fajr festival

TEHRAN – Actors e s k Hushang Tavakkoli, Reza Babak, and Roya Teimurian, and playwright Mohammad-Amir Yarahmadi will be honored with lifetime achievement awards at the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival.

Tavakkoli has collaborated in numerous acclaimed productions such as "Nightmares and Memories of a Bath Attendant about the Life and Murder of Amir Kabir" by

He has also been active as a researcher, while he has played roles in several movies such as "Under the Smoky Roof" by Puran Derakhshandeh and the acclaimed drama "Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh.

Babak has mostly been involved in children's theater. He has worked as a director in many theatrical projects, including "Thief and Red Color", "Ulduz and the Crows", "Talking Doll", and "Hamlet, Denmark's Little Prince".

His roles in several TV series such as



This combination photo shows (top row L-R) Roya Teimurian and Hushang Tavakkoli and (bottom row L-R) Mohammad-Amir Yarahmadi and Reza Babak. (Fajr Intl. Theater

"Qarib's Life" by Kianush Ayyari, "Ziba Barbershop" by Marzieh Borumand and "Our Home" by Masud Kermati are among his noteworthy credits.

Teimurian has also staged remarkable performances in plays such as "Les Misérables" by Behruz Gharibpur, "Hera" by Nasrollah Qaderi, "Inspector" by Alireza Kushk-Jalali, and "The House of Bernarda Alba" by Ali Rafiei.

Her roles in TV series such as "Rana" by Davud Mirbaqeri, "Tenth Night" by Hassan Fat'hi, and "Edge of Darkness" by Saeid Soltani are also worth mentioning.

Yarahmadi has written and collected over 100 long and short plays for radio.

'Old Blade", "Charlotte", "Last Night of the World", and "Let Us Take a Walk Together" are among the plays written by Yarahmadi.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from February

13th Fajr Poetry Festival honors winners

CULTURE TEHRAN – Winners of the 13th Fajr Poetry Festival were honored during a ceremony held at the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) on Saturday.

The honoring ceremony was attended by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi.

In the adult's poetry section, two books "Domino" by Abuzar Pakravan, and "The Sad Soul of a Poet" by Reza Mohammadi shared the top award.

No winner was picked by the jury for the children's poetry

Mahmud Omidsalar's "Poetics and Politics of Iran's

National Epic, the Shahnameh" and Hassan Javadi's "Influence of Persian Literature on English Literature" shared the top award at the About Poetry section.

Veteran Iranian poet Seyyed Ali Musavi Garmarudi, famous for his Persian translation of Nahi-ul-Balagha of Imam Ali (AS), was honored with a lifetime achievement award.

"Alita: Battle Angel" movie finally arrives, to lukewarm reviews

LONDON (Reuters) — Some 15 years in the making and after multiple delays, sci-fi epic "Alita: Battle Angel" finally arrived on Thursday, but the Japanese manga-inspired action film earned only lukewarm reviews.

The tale of a cyborg heroine in a postapocalyptic world, "Alita: Battle Angel" was a passion project for acclaimed "Avatar" director James Cameron for years before he turned it over to director Robert Rodriguez.

Speaking at the world premiere in London on Thursday, Rodriguez said Cameron, who first wrote a script in 2004, had crafted "a story that could really play around the world, even to people who don't know manga.'

"It's a more universal story than I think people are expecting," the director told

Rodriguez has said the movie's budget was around \$150 million. The release date was pushed back twice by Hollywood studio Twenty-First Century Fox.

Early reviews were largely disappointing. While praising the film's slick action sequences and the expressive, huge-eyed Alita - who is played by actress Rosa Salazar with CGI effects - many movie critics found the characters thinly developed.

Britain's Independent newspaper said "Alita" lacked the emotional pull of Cameron's other blockbusters, "Avatar" and "Titanic." Hollywood website The Wrap called the movie "a glossy muddle" while Britain's Guardian newspaper said it was "a vanilla dystopian romance.'

Los Angeles-based IndieWire was more enthusiastic, saying the film "lives up to its potential while leaving you wanting more."



Honoree Robert Rodriguez poses during 2014 NCLR ALMA Awards at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium in Pasadena, California October 10, 2014. (Reuters/ Kevork Diansezian)

Manga movies have proved a hard sell to Western filmgoers in the past, but Cameron, who retains a writing and producing credit, said on Thursday that 'Alita" was different.

"We know the film is a crowd pleaser. We know that for sure. Now, we know the audience will go with her (Alita) on her journey and believe in her and feel her spirit," he said.

The movie has also faced criticism for not casting Asian actors in the lead parts. Yukito Kishiro, who wrote the original graphic novels, said on Thursday he did not share the misgivings.

"I think it's a perfect cast. Had they had, say, a Japanese actress who can act the great action scenes, sure. But I suppose the casting people decided to go with what we have because there is a reason for that. I'm happy with that," Kishiro told Reuters on the London red carpet.

"Alita: Battle Angel" opens in the UK on Feb. 6 and in the United States on Feb. 14.

Céline Dion authorised biopic "The Power of Love" announced for 2020

LONDON (Guardian) — Céline Dion is the subject of a forthcoming biopic, "The Power of Love", slated for release in 2020. French star Valérie Lemercier will direct the film and play the singer. Dion, 50, has authorized the project and granted the rights to her songs, Variety reports.

'The Power of Love" will follow Dion from her childhood in Quebec in the 1960s, where she was the youngest of 14 children in what she has described as a poor but happy family, to her teenage rise to fame.

Dion made her first recording, Ce n'était qu'un rêve, aged 12. She wrote the song with her mother Thérèse and brother Jacques. Another brother, Michael, sent the song to manager René Angélil, who remortgaged his home to fund her first album. Angélil and Dion married in December 1994 and remained together until his death in January 2016.

Lemercier said she was touched by Dion's grief following Angélil's death, and began learning about Dion, her husband and mother . "I discovered the strength of their love story and their great humor, and I better understood how the alchemy of their three individual ambitions made an unwanted little girl the greatest star on the planet," Lemercier said.

Cécile Gaget of French studio Gaumont said the film would be "in the vein of "[forthcoming Elton John biopic] "Rocketman" and "Bohemian Rhapsody", but unlike those movies which were produced and released by studios, "The Power of Love" is a potential box office hit accessible to independent distributors". Of the director, she added: "She's a powerhouse who knows how to move and how to dance. And she's a perfectionist and an overachiever



in many ways like Dion.

Lemercier has directed a number of domestic hits, including "Palais Royal!" and "50 Is the New 30", and has a background as a chanteuse, herself performing one-woman shows in Paris.

"The Power of Love" joins a recent glut of music biopics and musician-endorsed movies. Bruce Springsteen has endorsed and lent 16 of his songs to the soundtrack of Gurinder Chadha's "Blinded by the Light", an adaptation of Sarfraz Manzoor's memoir about discovering Springsteen as a Muslim teenager growing up in 80s Britain. The film was acquired for \$15m by New Line

and Warner Bros at Sundance. Dion will play her only European date of 2019 at London's Hyde Park this summer, headlining the British Summer Time festival. It will be her first performance in the UK since summer 2017. The concert will come shortly after she completes her Las Vegas concert residency, which began

in 2011 and will close on 8 June. She recently removed her 1998 duet with R Kelly, "I'm Your Angel", from streaming services, following the broadcast of the Lifetime documentary series, "Surviving R Kelly".