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Iran-Syria terror fight benefited entire world



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VP inaugurates industrial, health projects worth \$176.5m

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In his one-day journey to the west-central province of Hamedan, Iranian First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri inaugurated several industrial and health projects at the value of around \$176.5 million in the province, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Four solar farms with the capacity of

seven megawatts (MW) each, went on stream in the presence of the senior official, increasing the capacity of the province's solar power plants up to 45 MW.

As reported, €28 million (\$31.9 million) of investments were made for construction of the new power plants, of which €7 million was supplied by the foreign sector. **→4**

INSTEX should not be tied to FATF, Tehran tells EU

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has said European countries should not link a payment mechanism that they have announced to safeguard trade with the Islamic Republic to an approval of the FATF by Tehran.

The UK, France, and Germany, three of the European signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA), issued a joint statement on January 31 announcing the

launch of the long-awaited direct non-dollar payment mechanism meant to protect their trade ties with Iran in the face of the United States sanctions.

In a Monday statement, the European Council asked Iran to join the FATF before the financial mechanism, officially called the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), takes force. It also called on Iran to restrict its missile program. **→2**

Bahrainis firm to continue peaceful struggle for change: Al-Wafaq

As Bahraini people gear up to mark the eighth anniversary of their uprising against the ruling Al Khalifah regime on February 14, the country's main Shia opposition group, the al-Wafaq National Islamic Society, has reaffirmed its determination to continue peaceful rallies until its demands for political reforms are met.

Al-Wafaq, which has been dissolved and banned from conducting any activity by the Al Khalifah rulers, said in a statement

on Tuesday that Bahrainis have increasingly witnessed Manama's "corruption, tyranny and recklessness" over the years, Bahrain's Lulu TV reported.

Al-Wafaq described the country's deteriorating situation as "frightening," and warned of a bleak future.

Eight years on, the Bahraini movement is still sticking to its demands for political reforms, and is resolved to keep up its struggle for change, it added. **→13**

Kashmir's splendors, arts and cuisine come to Iran in exhibit

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — The Economic Cooperation Organization Cultural Institute observed Kashmir Solidarity Day on Tuesday by hosting a walk-through exhibition, which showcases arts and cuisine as well as photos of natural beauties of the Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

ECO Cultural Institute Director Mohammad-Mahdi Mazaheri and Ambassador Riffat Masood cut the ribbon on the three-day exhibit that also features handicrafts, woodwork, handmade textiles, known as "Little Iran".

As Kashmiri traditional music filled the venue, a documentary film "Iran-e Saghir" produced by Iranian Sahar TV, also screened for the audience.

The greenish region's dishes and tea were also on the menu to delight the invitees.

A host of ambassadors, diplomats, Iranian scholars, academia, college students and members of Pakistani community attended the event that was organized by the Embassy of Pakistan.

Several speakers addressed history, arts, culture, natural landscape and everyday life in Kashmir, which is also known as "Iran-e Saghir" meaning "Little Iran."

In her keynote speech, Ambassador Riffat Masood highlighted the historical, cultural and traditional bonds between Kashmir and Iran that were the main theme of the exhibition.

Referring to the poetry of Allama Iqbal who called Kashmir as Iran-e-Saghir, the envoy said that Iran-e Saghir is now under occupation.

"Kashmiris continue to suffer countless brutalities with gross human rights violations," she said.

Veteran Iranian scholar Qasim Saafi elucidating religious and cultural commonalities between Iran and Kashmir, explained that Islam was promoted across Kashmir by Mir Seyyed Ali Hamadani, a prominent Iranian poet and scholar.

Pakistani scholar Rashid Naqvi used the context of long-standing struggle between Pakistan and India to condemn "human rights violations committed by Indian occupation forces against innocent Kashmiris".

Mazaheri, in his speech, reminded attendees of historical and linguistic annex between Iran and Kashmir as he mentioned that those relations are deeply rooted.

Every year, on February 5, Kashmir Solidarity Day is marked across Pakistan and by Kashmiri nationalists worldwide, holding special programs.

Parliamentary committee chief: INSTEX does not include oil money transfer

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Mohammadreza Pourebrahimi, head of the Economic Committee of the Iranian Parliament, has said that INSTEX (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges) does not include transfer of oil money.

"Europe was obligated to help transfer of Iran's oil money, however, INSTEX does not include this issue," Mehr news agency quoted him as saying on Tuesday.

He said that INSTEX is unacceptable because it restricts transfer of the country's oil income and also is linked to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

"Europe's act in setting condition for implementation of INSTEX is an insult to the Iranian

people. The [Iranian] Foreign Ministry should take a serious position in this respect. We believe that Europeans' commitments should be fulfilled apart from the FATF," he remarked.

Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larjani has also said Iran would never accept the "humiliating conditions" of the European Union's financial mechanism for trade with Iran, including Iran's accession to the FATF.

On Thursday, France, Germany and Britain officially announced the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

The European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, French Foreign Minister

Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt issued a statement saying the INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran.

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

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



REPORT

Ramin Hossein Abadian
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Saudi new project is to portray Damascus as insecure

TEHRAN — After the Saudis series of defeat in Syria in the past few years, the regime is trying hard to portray Syria as an insecure country through some Western-Arab media outlets.

The Syrian Ministry of Interior issued a statement in which it dismisses any news about unsafety in Damascus calling it "baseless" and "untrue". The ministry has also denied news on abduction of civilians in Damascus and noted it has received no report of such in the past few weeks or months.

The question is who is trying to portray a wrong image of Syria particularly in Damascus, and especially now that the Syrian resistance forces have achieved much in the political and ground battle in the fight against terrorism.

■ Creating fear and terror among people

It seems that in the portrayal of an "unsafe Damascus" by some Western countries and Saudi Arabia aims at creating fear and terror among civilians and people of Syria in various parts of the country.

That way they can portray a wrong image of the capital of Syria and influence and shape public opinion that despite the Syrian resistance achievement the capital of Syria remains unsafe.

The enemy knows all too well that one of the reasons Bashar al-Assad still is the head of the Syrian government is that he has the public support. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and its allies are spreading rumors about the insecurity in Syria.

■ Field achievement for Syrian resistance forces is Saudis' nightmare

Presently, tens of thousands of Syrian refugees, successful ground battle, have had voluntary repatriation as the situation in many parts of Syria is gradually returning to normal.

The Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria releases a number of reports on the Syrian voluntary return on a daily basis.

Thus, Saudi officials, fearful of repatriation of Syrians, have adopted a new deceptive policy to confront the legitimate government of Bashar al-Assad. **→7**



PERSPECTIVE

Javad Heirannia
political analyst

Saudi Arabia's missile program

According to satellite imagery reported by The Washington Post, Saudi Arabia is building its first factory to produce ballistic missiles. It is located at a missile base in al-Watah district, southwest of the capital of Riyadh. Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear weapons expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, argues that this development raises "the possibility that Saudi Arabia is going to build longer-range missiles and seek nuclear weapons." Lewis adds, "We may be underestimating their desire and their capabilities."

The findings were further confirmed by Michael Elleman of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and Joseph Bermudez of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. So far, neither the Saudi embassy in the United States nor the U.S. government has reacted to this development.

The history of the Saudi missile program dates back to the 1980s when Saudi Air Force commander Prince Khalid Bin Sultan traveled to China to buy medium-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Since the fuel for these missiles was liquid, their ability was limited. At the time, Saudi Arabia was worried about missile threats from Saddam Hussein and also hoping to gain an edge over Iran. The United States did not oppose the purchase, since the CIA concluded that the missiles did not have the ability to carry nuclear warheads. In fact, the purchase of these missiles was carried out under the authority of George Bush's administration.

Saudi Arabia's current missile efforts are part of the ambitious security program of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (Mbs). Last year, Mbs and former Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir both warned that the kingdom would seek nuclear weapons if Iran did the same. "It is difficult to tell" whether Saudi Arabia was preparing to go nuclear with its alleged new missiles, researchers Fabian Hinz and David Schmerler told Newsweek, because the exact model of the missiles is unknown. Hinz added, "if you want to have nuclear weapons, in general, you also want to have the means to domestically build the delivery systems." **→7**



President Hassan Rouhani honors a scholar during the 36th Iran's Book of the Year Awards at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 5, 2019.

There will be no regression in Iran: Rouhani

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani addressing the U.S. government on Tuesday said that there shall be no regression in Iran.

He made the remarks during the 36th Iran's Book of the Year Awards held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

He pointed to the history of relations between Iran and the United States and said, "We shall never regress because we have chosen the right path as is confirmed by the numbers." **→16**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani,
Putin to meet
in Sochi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will soon hold a meeting in Sochi, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said.

The meeting between the Iranian and Russian leaders will be held on the sidelines of the upcoming talks on the Syria crisis on February 14 which also includes the Turkish leader, Peskov said, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Iran, Russia, and Turkey have so far arranged 11 rounds of talks on the Syrian crisis. The latest round of the talks was held on November 28-29. Representatives from Jordan and the United Nations also attended the event in Astana as observers.



Iran produces
highly-pure
oxygen isotope

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian scientists have succeeded to produce Oxygen-18, a natural isotope of oxygen used in medical industry.

Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), made the announcement during a ceremony in Markazi province on Monday, Press TV reported, citing IRNA.

Salehi said the isotope is being produced at 97 percent purity, stating that by harnessing the technology at the Khandab Research Reactor, the Islamic Republic had broken the international monopoly of its production, which was previously held by only five countries.



‘EU after
blackmailing Iran
by tying INSTEX
to CFT, Palermo’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of the Expediency Council, says he regards tying INSTEX, a financial channel for trade with Iran, to Tehran's accession to the CFT and the Palermo Convention as some sort of blackmail.

In a post on his Twitter account on Tuesday, Rezaee denounced the EU's conditional implementation of INSTEX, saying that instead of such measures the Europeans must honor their commitments under the JCPOA, Tasnim reported.

On Monday, Council of the European Union issued a conclusion on the Islamic Republic, urging Iran to “adopt and implement the necessary legislation pursuant to its commitments under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Action Plan.”



UK documents
only part of reality
about Iran-Iraq
war: MP

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh has said the British government's recently declassified documents about Iraq's imposed war against Iran in the 80s show only a small part of the whole reality.

“These documents show that European countries regard America accountable for continuation of regional conflicts and that there are still disagreements,” Falahatpisheh said, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

During the war, 36 countries supported Saddam Hussein to wage a war against Iran, he said, adding that 350 Western companies and 70 American ones armed the Iraqi dictator with material to build chemical weapons.



Iran, Iraq
discuss
parliamentary
ties

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, has met with a number of Iraqi officials to discuss parliamentary ties.

In his meeting with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Muhammad al-Halbusi, Amir Abdollahian submitted an invitation letter from the Iranian parliament speaker to him to visit Iran, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

He also held talks with leader of the Iraqi National Alliance Ammar Hakim.

In the meantime, Amir Abdollahian delivered a speech over regional developments in a conference held with the attendance of Iraqi President Barham Salih.



Five aircraft
overhauled at
Shahid Doran
airbase

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Five aircraft, including super-heavy cargo, fighter and military aircraft, have been overhauled by Iranian technicians at the Shiraz Shahid Doran airbase.

Ahead of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Army's technicians overhauled Ilyushin, C-130, P6 and P3F aircraft as well as a Sukhoi Su-24 attack aircraft, Mehr reported.

The aircraft were added to the Army Air Force's fleet after final tests and training flights.

In recent years, the Air Force has shown remarkable capabilities in building parts and equipment and overhauling different types of planes and helicopters.

Iran-Syria war on terror has benefited entire world: Shamkhani

Iran's security chief warns if Israel does not stop violating Syrian sovereignty it will receive a serious response

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, said on Tuesday that Iran and Syria will continue cooperation in fighting terrorism.

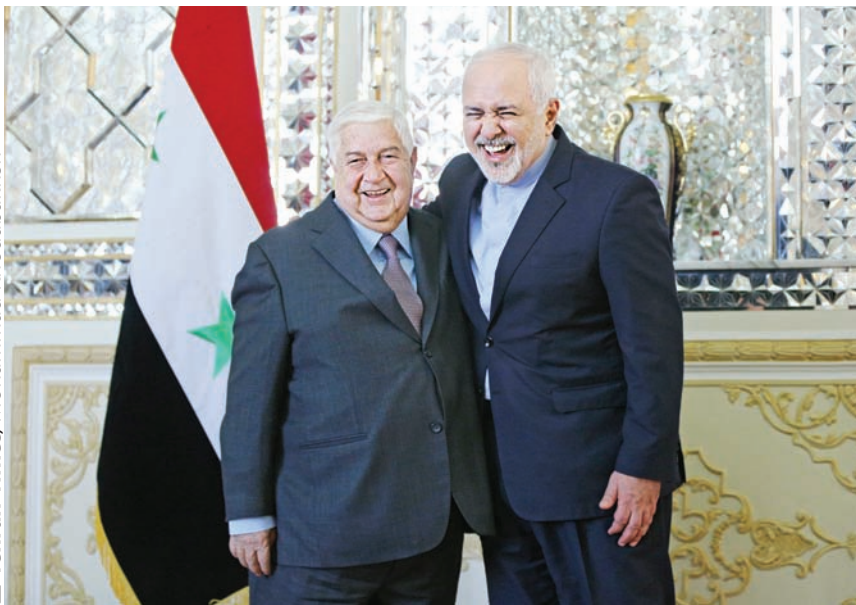
“Iran-Syria cooperation in fighting Takfiri terrorism has had undeniable achievements for the region and for the international security and this process will continue” until the security crisis in Syria is resolved, Shamkhani said during a meeting with visiting Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in Tehran.

Shamkhani said that Iran will stand beside Syria in the reconstruction time.

“Return of security to Syria is an important opportunity for the country's development and providing services to the grief-stricken people of Syria, and the Islamic republic of Iran which stood beside Syrian people and government in the war against terrorism it will spare no effort to help and counsel in the reconstruction time,” Shamkhani explained.

Elsewhere, he said that enemies of Islam are making efforts to harm the Islamic countries through causing divisions, calling for a united strategy against them.

The Iranian security chief also said the Israeli aggressions against the Syrian



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ian Army and resistance forces and its repeated violation of the Syrian sovereignty are “unacceptable”, warning that if the Zionist regime does not stop such adventurous moves it will receive a “deterrent and crushing response”.

For his part, Muallem praised Iran's supports for the Syrian government and people.

He said that the Syrian government will follow talks with unarmed opposition groups in line with protecting the

country's unity.

■ Zarif highlights necessity of regional unity

In a separate meeting with Muallem, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif highlighted the necessity of unity among regional countries.

He also said that Israel seeks to undermine security in Syria.

For his part, Muallem thanked Iran and said Syria's victory in fighting terrorism is also a victory for Iran.

Zarif also met with new UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen.

Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also met separately with Muallem.

Larijani said that the two countries will continue expansion of relations, especially in economic area.

The chief Syrian diplomat also said U.S. President Donald Trump is not aware of the Iranians' determination, predicting that imposition of sanctions against Iran by the U.S. will end in failure.

Trump ordered sanctions against Iran in May 2018. 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.

INSTEX should not be tied to FATF, Tehran tells EU

1 → In response, the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday said Tehran welcomes the European Union's positive positions on Iran, particularly those on the Iran nuclear deal or JCPOA, expressed in a Monday statement. However, the ministry said there were points and criticisms to express regarding the statement, as the following:

■ 1. Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges:

The Islamic Republic of Iran is seriously critical of positions of the European Union in this regard. As announced before, Iran welcomes the registration of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges. But there are natural and realistic expectations that the mechanism, introduced following delayed and inadequate efforts by the EU, goes operational accurately and quickly and covers other sectors of trade between Iran and European countries, as obliged in a May statement by the foreign ministers of Iran and the E3. For us, the economic aspects of JCPOA and its benefits for Iran are of particular importance and the implementation of obligations of European signatories to the nuclear deal could be an important criterion determining the future course of relations. This is unacceptable to link the implementation of this mechanism, which is part of JCPOA-related commitments, with the requirements of institutions such as the FATF.

■ 2. Allegations of plots in Europe:

Raising baseless allegations that Iran has designed or carried out terrorist plots in Europe was baseless and surprising in the first place. Raising such empty allegations and expressing concerns at a time when notorious terrorist and criminal groups who are freely active in Europe is not only non-constructive but is in line with the goals of enemies who want relations between

Iran and Europe to sour. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the biggest victims of terrorist attacks who has been a pioneer in fight against groups such as ISIS who even threaten Europe's security, expects the EU to deal with these allegations seriously, while holding a realistic view and putting aside double standards.

■ 3. Iran's defense activities:

As announced before, Iran's defense activities are only defensive, deterrent and home-grown, and this issue has never been included in the agenda of our talks with other countries. We firmly believe that raising such issues is not constructive and useful and not in line with the security interests of the region and real interests of Europe, considering the current circumstances in the region and clear threats against Iran's national security.

■ 4. Regional issues:

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly advises European countries to hold a realistic view about incidents and issues in the region and not to believe the suggestions of elements who are against peace, stability and security of the region and development of relations between governments and nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran always supports dialogue, interaction and political solutions for settling regional crises.

■ 5. Human rights:

The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns the use of human rights as a political tool against independent countries. The behavior of Iran in the past four decades shows Iran's seriousness in promoting human rights and fulfilling international commitments through constructive cooperation and dialogue-based mechanisms. Positive measures and interactions of Iran with the UN's human rights bodies and related international institutions indicate Iran's commitment

to continuing constructive cooperation. Expressing concern about the conditions of human rights in Iran, while it is clear to everyone that Iran's human rights conditions are immaculate compared to that of others in the region, is an attempt to divert public opinion and an insistence on a wrong approach that can deepen distrust in bilateral relations.

In a region where the main crises are the massacre of children at the hands of the Zionist regime and the crimes of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (carried out by conventional and non-conventional weapons provided by western governments including some EU members), such positions are undoubtedly non-constructive and rejected in the world's eyes. The silence of the EU regarding widespread violations of human rights in its member countries, including violations of basic rights of refugees and immigrants, the growth of alt-right tendencies, and racist attacks against ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Muslims (due to hate speeches by European officials and violent moves by extremists), contradicts EU's claims that they are advocating human rights.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic of Iran seeks constructive dialogue with the EU, based on mutual interests and respect. The history of dialogues and cooperation between Iran and the EU, particularly the experience gained in the past three years, shows that there are great capacities for developing relations between the two sides. We hope that the fulfillment of Europe's commitments would prepare the ground for deepening relations as soon as possible.

(Source: mfa.ir)

Larijani: 1979 revolution caused fear among regional dictators

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Tuesday that the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 caused all dictators in the region to feel threatened.

“The Iranian nation did a historic job on Bahman 22, 1357 (February 11, 1979) and with the guidance of Imam Khomeini finally defeated the dictatorship to replace it with a religious democracy,” Larijani remarked.

“This important move of eliminating America's tyranny and establishing democracy had an important message for the region's dictators,” he added.

Larijani further recalled that before the Islamic Revolution, the nation played no role in national affairs, saying parliamentarians and senators were picked by the Shah's regime.

But today, he continued, all senior officials are being directly elected by people's vote.

“This is a big political and social capital for our nation which we should continually protect and deepen,” he pointed out.

He also pointed to Iran's regional role, saying, “Today, Iran plays an effective role in establishing stability and security in the region, and Imam [Khomeini]'s



theory of ‘neither the East nor the West’ has been put into practice.”

The senior MP underlined the importance of unity in the face of U.S. sanctions and its efforts to pressure Iran, saying through national unity and resistance the nation can progress.

The enemies have used different plays against the Islamic Revolution, he stated, highlighting that Iraq's war against Iran in the 1980s was one of their plots.

“Although the Sacred Defense inflicted heavy losses to Iran, the Islamic Republic gave the enemies a lesson that they won't dare attack Iran anymore,” the parliament speaker boasted.

Iranians refer to resistance against the invading Saddam army in the 1980s as Sacred Defense.

Military chief: Enemies spend \$100bn annually to counter Islamic Revolution

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, said on Tuesday that enemies spend \$100 billion annually to counter Islam and the Islamic Revolution.

“Our enemies from the Zionist regime and the U.S. to Saudi Arabia and the (United Arab) Emirates spend at least 100 billion dollars annually in military area for animosity towards Islam and the Islamic Revolution,” he said during a conference at Shahid Sattari University of Aeronautical Engineering.

He noted that the Islamic Revolution brought “freedom and self-sufficiency” for the Iranian people and the enemies have spared no efforts in enmity towards the people.

Pointing to Europe's financial mechanisms to save the 2015 nuclear deal, he said, “It has been for several months that Europe has not been able to establish a company and find an economic strategy to do financial interaction with Iran and counter the U.S. threats.”

He added that Iran takes its own decisions in this situation.

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.

France, Germany and Britain officially announced on Thursday the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

Iranians believe that the financial mechanism fall far short of expectations.

The Foreign Ministry has even criticized the European Union for linking implementation of INSTEX to approval of the FATF by Iran.

‘Iran has precise information that U.S. is transferring Daesh to Afghanistan’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader, said on Tuesday that Iran has “precise information” that the U.S. is transferring Daesh militants to Afghanistan.

In a ceremony held to mark the 40th anniversary of

victory of the Islamic Revolution, Safavi also said the U.S. and Zionist regime's power is on the wane “but Iran's power is increasing and we are now a regional power.”

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in January 2018 that the U.S. is trying to justify

its presence in the region by relocating Daesh from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan.

“They were defeated, previously, in Iraq and Syria. Now, they seek to ignite terror all over again in Afghanistan,” the Leader said, according to khamenei.ir.

Russia backs talks between Venezuela’s Maduro and oppositio

Maduro: Oil, gold & other riches behind Trump’s Venezuela crusade

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that the crisis in Venezuela could only be solved by getting the authorities and the opposition to talk to each other, the RIA news agency reported.

Major European nations on Monday joined the United States in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president of Moscow ally Venezuela, heightening a global showdown over Nicolas Maduro’s socialist rule.

“We continue to believe that the only way to exit this crisis is by sitting the government and opposition down at the negotiating table,” Lavrov was cited as saying by RIA. “Otherwise it will simply be the same regime change that the West had done many times.”

----- Oil, gold & other riches behind Trump’s Venezuela crusade

Venezuela’s natural reserves, such as oil, gas, and gold, encourage the U.S. to seek regime change there, President Maduro told RT, saying he won’t be remembered as a leader who showed weakness and ignorance to his people.

“What is Donald Trump’s ‘casus belli’ against Venezuela? The ‘casus belli’ is the oil of Venezuela, the riches of Venezuela, its gold, gas, iron, diamonds, other material riches,” Maduro said in an exclusive interview with RT Spanish. The remarks come as Western nations pile overwhelming pressure



on the Latin American country.

Maduro, who is widely seen as the successor to the cause of late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez, said it doesn’t matter how he will go down in history.

What does matter, he said, is that he doesn’t want to be a “traitor” and a “weak person,” bowing down to Washington.

Turmoil in Venezuela escalated on the heels of economic hardships which saw the

country suffer from galloping inflation, skyrocketing prices and low living standards. Yet, Maduro believes his government has a solution to those troubles.

Admitting that “hyperinflation caused tremendous damage to us,” he suggested that the resources “kidnapped by the world” be freed for a national recovery. Aside from that, the government will work on keeping prices as low as possible and will stabilize

the national currency rate.

U.S. sanctions also did their job, Maduro said. He labelled Washington’s restrictions against state-run oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) and its U.S. subsidiary Citgo illegal, saying Caracas will respond. “What they have done has no name, it has never been done against any country,” stated Maduro.

CIA World Factbook for 2017 says Venezuela has the world’s biggest proven crude oil reserves, surpassing those of Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iran and Iraq. During the crisis, Venezuelan officials suggested that oil is behind U.S. attempt to replace Maduro with someone friendlier to Washington.

As Bush-era arch-hawk John Bolton put it, the U.S. had “a lot at stake” in Venezuela’s affairs. “It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela,” he told Fox Business host Trish Regan.

The U.S. has steadily toughened sanctions on Venezuela in recent years in an effort to weaken the government and destabilize economy. Some international observers believe the sanctions and economic war hit Venezuela’s people in the first place, contributing to the lack of medicine, malnutrition and mortality.

(Source: agencies)

‘Killing spree’: UK soldiers told to kill unarmed citizens in Iraq and Afghanistan

A disturbing media report claims that the British Army allowed soldiers to shoot unarmed civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers say they killed children and covered up civilian deaths by planting weapons beside bodies.

Speaking to Middle East Eye (MEE), soldiers detailed the relaxed rules of engagement that instructed them to shoot at unarmed civilians who they thought were involved in surveillance of the British troops, with one veteran describing it as a “killing spree.”

In Basra, Iraq, in 2007 soldiers say they were told it was okay to shoot anyone holding a phone or a shovel, or anyone who looked suspicious. The relaxation of the rules was said to be due to concerns that these unarmed civilians were acting as spies for combatants, or that they were involved in planting roadside IEDs.

“We were shooting old men, young men. This is what I witnessed,” a soldier told MEE. “I have never seen such lawlessness.”

The soldiers who spoke to MEE revealed instances in which young boys were killed and explained there were cover-ups to make slain civilians appear as though they were combatants. When two unarmed teenagers were killed in Helmand in Afghanistan, an ex-soldier alleges that a Soviet-era assault rifle and a machine gun were taken from storage in the base and placed next to the dead teenagers’ bodies before they were photographed.

“I think that explains why we were keeping those weapons on the bases,” he said.

A Royal Marine told the outlet that one of his men was

forced to admit to killing an Afghan boy, who was about eight years old, when the boy’s father arrived at the base carrying his dead child and demanded an explanation.

“Our commanders, they would tell us: ‘We will protect you if any investigation comes. Just say you genuinely thought your life was at risk - those words will protect you,’” one of the ex-soldiers said.

RT has contacted Britain’s Ministry of Defense (MoD) for details on the soldiers’ accounts. It has yet to receive a response. The MoD declined to comment when MEE invited them to respond to the allegations laid out in their report.

While the publication said it was unable to independently verify each claim made by the soldiers, their stories are backed up with other accounts from the wars, such as in the Sniper One book by Dan Mills, a sergeant who fought in Amarah in 2004 in the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment and explained a colonel told them they could hit unarmed spotters.

“Nowhere in the Rules of Engagement does it say you can’t shoot unarmed people,” he reportedly said.

In 2017, it was revealed that the UK’s Royal Military Police were investigating reports of the Special Air Service (SAS) planting weapons beside Afghan men killed in raids on their homes.

An infantryman who served in Nad-e Ali in Helmand, Afghanistan, told MEE troops were told in 2010 that they were “no longer shooting dickers” [suspected lookouts] but said these shootings continued. The cover-up of the killing of the two teenage boys took place after this announcement.

He explained that the two boys approached their base on



a scooter and troops fired warning shots at them. The pair continued heading in their direction, but then turned to go another way. It was then that the “corporal decided to fire a GPMG (general-purpose machine gun) into them,” the infantryman said. “He fired about 10 or 12 rounds. They were hit three times.”

“We were told that our story was this: they were armed and we believed they posed a threat to one of our patrols that was in the area they were driving towards. Then we were asked: ‘Does anyone have a problem with this? If so, tell us now,’” he recounted.

(Source: RT)

‘Still time’ to find Brexit solution: Merkel

There is still time to find a solution to Britain’s exit from the EU, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Tuesday, voicing optimism on a political deal over the tricky “backstop” that has stymied progress.

Speaking to Japanese and German business leaders in Tokyo, Merkel stressed that “on the one hand, time is pressing” and businesses using “just-in-time” delivery processes could not afford lengthy customs procedures.

However, she added: “From a political point of view, there is still time. Two months is not a long time but there is still time, and this should be used by all sides.”

Britain is poised to leave the EU at the end of March following a 2016 referendum.

Merkel acknowledged the issue of the unpopular Northern Ireland backstop provision was “complicating” Brexit talks.

The backstop is intended to ensure there is no return to a hard border with Ireland, but Brexit supporters fear it will keep Britain tied to EU customs rules.

She said the issue with the backstop was a “problem that is precisely defined and therefore one should be able to find a precisely



defined solution.”

“But this solution depends on the question of what the future relationship between Britain and the EU will be like and what type of trade deal we sign with each other,” added the chancellor.

Throwing the ball into London’s court, she stressed: “It will be very important for us

to know what exactly the British side sees as its future relationship with the EU.”

After meeting Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe Monday, she urged “creativity” and “goodwill” to find a solution.

However, she was clear that any solution could only come via the political declaration attached to the withdrawal agreement – rather

than re-opening talks on the actual exit deal.

There are concerns in London that any tweaks to the political declaration will not be legally binding.

Her Monday comments were seen as conciliatory and boosted the pound as British Prime Minister Theresa May prepares to engage in further talks with EU officials to break the Brexit deadlock as the exit date approaches.

A top EU official, however, sounded the alarm bell after talks with British MPs.

Martin Selmayr, the right-hand man of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, said the meeting had confirmed the view that the EU was right to start in December 2017 preparations for a “no-deal” Brexit.

Merkel said relations between Britain and the EU bloc were currently strong and would remain that way.

“Over the last two years during which we have been dealing with Britain’s exit, we have worked more closely together than during several years when Britain was a member of the European Union,” she quipped to laughter.

(Source: AFP)

Kazakh president dismisses talk of snap election

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev on Tuesday dismissed reports that he was planning a snap election after he sought clarification on a clause in the constitution covering the length of his term.

In a video address published online, Nazarbayev said his request to the Constitutional Court on Monday had been a routine one meant to clarify gaps in sections covering the replacement of a president, an incumbent’s resignation and other areas.

“Of course, everyone is interested... in the elections,

(political) transition,” he said.

“Yes, the president has the right to call an early election, but this is not something we should be worried about, so let us calm down and work as usual,” he added.

Nazarbayev, 78, has run the oil-rich Central Asian nation for three decades and has no apparent successor. He won 97.7 percent of the vote in his last vote in 2015.

Kazakhstan is scheduled to hold both presidential and parliamentary elections next year, and some commentators had suggested authorities might bring one of the votes for-

ward to avoid a clash.

Nazarbayev’s government has also pushed through a number of popular policies in recent months - including raising public-sector salaries and forcing utilities to cut and freeze tariffs - stoking speculation that he was preparing for a vote.

Nazarbayev, the only Soviet-era leader still in charge of his country, made no mention of the parliamentary election in his brief address on Tuesday. His Nur Otan party dominates the two-chamber legislature.

(Source: Reuters)

No satisfactory plan with U.S. on north Syria safe zone: Erdogan



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he had not yet seen an acceptable plan from the United States for the creation of a safe zone in northeastern Syria, three weeks after President Donald Trump suggested establishing the zone.

“There is no satisfactory plan that is put before us concretely yet,” Erdogan told a parliamentary meeting of his AK Party. “Of course we are loyal to our agreements, our promise is a promise. But our patience is not limitless.”

Turkey wants to set up the safe zone with logistical support from allies and says it should be cleared of the U.S.-backed Kurdish YPG militia which Ankara considers a terrorist group.

Erdogan said that Turkey did not need nor have to ask anyone for permission to implement its own plans in the area. “No threat can make us turn from this path, including a sanctions list,” he said.

The safe zone will be an issue at a meeting on Wednesday in the United States of ministers from a coalition of countries fighting Daesh (ISIL). Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will attend those talks.

In December, Trump confounded his own national security team with a surprise decision to withdraw all 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria, declaring that Daesh had been defeated there.

Erdogan also said on Tuesday that Turkey would only wait a few weeks for militants to be removed from the north Syrian town of Manbij. The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is spearheaded by the YPG, has controlled Manbij since 2016.

After months of disagreement, Ankara and Washington agreed in June on a roadmap that would see the YPG removed from the town. Turkey has repeatedly expressed its frustration that the implementation of the plan has been delayed.

Trump has warned Turkey not to attack Kurdish fighters in Syria and last month threatened economic devastation if Ankara attacked the YPG militia.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia plans new missile systems to counter U.S. by 2021

Russia will race to develop two new land-based missile launch systems before 2021 to respond to Washington’s planned exit from a landmark nuclear arms control pact, it said Tuesday.

President Vladimir Putin said at the weekend that Russia had suspended the Cold War-era Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which bans both nations from stationing short- and intermediate-range land-based missiles in Europe.

Moscow and Washington accuse each other of violating the treaty and Putin said Russia had acted after the United States announced it was withdrawing from the pact.

Washington had made clear it planned to start research, development and design work on new missile systems and Moscow would do the same, Putin said. The Russian military should start work on creating land-based launch systems for an existing ship-launched cruise missile, the Kalibr, and for longer-range hypersonic missiles which travel at least five times the speed of sound, he said.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu Tuesday ordered work to begin on developing the new systems.

Shoigu, a close Putin ally, said he wanted the work completed by the end of next year so the new systems were ready by 2021.

“From Feb. 2, the United States suspended its obligations under the INF treaty,” Shoigu told a meeting of defense chiefs.

“At the same time they are actively working to create a land-based missile with a range of more than 500 km which is outside the treaty’s limits. President Putin has given the defense ministry the task of taking symmetrical measures.”

Moscow denies flouting the 1987 pact. It says Washington is the one violating it and has accused the United States of inventing a false pretext to exit a treaty it wanted to leave anyway in order to develop new missiles. Washington denies that.

U.S. disarmament ambassador Robert Wood told a U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Tuesday that the United States would reconsider its withdrawal from the INF treaty “should Russia return to full and verifiable compliance.”

“This is Russia’s final opportunity to return to compliance,” Wood said.

(Source: TASS)

Burkina Faso forces kill 146 militants after civilian attack

Burkina Faso’s commander general says armed forces have killed 146 militants in three counterattack operations in the northwest near its border with Mali.

Gen. Moise Minoungou spoke on National Television late Monday saying armed men entered Kain village early Monday and killed 14 men and women. He said Burkina Faso’s army responded by fighting in Kain, about 80 kilometers from Ouahigouya in the north Yatenga province. With air support it also fought in Bahn in the north region and Bomboro in the Boucle du Mouhoun region.

He said the combined operations killed 146 militants fleeing to Mali. Islamist extremists have increased attacks in Burkina Faso’s Sahel region, also shifting to the forested east near the Niger border. Burkina Faso is part of the G5 Sahel regional counterterrorism force.

(Source: AP)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	158394.2
IFX	1922.79

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,016 rials
GBP	54,753 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$62.11/b
WTI	\$54.16/b
OPEC Basket	\$60.93/b
Gold	\$1,314.35 /oz
Silver	\$15.87/oz
Platinum	\$825.50 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Merkel sets out condition for Huawei's participation in 5G network

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Tuesday Germany needs guarantees that China's Huawei Technologies will not hand over data to the Chinese state before the telecoms equipment supplier can participate in building its 5G network.

Merkel, on a visit to Japan, said that due to security concerns, it was important to speak to the Chinese government so "the company doesn't just simply hand the data to the state".

She told students in a discussion at Keio University that security was important if firms wanted to work in Germany and it must be made clear that the Chinese state cannot access all the data in Chinese products.

Huawei faces international scrutiny over its ties with the Chinese government and suspicion that Beijing could use Huawei's technology for spying, which the company denies.

The German government has yet to reach a common stance on whether to follow other countries in excluding Huawei from its market on national security grounds.

(Source: Reuters)

UK economy flat-lines as Brexit nears, firms cut jobs

Britain's economy risks stalling or contracting as Brexit nears and the global economy slows, with firms in the dominant services sector reporting job cuts for the first time in six years and falling orders, a survey showed on Tuesday.

A closely watched gauge of the world's fifth-biggest economy, the IHS Markit/CIPS UK Services Purchasing Managers' Index, fell to 50.1 in January from 51.2 in December -- its lowest level since July 2016 and barely above the 50 mark that separates growth from contraction.

A Reuters poll of economists had expected a reading of 51.1.

Britain's economy defied forecasts from some economists that it would go into recession after the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union. But growth slowed sharply in late 2018 as worries mounted about an abrupt, no-deal Brexit.

Overall, the survey suggested Britain's economy is flat-lining after losing momentum late last year.

Tuesday's figures are likely to worry Bank of England officials ahead of their latest interest rate decision announcement and new forecasts for the economy on Thursday.

"The latest PMI survey results indicate that the UK economy is at risk of stalling or worse as escalating Brexit uncertainty coincides with a wider slowdown in the global economy," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at survey compiler IHS Markit.

The report adds to other signs that Brexit, scheduled in less than two months' time, is taking its toll on businesses and consumers.

Prime Minister Theresa May, under pressure from her own Conservative Party, wants to reopen her withdrawal agreement with the European Union to replace a contested Irish border arrangement, something Brussels has rejected.

Investors are urging the government to ensure an orderly exit from the club Britain joined in 1973.

On Monday, a Deloitte survey of chief financial officers showed appetite to take on financial risk had fallen to its lowest level in nearly a decade due to fears of "the hardest of Brexits" and rising U.S. protectionism.

That caution was evident in Tuesday's survey, covering the bulk of Britain's private sector economy.

New orders fell for only the second time since the financial crisis, while employers cut jobs for the first time since late 2012 -- around the last time Britain flirted with recession.

"The survey results indicate that companies are becoming increasingly risk-averse and eager to reduce overheads in the face of weakened customer demand and rising political uncertainty," Williamson said.

New export orders contracted at the fastest pace since records for this part of the PMI began in September 2014.

The composite PMI for December, combining the manufacturing, construction and service sectors, fell to 50.3 from 51.5 in November, the lowest level since July 2016.

(Source: Euronews)

Tehran hosts specialized panel on energy Fintech

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Iran Water and Power Resources Development Company (IWPCO) in collaboration with Research Institute for Energy Management and Planning (RIEMP) as well as Farab Construction Engineering Company hosted a specialized panel meeting on Tuesday to discuss energy Financial Technology (Fintech) in Iran and specifically Energy Credit Obligation (ECO).

Chris Cook, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security Studies at University College London and a leading global expert in energy markets and financial technology, and Mahmood Khaghani, one of Iran's experienced and informed energy experts were the key speakers of the panel.

The event was also attended by Ali Shams Ardakani, the head of Energy Commission at Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), and a handful of Iranian businessmen and energy experts along with officials from the British embassy in Tehran including Qumrun Naher, the deputy director of the British embassy's department for international affairs, and Maryam Najafi, a senior trade advisor with the embassy.

During the meeting, Cook elaborated on the necessity for a new energy paradigm for Iran — or what he would call it "a 21st Century



Chris Cook (2nd L), a senior research fellow at the Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security Studies at University College London, and Mahmood Khaghani (1st L), an Iranian energy expert, posing for a photo during a specialized panel meeting in Tehran on Tuesday

energy strategy".

According to Cook, U.S. sanctions have

increased Iran's resilience not only in economy but also in other aspects like technology and

Iran not to allow U.S. to reduce its oil to zero: Zanganeh

ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said his country will not allow the United States to reduce its oil exports to zero, Shana reported.

Making the remarks in a press conference on Tuesday on the occasion of the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution), the minister said the U.S. had embarked on a unilateral war against Iran's petroleum industry.

He also condemned the U.S. sanctions against Venezuela's state-run oil company, saying, "We condemn the U.S. [punitive] actions against Venezuela. Nonetheless, these actions have affected the oil market."

Zanganeh then criticized Greece and



Italy for not buying its oil despite U.S. waivers and said they had not offered Tehran any explanation for their decision.

The United States granted the two countries exemptions along with six others - Turkey, China, India, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan - allowing them to temporarily continue buying Iranian oil as Washington reimposed sanctions on Iran's banking and energy sectors.

Iran's recoverable liquid hydrocarbon reserves at 160b barrels: NIOC

ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in a recent report has put the country's recoverable liquid hydrocarbon reserves at 160.12 billion barrels, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The report also put Iran's recoverable natural gas reserves at 33.33 trillion cubic meters.

The country stands at the first place in terms of natural gas reserves and at the fourth place in terms of crude oil reserves in the world.

Two weeks ago, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced that Iran has discovered a new oil field containing unspecified reserves of "light and sweet" crude in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

The oil field was discovered on January



22 on Minoo Island in the general area of Abadan, which is home to Iran's largest and oldest oil processing facility.

"This is the first time we discover oil in the Abadan area," which is located at a depth of 3,770 meters, Zanganeh was quoted as saying by Press TV.

Drilling will continue to estimate the total volume of the reserves and the possibility of production, he added.

VP inaugurates industrial, health projects worth \$176.5m

1 → Jahangiri, also inaugurated a pellet production unit in Asad-Abad region in Hamedan. The project, using 1.3 trillion rials of credit (about \$30.9 million) creates 120 new jobs. It has the capacity of producing 2,000 tons of pellets per day.

Also, the first phase of Rad Steel Company became operational by Jahangiri. The company, producing 500,000 rebars per day, has been established by 3.5 trillion rials (about \$83.3 million) of governmental investment. The project provides 400 direct and 1,500 indirect jobs.

Azarakhsh Ferrosilicon Factory, the other project inaugurated on Tuesday by the first VP has the capacity of producing 12,000 tons of ferrosilicon per annum. The factory is established by 720 billion rials (about \$17.1 million) of investment and employs 130 workers.



Hegmatan Pharmaceutical Company using 150 billion rials of investments (about \$3.5 million) and 60 billion rials (about \$1.4 million) of working capital was the other projects that became operational in the presence of Jahangiri.

The official also inaugurated the 85-bed Bahari Hospital. Construction of the hospital cost 350 billion rials (about \$8.3 million) and 50 billion rials (about \$119,047) was consumed to equip it.

Nearly 813,000 cars manufactured in 10 months

ECONOMY DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian carmakers manufactured 812,979 vehicles during the ten-month period from March 21, 2018 to January 20, 2019, IRNA reported on Tuesday citing the data released by the Ministry of Industry.

The data show that the car output in the mentioned ten months has fallen 35.4 percent from 1.257 million cars manufactured during the same period of time in the previous year.

As reported, 758,128 passenger cars, 1,207 vans, 1,540 minibuses and middle buses, and 540 buses have been manufactured during the ten-month time of this year.

Iranian carmakers manufactured over 1,535 vehicles during the past Iranian

calendar year 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018), with 13.7 percent rise from the figure of its preceding year, Industry Ministry has previously announced.

According to the ministry's data, car manufacturing in Iran stood at over 1.35 million in the calendar year 1395.

As reported, 1,442 million passenger cars were manufactured in the past year, with 14.9 percent growth from 1.255 million cars in its previous year.

Some 1,381 minibuses and middle buses were manufactured in 1396, indicating 52.6 percent increase from 905 minibuses and middle buses manufactured in 1395.

Also, 1,782 buses were manufactured in the last year, with 53.9 percent rise from 1,158 buses manufactured in the year before.

Saffron options contracts to be launched by March 20

ECONOMY DESK **TEHRAN** — Given the widespread welcoming by market participants for launching futures and certificates of deposit for saffron trade at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) and its positive impact on transparency of the price of saffron and the elimination of intermediaries, IME will launch saffron options contracts by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), IME's managing director announced.

Hamed Soltaninejad stated that IME, aimed at hedging the price of saffron, and, consequently, creating the possibility of long-term planning and management of supply and demand for farmers and activists in this field, as well as the development of

derivatives as one of the main pillars of the development of the Iran capital market, launched Saffron futures for the first time in Iran at the beginning of the year, being welcomed highly, IME's International Affairs and Public Relations Department reported on Tuesday.

According to Soltaninejad, since the launch of these contracts, more than 11 million futures contracts have been traded on Iran Mercantile Exchange.

IME's managing director further said that the introduction of new financial instruments would reduce transaction costs, increase transparency and elevate the level of transactions, adding, "the launch of saffron futures contracts in this

year led to the development of traditional market structures to modern structures and the development of domestic markets for saffron. Therefore, due to the widespread appreciation of the market participants for saffron futures and certificates of deposits, saffron options contracts will be launched by the end of this year.

Soltaninejad expressed the advantages of using this financial instrument, saying that the options contracts would allow farmers to secure sales at certain prices. In addition, due to the low transaction costs and price transparency on the Iran Mercantile Exchange, the entry of farmers into this market will lead to the elimination of intermediaries and the price management for saffron.



Managing director of IME added: "The establishment and further development of commodity-based derivatives will ensure the farmers' confidence in future prices and decision on the cultivating and selling in the future."

European markets rally to hit nine-week high amid earnings; Pandora shares surge 12%

European stocks surged to a nine-week high on Tuesday afternoon, as market participants monitored a flurry of corporate earnings results.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 was up almost 1 percent during lunchtime deals, with almost all sectors and major bourses in positive territory.

Europe's oil and gas stocks led the gains, up more than 1.8 percent amid earnings news. It comes after BP reported stronger-than-anticipated full-year profits on Tuesday. The British oil giant said profit jumped more than 65 percent

when compared to the same period in 2017, following a sharp rise in oil and gas production and the acquisition of BHP's U.S. shale assets. Shares of BP rose over 5 percent on the news.

Looking at individual stocks, Denmark's Pandora surged to the top of the European benchmark during afternoon deals. It comes after the embattled jewelry maker reported better-than-forecast earnings for the final three months of 2018. Shares of Copenhagen-listed stock advanced more than 12 percent on the news.

Meanwhile, Apple supplier AMS tumbled to the bottom of the index. The Austrian group said Tuesday it expects revenue to fall over the coming weeks amid continued weak smartphone demand. Shares of the company fell 12 percent.

Retail sales

On the data front, euro zone retail sales fell as expected in December.

Official data published Tuesday showed non-food sales and online purchases dragged retail sales down to 1.6 percent month-on-month at

the end of 2018, largely in line with an average forecast in a Reuters poll of economists.

In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares, excluding Japan, rose 0.4 percent — hovering close to a four-month high.

Trading was subdued on Tuesday, with many of Asia's financial markets closed for the Lunar New Year. China's financial markets are closed all week, with South Korea's index set to reopen on Thursday.

(Source: CNBC)

Oil rises on tighter supply but U.S. factory data weighs

Oil prices rose on Tuesday as investors expect U.S. sanctions on Venezuela and production cuts led by OPEC and its allies to head off any glut, but data showing a decline in U.S. factory orders weighed on the market.

The supply optimism helped U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Brent crude reach 2019 highs on Monday.

WTI futures were up 46 cents, or 0.84 percent, at \$55.02 per barrel by 0940 GMT. They touched their highest level in more than two months at \$55.75 the previous day.

International Brent crude futures were up 33 cents, or 0.53 percent, at \$62.84 a barrel, down from a high of \$63.63.

Trading proceeded at lower volumes in parts of East Asia due to the Lunar New Year holiday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, including Russia, agreed to production cuts effective this month to forestall an overhang.

The oil industry generally believes the curbs will help balance the market in 2019.

“You’ll see OPEC disciplined and therefore prices look fairly robust around where they are”, BP CFO Brian Gilvary told Reuters,



adding that he expected demand growth of 1.3 to 1.4 million bpd in 2019 – similar to 2018. Analysts said U.S. sanctions on Venezuela had focused market attention on tighter

global supplies.

“Fresh U.S. sanctions on the country could see 0.5-1 percent of global supply curtailed,” said Vivek Dhar, mining and energy analyst

at Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

The sanctions will sharply limit oil transactions between Venezuela and other countries and are similar to, but slightly less extensive than, those imposed on Iran last year, experts said on Friday, after looking at details posted by the Treasury Department.

Meanwhile, a Reuters survey found that supply from OPEC states had fallen the most in two years, as Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf Arab allies over-delivered on pledged cuts, while Iran, Libya and Venezuela registered involuntary declines.

But weighing on markets, U.S. government data showed new orders for U.S.-made goods unexpectedly fell in November, with sharp declines in demand for machinery and electrical equipment.

The global economic outlook and prospects for growth in fuel demand have been clouded by poor economic data in China and U.S.-China trade tensions.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week said he would meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in coming weeks to try to settle the two countries’ dispute.

(Source: Reuters)

Higher production and prices help BP double profits in 2018

Higher oil and gas production combined with a boost in prices gave BP a surge in fourth-quarter earnings from a year ago, helping the energy major more than double its profits in 2018.

Shares in the group rose 3.5 percent in early Tuesday trading after its results came in ahead of expectations, with BP saying it was able to keep spending in check while bringing more new higher margin projects online.

Underlying replacement cost profits, BP’s definition of net income and the measure tracked most closely by analysts, was nearly \$3.5bn in the three months to December 31.

This compares with \$2.1bn in the same period the prior year and analysts’ consensus estimates of \$2.6bn, despite volatile oil prices at the end of 2018 when crude slid by 40 percent.

On an annual basis, BP reported earnings of \$12.7bn in 2018, compared with \$6.2bn in the prior year.

BP is growing its business after years of retrenchment after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and a multiyear downturn in the energy industry.

The company is weighing up cash gen-

erated from its businesses and divestment proceeds with capital spending, dividends, buybacks and persisting – albeit smaller – claims from the Gulf of Mexico disaster. Net cash from operating activities totaled \$6.8bn, which is higher than \$5.9bn during the fourth quarter in 2017.

Last year BP announced it would buy BHP’s U.S. shale assets – its biggest deal in 20 years – and pay for it in cash depending on the trajectory of oil prices. It had initially said it would fund the deal partly through new stock issuance.

BP had also planned to sell assets – targeting \$5bn-\$6bn of disposals predominantly from its existing U.S. onshore portfolio – and use the cash to pay down debt, in the absence of buying back the newly issued shares.

These sales to bolster its balance sheet came in addition to the \$3bn in disposals it had already committed to in 2018.

BP said total divestments and other proceeds amounted to \$3.5bn last year and it intends to complete more than \$10bn in divestments over the next two years.

Net debt stood at \$44.1bn at the end of 2018 compared with \$37.8bn the prior year. (Source: Financial Times)

German grid firms see extra costs to meet renewable power target

Boosting renewables to 65 percent of Germany’s power mix by 2030 could cost 20 billion euros more than previously planned, which will mean higher consumer energy bills, the four main grid operators said on Monday.

Last year, Germany raised its target for the contribution of renewables to 65 percent by 2030 from 50 percent in a bid to reduce CO2 emissions by 55 percent over 1990 levels. It is set to miss a 2020 target aimed at cutting emissions by 40 percent.

About two fifths of power needs in Europe’s largest economy are now met by renewables, but this needs to rise as it seeks to close nuclear plants by 2022 and coal power stations by 2038.

As a result, power grids need to be extended to reach renewable energy sites. This will include new transmission lines to connect the industrial south with northern wind power farms.

The grid companies, known as transmission system operators (TSOs), have presented plans for a four-week consultation outlining spending on onshore lines of 52 billion euros (\$60 billion), compared to the 32 billion euros previously envisaged.

The four main TSOs – EnBW’s Transnet-

BW, 50Hertz, TenneT, and Amprion – said in a statement that an additional 18 billion to 27 billion euros would be needed to link up offshore wind farms.

Total spending of 70 billion to 79 billion euros over 12 years would be shouldered by consumers via higher grid fees, which account for about a quarter of their electricity bills.

However, the energy regulator Bundesnetzagentur said between a quarter and a third of costs estimated by TSOs in the past were not approved.

The TSOs said some of extra costs arose from digitalizing transmission systems and running more lines underground.

The TSOs demands include adding two more cross-country lines on top of three underground ones already planned for 2025.

Between a quarter and half of power demand in southern Germany will have to be met by renewable generation in the north, where plants now generate double the north’s needs.

The additional lines to be built would run from Schleswig-Holstein to Baden Württemberg via North-Rhine Westphalia, with capacity for 4 gigawatts (GW) over a distance of 1,160 kms (725 miles), the TSOs said. (Source: CNBC)

UAE’s ADNOC awards onshore block to Occidental Petroleum

Abu Dhabi has awarded an onshore block to Occidental Petroleum in the emirate’s first licensing round in decades, state-owned producer ADNOC said Monday.

U.S.-based oil and gas company Occidental Petroleum will receive a 35-year concession and invest Dirhams 893 million (\$243 million) during the exploration phase of Onshore Block 3 in the Al Dhafra region, ADNOC said.

Onshore Block 3 is the first onshore block to be awarded among the areas ADNOC offered for commercial bidding in April 2018. The company last month handed exploration concessions in two offshore blocks to Eni and PTT Exploration and

Production.

Abu Dhabi intends to boost its oil production capacity to 4 million bpd by the end of 2020, rising to 5 million bpd by 2030, under plans recently approved by the Supreme Petroleum Council. The emirate is investing in new capacity and pushing forward with its search for resources despite volatile oil prices and OPEC’s recent pledge to cut output by 1.2 million bpd in partnership with allies including Russia.

The UAE pumped 3.25 million bpd in December, according to the latest S&P Global Platts OPEC survey, but will be holding production down to 3.07 million bpd, in line with its quota under the

output cut agreement, which went into force January 1, energy minister Suhail al-Mazrouei has said. ADNOC produces the vast majority of the UAE’s crude.

In January, Sultan Al Jaber, chief executive of ADNOC, said all winning bids in the current licensing round, which covered two offshore and four offshore licenses, would be announced by the end of March. ADNOC’s head of upstream, Abdulmunim Saif al-Kindy, has said the company is considering a second exploration licensing round to include opportunities in conventional and unconventional plays in oil and gas. (Source: Platts)

Why are Asian spot LNG prices plunging?

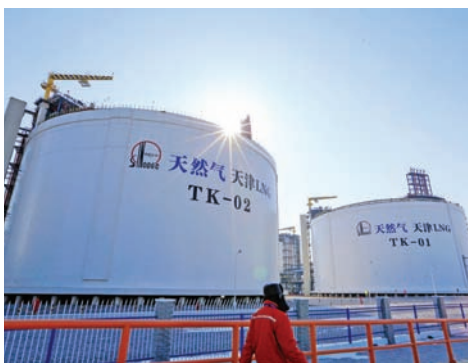
In more unusual moves for spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Asia, prices for the super-cooled fuel last week fell to a nine-month low amid an uncharacteristically oversupplied market due to continued warmer than usual winter temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere, which includes North Asia. Japan, China and South Korea and Taiwan make up more than 70 percent of global LNG demand, with that amount forecast to increase to 75 percent amid more LNG demand from China as the country pushes through with its government mandate that at least 10 percent of its energy mix be comprised of natural gas by 2020 to offset record air pollution, with further earmarks to 2030.

Spot prices for March delivery to Asia last week fell to \$7.00 per million British thermal units (MMBtu), down \$1 from the previous week, their lowest since April 6, Reuters reported on Friday, citing trade sources. Seasonally, prices are their lowest since this time three years ago.

■ **Cargoes now headed to Europe**

Lower spot LNG prices in Asia is also causing LNG producers and supplies to divert cargoes to Europe, an unusual move, especially this time of year, given that historically higher demand in the Asia-Pacific region fetches much higher prices, especially during winter. LNG prices in Asia for March have now fallen below the UK front-month gas price.

Global energy and commodity trading company Vitol changed the destination of two LNG cargoes sourced in the U.S. to northwest Europe



from Asia due to the discount on Asian prices compared to those in Britain, the Reuters report added, citing an industry source familiar with the matter. “The market’s getting kind of crazy,” a Singapore-based industry source also said, adding that derivatives volumes in Asia have dropped recently.

Approaching Lunar New Year in China (called the Spring Festival on the mainland) also contributed to the past week’s weakened demand and downward pressure on prices since factories in the country will be shut down for around a week. Moreover, this year reports indicate that factories could be shuttered longer than usual as well as other business shutting down longer due to economic headwinds from ongoing trade tensions between the U.S. and China.

The two sides have set a March 2 deadline

to reach a trade deal. Unless a deal is reached that appeases U.S. concerns over not only trade imbalances but intellectual property rights and cyber security issues, President Trump has pledged to increase existing tariffs of 10 percent on some \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods to as high as 25 percent, while also possibly putting tariffs in place on another \$267 billion worth of Chinese goods entering the U.S.

The two sides are reportedly optimistic about the progress made in the high-level trade talks in Washington which ended on Thursday, raising hopes that despite the need for more work, a deal to end their trade war could be reached before stiffer tariffs kick in. Trump said he would meet Chinese President Xi Jinping, potentially more than once, to seal a deal.

■ **Not a repeat performance**

Last year, Beijing pushed too quickly to replace dirtier coal usage for both residential and industrial use with cleaner-burning natural gas, resulting in a supply crunch that saw the government redirect gas supply from factories to residential end users during an unusually cold winter season. The ongoing cold temperatures last year in China also created extra demand for spot LNG as well as corresponding support for LNG prices in Asia. However, in the ensuing year, China procured more LNG during the months before winter earmarked for storage to head off a repeat of last years’ gas supply mishap, removing current price support in spot markets. (Source: oilprice.com)

The Permian has a flaring problem

A report from the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) found that the rate of flaring in the Permian basin is twice as high as the industry has been reporting. In 2017, the amount of natural gas that was flared could have met the gas needs of Texas’ seven largest cities. Put another way, “that’s roughly \$322 million dollars of natural gas that went up in smoke,” EDF concluded.

EDF used satellite data, estimating that in 2017, oil and gas drillers in the Permian flared roughly 104 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas, or about 4.4 percent of all gas produced. However, the industry only reported burning 55 bcf of gas, or half the amount that EDF found. In the Delaware basin alone, EDF estimates that industry burned nearly 8 percent of the gas that came out of the ground.

The report shines a spotlight on a huge problem with tracking flaring in America’s oil and gas fields: The data is mostly collected via self-reporting by the companies themselves. Drillers send that data to state agencies, and then the U.S. EIA aggregates it into data that is published on a several-month delay.

There is an obvious motivation that might explain why the industry seems to be underreporting flaring rates. Shale drillers are targeting oil production; natural gas is coming up as a byproduct. While there is a bit of a bottleneck for shipping crude oil out of the Permian, the gas bottleneck is even worse. As a result, there is simply too much gas on hand, and no way to move it. The glut has been so bad that regional natural gas prices in West Texas briefly fell into negative territory late last year.

But while drillers may not garner much for their gas, which incentivizes them to just burn it off, there are limits on how much the industry can flare. EDF and S&P Global Platts have speculated that flaring rates may be vastly exceeding the amount reported because drillers want to keep the oil flowing. It’s all about oil, not natural gas.

“The satellite analysis indicates the [Texas Railroad Commission] is working with incomplete and faulty data,” Colin Leyden, Senior Manager for State Regulatory & Legislative Affairs at EDF, wrote in a commentary last month. “The RRC is statutorily bound to prevent waste and pollution, and Texans have the right to know just exactly how much waste and pollution is occurring through the extraction of our state’s natural resources.”

The Railroad Commission grants companies waivers to flare gas for six months after a well comes online. But they also have repeatedly issued extensions, demonstrating a leniency towards the industry.

EDF suggested that the Texas Railroad Commission should treat wasted gas as a viable resource, eliminate permanent flaring permits, require the industry to incorporate new technologies into their operations, and improve reporting requirements. The environmental group also said that the state should eliminate the tax exemption on flared gas – as it stands, companies don’t pay tax on flared gas, but if that exemption were scrapped, companies would have a greater incentive to capture the gas.

The problem is not isolated to the Permian. North Dakota has also seen a surge in flaring, aided by some lax rules from the state. The Trump administration has also thrown the oil and gas industry a lifeline, reversing an Obama-era regulation on capping methane emissions from oil and gas operations. The New York Times, in an eye-opening investigation in late December 2019, explored the on-the-ground consequences of the extraordinary rates of gas flaring in North Dakota.

The industry has long fought against federal regulations, arguing that operators can take action on their own, especially since they have an incentive to capture the gas in order to sell it. But that argument kind of breaks down when confronted with the data on soaring rates of flaring. “If it’s inconvenient they’ll just flare it,” Colin Leyden of EDF told the Houston Chronicle. “There’s been a problem since 2014, so what is a reasonable amount of time for the industry to solve this?”

(Source: oilprice.com)

Development Trend of Iran Petrochemical Industry at a Glance



With the growing trend of consumption of petrochemical products in the world and creation of a vast market in this sector over the past years, policymakers and policy setters of the country have concentrated on planning, designing and constructing giant oil, gas and petrochemical complexes in line with the optimal use of these economic resources in cooperation with the domestic and foreign investors as well as using salient advantages of major hydrocarbon resources and strategic geographical situation of the country using world’s latest technologies.

This significant industry has taken giant strides in the past forty years in a way that today, this industry is a driving force of industrial development in the country.

Description	Measurement Unit	IMIDRO Performance in 1978	IMIDRO Performance by 2018
Installed capacity	(Million Tons)	3	65.8
Variety of product	Type	17	121
No. of complex	QTY	6	54
Production	(Million ton)	1.6	55
Total sales volume	(Million tons)	1.52	38.07
Exports volume	(Million ton)	0.6	21.67
Exports value	(Milliard dollar)	0.05	12.76
Domestic sales volume	(Million ton)	0.57	16.40
Domestic sales value	(Million rials)	11	661288

Achievements Taken by IMIDRO in 11th and 12th Governments in Petrochemical Sector

IMIDRO took giant strides in materializing objectives of mining and mineral sector in the country in recent years especially during 11th and 12th governments, so that Iran’s share of mining and mineral sector has increased in the Middle East and the world. With the necessary follow ups, a number of 11 mining and mineral complexes became operational.

Share of Iran’s Petrochemical Industry from production capacity of major petrochemical products in Middle East and world

Description	2013	2015	2016	2017
Iran’s share of mineral capacity in Middle East	22.21	22.6	23.64	23.46
Iran’s share of mineral capacity in world	2.26	2.26	2.54	2.50

No. of existing complexes (without considering two centralized offshore services)	Beginning of 2013	July 2018
43		54
Installed capacity (million tons per year)	59.8	68.5

On the other hand, exports of petrochemical products in 2013 hit from 12.83 million tons in 2013 to 22.41 million tons by the end of 2017. Also, exports volume of these products in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year in 1397 (March 21 – Sept. 21) stood at about 11 million tons.

	Unit	2013	2017
Production	Million ton	41.3	53.6
Sales – exports	Million ton	12.83	22.41
	Value (billion dollar)	9.87	11.95
Total domestic sales	QTY (million tons)	14.53	17.59
Total domestic sales	Value (1,000 billion rials)	313.77	387.29

Given the investment made in this industry, attaining maximum production capacity has been the basic programs of the senior officials of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC). Relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, giant strides were taken in this industry in a way that production capacity in this industry has increased up to 85 percent.

Attaining Nominal Production Capacities

Percentage of production performance to nominal capacity	2012	2017
	73%	85%

Future Outlook of Petrochemical Industry

By launching 61 petrochemical projects, it is estimated that production volume of petrochemicals will increase up to 70 million tons / annum.

Moreover, it is predicted that a number of 30 petrochemical projects, with the nominal production capacity of about 40 million tons, would be put into operation during 6th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan.

Trump, nukes, and no first use

Two bills aim to enact a long-overdue policy that will make the world less dangerous



By Tom Z. Collina

Do you trust President Trump with nukes? If not, you are in good company. Trump has an impulse control problem. From reactionary tweets to rambling falsehoods, there's a reason why most Americans oppose Trump's foreign policy and disapprove of his job performance.

That is good news for congressional Democrats, who rightly see an opportunity to raise the underappreciated issue of presidential "sole authority." Few Americans realize that within minutes, with just one phone call, President Trump could unleash up to 1,000 nuclear weapons, each one many times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. It would be the end of civilization. Millions would die. Short of mutiny, no one can stop him. Once launched, the missiles cannot be recalled. For President Trump, starting nuclear war is about as easy as sending a tweet.

It should not be so easy to end the world. This week, two bills were introduced in Congress to make it much harder. On Tuesday, Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., and Rep. Ted Lieu, D-Calif., reintroduced a bill to prevent any president from launching a nuclear first strike without congressional approval. "No American President, and certainly not Donald Trump, should have the power to launch a first-use nuclear first strike absent such an attack without explicit Congressional approval," Sen. Markey said.

The next day, presidential hopeful Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, dropped a separate bill that would establish in law that the United States would not use nuclear weapons first. "Our current nuclear strategy is not just outdated—it is dangerous," they said in a joint statement. "By making clear that deterrence is the sole purpose of our arsenal, this bill would reduce the chances of a nuclear miscalculation and help us maintain our moral and diplomatic leadership in the world." The lawmakers said their bill would codify what most Americans already believe: that the United States should never initiate a nuclear war.

Indeed, no sane U.S. leader would ever — ever — make first use of nuclear weapons. Every president in the atomic age, Republican and Democrat, has known this, even if they have not had the political fortitude to enact it as policy. After dropping the first atomic bombs on Japan, President Truman thought the idea of killing "another 100,000 people was too horrible." President Kennedy's defense secretary Robert McNamara recalled that "in long private conversations with successive Presidents — Kennedy and Johnson — I recommended, without qualification, that they never initiate under any circumstances, the use of nuclear weapons. I believe they accepted my recommendations."

In 1985, President Reagan and Soviet Premier Gorbachev issued a joint statement declaring that "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." Former Defense Secretary Bill Perry, who served under President Clinton, said, "I never confronted a situation, or could even imagine a situation, in which I would recommend that the President make a first strike with nuclear weapons — understanding that such an action, whatever the provocation, would likely bring about the end of civilization."

In 2016, President Obama tried to enact a no-first-use policy but ran out of time. Just before President Trump took office, Vice President Biden said that, "Given our non-nuclear capabilities and the nature of today's threats, it's hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary. Or make sense. President Obama and I are confident we can deter — and defend ourselves and our allies against — non-nuclear threats through other means."

If no president would ever use nuclear weapons first, why has none been able to make it U.S. policy? Maybe it just never rose high enough on the list of priorities. One should never underestimate how entrenched the bureaucracy is on nuclear issues, and how hard it is to make changes. In Obama's case, the president was opposed by his secretaries of defense, state and energy. He should have gone ahead regardless, but did not. At the time, he did not know who the next President would be.

Now we know. President Trump's erratic and unstable nature has elevated sole authority to a prominent political issue and put no-first-use on the map. This is no longer an issue that can be swept under the rug. Jim Mattis is no longer here to stop the worst from happening, if he ever could.

The risks of having nuclear weapons ready to launch within minutes, on the president's sole authority, outweigh any perceived benefits. Any decision to use nuclear weapons is too important to be left to any single person. This system is unsafe, undemocratic and unnecessary. It must be fixed, and no-first-use is the right first step.

(Source: Defense One)

As EU-Arab summit approaches, more headaches than planned

When plans for a summit between the European Union and the Arab League were first hatched last year, it was envisioned as the start of a new friendship across the Mediterranean. What a difference a few months makes.

The EU hopes that improving ties with its Arab neighbors would help advance its policies, not least its aim to fight illegal immigration from the Middle East and North Africa.

But after the murder of a journalist in a Saudi consulate last October, European officials helping to prepare for the Feb. 24-25 summit in Egypt says they are now focused mainly on limiting the awkwardness.

"The idea was to give them red carpet treatment and start engaging with them more, see what we can do on migration," said one European diplomat. "But now we are in an unlucky spot as some of the (Arab League) national leaders are not our favorites."

With barely three weeks to go before the summit, top EU leaders have yet to confirm their participation.

A lower-level meeting of Arab League and EU foreign ministers intended to set up an agenda for the summit ended on Monday in Brussels with no agreement on a joint statement.

As top EU diplomat Federica Mogherini was explaining to a news conference why they had failed to agree, she was interrupted by her co-chair, the Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

There were "more complications on the European side than the Arab side," Aboul Gheit said. In a friendly but public sign of disagreement, Mogherini snapped back: "I would say the contrary."

The EU wants to focus at this month's



The EU hopes that improving ties with its Arab neighbors would help advance its policies, not least its aim to fight illegal immigration from the Middle East and North Africa.

summit on migration, but that is a fraught area in which EU member states disagree sharply among themselves. Hungary, led by an anti-immigration hardliner, vetoed Monday's joint declaration over the subject.

This summit has been very difficult to organize, to find a date, nobody really wants this," another EU official said of the top-level talks later this month.

For the EU it is all about migration, but there are so many other touchy subjects that people would rather not address.

■ Saudi and Sudan

A key change in the European-Arab relationship in recent months has been the collapse in the global standing of the wealthy and influential Arab leader, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The West's relationship with Saudi Arabia — the world's biggest exporter of oil and second biggest importer of arms — has been the bedrock of its ties to the Arab world for decades.

But the de facto ruler has been shunned since U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi

was killed at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October. Riyadh initially denied the killing, then gave conflicting accounts. It now accepts that its agents killed him but says its leadership had nothing to do with it.

Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, arrived at Monday's meeting in Brussels speaking as if little had changed: the sides faced common challenges "like countering extremism and terrorism," he said. "There are also big offers related to trade and investment."

But relations are not what they once were. Attending an event with the crown prince is tricky for some European leaders who were already accused by rights groups of rubbing shoulders with him at a meeting of the G20 industrialized countries in November, European sources said.

Nor is Crown Prince Mohammed the only potentially awkward guest for the EU. In recent weeks, Arab states have been showing solidarity with Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, who has been facing the most sustained anti-government demonstrations at home of his 30 years in power.

Bashir, wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court in the Hague, is persona non grata for some Europeans.

"We don't deal with him directly, but we deal with Sudan," an EU official said. "They could send somebody else."

"Preparations for the summit are going very slowly, it's all rather uncomfortable," one EU diplomat said, but stressed there were no plans to call the whole thing off.

There are plenty of embarrassing traps to avoid, like sitting at one table with the Saudis or Sudan's Bashir.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

Killing the search for truth about Britain's forgotten role in Iraq

Ibrahim Al-Marashi

On 7 June 2018 the Guardian ran an in-depth article with the headline: "Why we may never know if British troops committed war crimes in Iraq." The piece focused on the Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) set up by the British government to investigate claims of abuse committed by its troops against Iraqi civilians.

The article laments: "After its collapse, some fear the truth will never come out." Yet the truth about what occurred in Iraq still struggles to emerge.

■ A history of occupation

On Monday Middle East Eye (MEE) published an exclusive report revealing that the British army operated rules of engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan that allowed soldiers to shoot unarmed civilians who were suspected of keeping them under surveillance.

While the history of the occupation of Iraq tends to focus on American misconduct, such as the Blackwater shooting of 20 Iraqi civilians or the Abu Ghraib scandal, Middle East Eye's investigation is a painful reminder of the forgotten British role in Basra and its environs during this time and the breaches of Geneva Conventions that ensued.

The recent findings highlight a need for a critical examination of the British role in Iraq and the violations need to be situated within a greater narrative about how the UK government failed to address these past transgressions.

■ The British role in Basra

The Iraq war was the first time since World War Two that the UK had taken part in an invasion and occupation of a sovereign state. In April 2003 British troops entered Basra, and exactly a year later, these forces came under attack by the militia of al-Mahdi Army, led by Shia religious leader Muqtada al-Sadr.

By May 2006 the UK assumed responsibility for securing Helmand province in Afghanistan from the Taliban. This deployment forced Britain to draw down on its forces in Iraq, reducing the necessary manpower to stabilize Basra.

The British forces in Afghanistan operated under the same rules of engagement as Iraq, allowing soldiers to target insurgent spotters there as well, resulting in civilian fatalities in both theatres of combat. In August 2007 the British forces in Iraq made an arrangement with al-Mahdi Army that reduced its attacks on UK forces in Basra, eventually handing over the city to the militia, and by April 2009 Britain ended combat operations in Iraq.

■ The targeting of 'dickers'

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, as MEE's investigation disclosed, British forces appear to have been given permission to shoot "dickers", a euphemism for "a spotter" working on behalf of enemy forces. The term emerged during the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland, referring to persons who reported on British troop movements to the Irish Republican Army.

The fact that the term continued to be used in Iraq and Afghanistan is symbolic, as the British failure to date to account for its actions during that conflict partially explains why such abuses re-emerged during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In Iraq, the practice of targeting dickers appears to have begun in June 2004 in Amara, in the south east of the country, after fighting erupted between British soldiers and the Mahdi Army.

This relaxing of the rules of engagement would eventually result in the fatal shootings of civilians in Basra. In the words of one British soldier, this would lead to a "killing spree".

■ Military misconduct

The Middle East Eye investigation needs to be seen in the context of how British institutions tried - and failed - to prevent abuses in the past, such as the targeting of civilians.

As incidents of military misconduct began to emerge from Iraq, the British Ministry of Defense created the Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) in 2010 as a legal body that would

investigate allegations of crimes and pursue prosecutions of infractions conducted by individual soldiers. The ultimate problem with IHAT was its mandate to investigate individuals rather than looking at systemic problems in the military. While individual soldiers had personal responsibility for their actions, problems often occurred as a result of faults or ambiguities during their training.

By the time of the Iraq war, training manuals did not mention that these techniques were forbidden, nor did the manuals advocate using these methods. Institutional knowledge of the ban had been lost over time.

The MEE investigation includes an example of such training material. What that example demonstrates is an institutional fault in what is termed "military doctrine." Doctrine is basically the institutional memory of the armed forces, drawing on mistakes and successes from the past to guide the military in the future.

■ Domestic political issue

What appears to be at fault with British military doctrine is that lessons from its past in dealing with counterinsurgency

in Northern Ireland, which was a combat theatre where the enemy was embedded among civilians, were not applied to similar combat theatres in Iraq and Afghanistan, ranging from abuses during detention to indiscriminate targeting of civilians under the justification that they could be dickers. The failure to institute changes in military doctrine could be attributed to domestic British political considerations. In the run-up to the September 2016 Conservative party conference, Michael Fallon, then UK defense secretary, promised to dismantle IHAT, along with other historic allegations inquiries into Northern Ireland and Afghanistan.

IHAT was dismantled, and while the British government has paid out compensation to past victims, there has not been a systematic effort to hold the system to account.

Unfortunately, the perceived failure of the IHAT investigations into abuses in Iraq had set a precedent that discredited the entire idea of seriously investigating historic abuses committed by the British military, whether they occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Northern Ireland.

(Source: Middle East Eye)

Second Announcement



Call for public tender (First/Second publish)

One-Stage (semi-compressed) tender

N.I.O.C

Subject of Tender: : PARTS FOR "ROSS HILL" SILICON CONTROL RECTIFIER

National Iranian Drilling Company

1397.5987

Tender descriptions:

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3,190,461	Tender No. :FP/09-97/043 Indent No.:01-22-9746016	17,449,000,000 (Rial)

Qualitative evaluation of tenders

Method	R Based on minimum scoring (60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers' pre-qualification forms. 1- Applicants who have more than 4 in process contracts with NIDC are not allowed to participate in this tender. 2- Applicants which have more than 2 in process contracts with NIDC in similar subject (exclusively same subject) are not allowed to participate in another tender
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Purchasing & Submitting

Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof	
	Distribution Place	Hall No.:113, 1 st floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN – Tel : 061 34148601
	Submitting Method	Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 510,000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 520100004001114004020491) in name of "NIDC Income Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank. Avoid any payment other than the bank method (in person) and also provide a deposit. Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents.
	Closing date	Days after the last time of Purchasing 14
Documents Receiving Method	Address	Hall No. 107, 1 st floor, Tender Committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569

Tender Guarantee

Value of guarantee	872,450,000 Rials / 18,147 Euro
Type of guarantee	✓Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. ✓Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.

(Foreign Procurement Dept.)
More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on:
www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr

تهران تایمز نوبت اول ۹۷/۱۱/۱۶ نوبت دوم ۹۷/۱۱/۱۷

U.S. well-versed in using terrorist groups as assets: American activist

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A peace activist and journalist based in the US state of Virginia warned of a “very dangerous” plot hatched by Washington to raid Iran by using Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) terrorists in Afghanistan and said the US is “well-versed in using terrorist groups as assets”.

“I would be very concerned that there is some kind of grand plan going on that will not be good for the people of Afghanistan, probably, won’t be good for Iran,” Janice Kortkamp from Leesburg, Virginia, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

“Perhaps, there will be raids launched from across the border from Afghanistan into Iran using ISIS and the US can just completely wash his hands up at all because they’ll say ‘oh we pulled our troops out and we’re not in there anymore’,” she said, adding, “So we (the US) are well-versed in using terrorist groups as assets as has also been proven in that history of the Afghan wars.”

Janice Kortkamp became an independent, completely self-funded, journalist after “seeing Western media bias regarding Syria and how that bias was promoting war and destabilization in Syria and all the Levant”. She has researched the current crisis for six years, putting in over 7,000 hours of study. She has visited Syria five times over the past three years, spending months traveling around the major population areas and the outskirts of Damascus, Homs, Latakia (including Kessab), Hama, Palmyra, Deir Ezzor and Aleppo. She has also gone to Germany, Lebanon, and Kuwait to meet with Syrian refugees and emigrants. Through friends and contacts in Syria as well as reports from genuine news sources around the world, she tracks the situation on the ground in Syria on an hourly basis.

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



in Syria and Iraq, what goal is Washington pursuing by transferring the terrorists to Afghanistan and strengthening them?

A: Well, of course, this is a difficult question to answer because we don’t have a lot of information. All we have are clues and previous actions and policies. Obviously, Washington is well known for having assets like ISIS. We’ve been working with them and aiding and abetting them in Syria and we, you know, really incubated the group in Iraq and we’ve been aiding and abetting al-Qaeda as well in Syria and other terrorist groups in Libya, for example. So we are well-versed in using terrorist groups as assets as has also been proven in that history of the Afghan wars. So, you know, basically, the answer to the question is the goal is probably not a good goal. The goal is probably to create problems. It’s interesting that this comes alongside these recent negotiations between the US and the Taliban. I think it’s also an important factor that it seems like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo support this idea of pulling US troops out of Afghanistan and negotiating with the Taliban. That seems to be antithetical to their typical stand of wanting to just go to war with anybody and everybody and particularly if there’s some kind of perception that an action could be

used to further isolate Iran for Israel’s sake. So given the fact that Pompeo and Bolton appear to be on board with this idea that there is somewhat of a consensus in Western media in favor of the plan of pulling out the troops, if you combine that with this idea of breaking ISIS prisoners out of a jail, what we’ve done with ISIS in Syria, for example, and using them as an asset and also this idea of perhaps Eric Prince with a mercenary force basically taking over the US military role in Afghanistan, I think that there are more questions right now than I have answers for but I would be very concerned that there is some kind of grand plan going on that will not be good for the people of Afghanistan, probably, won’t be good for Iran. Perhaps, there will be raids launched from across the border from Afghanistan into Iran using ISIS and the US can just completely wash his hands up at all because they’ll say ‘oh we pulled our troops out and we’re not in there anymore’. I think this is very dangerous and only time will tell really from here on what happens with all of these different factors going on.

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

A: I think I explained that a little bit in my previous answer but you know, having observed Iran and other parties involved in these conflicts over the last several years, I would say if Iran is concerned or is sensitive to a threat then that threat is most likely very real again Pompeo and Bolton the whole reason for their existence seems to be the defense of Israel, the support of Israel, what Israel wants Israel gets, and yet then we have what appears to be the opposite strategy going to take place in Afghanistan with their support. So I’m suspicious. I’m sure the leadership in Iran is suspicious that’s a very difficult border I’m sure to protect and you know, the security issues are going to be high now. If ISIS is gaining more and more of a presence in Afghanistan, that is a significant problem for Iran.

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

A: You know this is a difficult question also because as we know Afghanistan is very tough terrain. The people have been through a quite a bit of war so many decades now of war. The economy I’m sure is terrible and there are probably a lot of people that would succumb to temptations of money and I would suspect that with the US helping Daesh, certainly, Saudis are probably helping Daesh, then you know, you have this situation where there could be a lot of money available to people to join that terrorist group and desperate people are more easily tempted by that.

Also, you have the fragmentation and the weakness of Afghanistan’s government. You have, you know, just a warlord mentality that is present in much of the country and people might tend to go with a strong man that they feel can protect them or out of fear of needing to submit to a strong man. I’m struggling a bit because these are all very complicated issues in Afghanistan particularly you know is the graveyard of empires and nobody can really predict I think what is going to happen now but personally, I’m highly skeptical and cynical of what any plan of the US may be doing there. We’ll just have to keep our eyes on it.

Saudi’s new project is to portray Damascus is insecure

➡ ■ Arab countries to reopen embassies in Damascus Another issue of concern for the Saudis is the reopening of Arab embassies in Damascus in the past few weeks.

The United Arab Emirates has opened embassy in Damascus, Jordan has appointed new charge d’affaires at its embassy in Damascus, and Kuwait will soon reopen its embassy in Damascus.

Saudi Arabia wishes to halt the process by demonstrating Damascus as an unsafe city.

■ The political achievement of drafting the Syrian constitution Yet another issue that has devastated the House of Saud is the formation of Syrian constitutional committee which can put an end to Syria’s eight-year crisis.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has hoped the committee reaches an agreement soon as Russia, Turkey, Iran continue to hold dialogue and push for Syrian constitution.

In any case, the Saudis, quite apprehensive about the new developments, have gone off the deep end to leave an image of insure Damascus through their related media. They will fail this time too as they had before.

Saudi Arabia’s missile program

➡ In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been more open about its missile program. For instance, in 2010, Saudi Arabia opened a central office of missile defense in Riyadh. It wants to demonstrate its deterrent capabilities. It also wants to send a signal to Iran in particular of the consequences if Iran doesn’t limit its own missile program.

The rocket attacks on Riyadh by Yemen’s Houthis have also pushed Saudi Arabia to expand its missile program. The Saudis are worried that Iran could build a missile factory in Syria to equip Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen with advanced missiles.

The other major reason behind the Saudi ballistic missile program is Riyadh’s distrust of Washington. The widespread U.S. criticism of Saudi Arabia after the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi showed that Trump, who wants to maintain his close relationship with MbS, could not control the political environment in Washington. At the same time, Trump warned Saudi Arabia that the king would last two weeks without U.S. support.

Given the growing fragility of U.S.-Saudi relations, Riyadh has decided to develop its nuclear and missile program even without American support.

(Source: Lobelog)

A Glance at Four-Decade Performance of IMIDRO, “Production & Investment Growth”

Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has taken giant strides since the Islamic Revolution.

■ Iron Ore, Steel and Copper, Fore-runner & Leader in Capacity Building

Significant increase of production and investment capacities, exploratory activities, employment growth and development of infrastructures are of the salient measures that have been taken in the past 40 years by the then Ministry of Industries and Mines and also Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade and also Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) especially since 2002 as well as private sector.

In this regards, statistics show that a consider-

able portion of these capacities has been outlined over the past years.

■ IMIDRO Performance over Past 40 Yrs.

In the past four decades, the country has witnessed considerable production growth in the mining and mineral sector in such a way that iron ore, steel and copper have got the lion’s production share.

The below table indicates that more than 21,800,000 tons of steel was produced in this period, showing a significant 60 percent growth.

Production of steel products has also increased from 368,000 tons to more than 19 million tons in this period, showing a significant 53fold growth.

In this period, iron ore production also hit a considerable record, showing 83fold growth.



Creation of capacities of basic metals from 2002 to 2018 – 1,000 tons

Product Name	Capacity – 2002	Capacity - 2017	Capacity (predicted) 2018
Steel ingot	8000	32500	34600 (4.3fold)
Copper cathode	190	459	459 (2.4fold)
Aluminum	216	422	475 (2.2fold)

■ IMIDRO Salient Projects (2013 – 2018)

- Construction of iron ore processing factories in Sangan with the production capacity of 10 million tons and investment of 10,000 billion tomans in cooperation with the private sector as joint venture.
- Development of port in Persian Gulf special economic zones and doubling of loading and unloading operations to 12 million tons.
- Launching four provincial steel projects with the production capacity of 3.2 million tons of sponge iron (DRI)
- Launching 1st hematite iron ore concentrate factory
- Commissioning 1st copper smelting factory using FLASH method
- Producing copper cathode using tank bioleaching method
- Construction of Zarshuran gold mine factory
- Construction of titanium pilot unit in Kahnouj
- Construction of crane coke pylon unit
- Construction of Sefidabeh antimony pilot unit
- Construction of Iran minerals processing research unit

- Construction of rare soil elements production unit
- Construction of special economic zones in mining and mineral industries sector
- Construction of vast infrastructures in mining and mineral industries sector such as road construction, electrification, construction of specialized ports

■ Exploration

Concentrating on implementation of new exploratory programs is of the main and basic measures taken by IMIDRO over the past five years.

However, statistics show that IMIDRO has taken giant strides in exploration affairs since its establishment in 2003.

Another statistic showed that maximum drilling operations of the organization was registered in 2014.

■ Salient Achievements and Measures Taken by IMIDRO after Islamic Revolution

- Localizing and indigenizing technical knowhow of steel Direct Reduction (DR) factory entitled PERED
- Localizing sectors of iron ore concentrate and pelletizing factories,
- Transferring technical knowhow of projects implemented in the mining and mineral sector (especially in steel and aluminum industry),
- Technology of hot charging in the production of sponge iron and also die casting ingot
- Development and implementation of copper bioleaching technology
- Construction of Karaj minerals processing research center as the largest research center in the mineral sector in the Middle East
- Construction of Esfahan’s Mobarakeh Steel Company (EMSCO) as the largest producer of flat steel sheets in the Middle East
- Operation of large mining and mineral industries such as Sangan, Chadormalu, Gol-e-Gohar, Mehdiabad Lead and Zinc factory and also Angouran Lead and Zinc factory
- Export of technical-engineering services in cement industry to overseas as well as construction two cement production units in Syria
- Construction of Persian Gulf special economic zone and attaining development capacity of loading and unloading 12 million tons

By: A.Saeidi



IMIDRO Production Growth in 2018 as Compared to 1979 (1,000 tons)

Product	1978	2017	Prediction in 2018
Steel	368	21840	25000
Steel products	368	19776	19000
Iron ore	891	74100	75000
Copper*	0	163	200
Aluminum	18	337	345
Coal concentrate	504	1496	1500
Cement	8000	55192	82000

Steel production volume in 2016 equaled to 193,000 tons. Given the spending of duration for technology change, steel production decreased in the past year in 1396 (ended March 21, 2018).

■ Implementation of Strategic Projects and Plans

During these years, despite existence of sanctions problems and also eight years of Iraqi imposed war against Iran (1980-1988), giant and different projects were conducted in IMIDRO.

Today, 110,000 and 600,000 people are working in mining and mineral industries respectively.

In the meantime, since the beginning of activity of IMIDRO (from 2002 to Nov. 2018), more than 111 mining and mineral projects were commissioned, valued at \$14.4 billion. These total mining and mineral projects have thus far generated new employment opportunities for 45,000 and 100,000 job-seeking people respectively.

Planning made in this regard indicate that more than 42,000 employment opportunities will be generated by 2021, valued at \$16 billion.

■ IMIDRO Performance over Past Years, Exacerbating Investment and Production Growth

A brief look to the performance of IMIDRO over the past five years, the organization launched more than 63 mining and mineral projects, valued at \$5 billion. Also, IMIDRO inaugurated a number of six projects, valued at more than \$585 million, in nine months of current year (March 21 – Dec. 21).

On the other hand, some 19 mining and mineral projects would be put into operation by the yearend, valued at \$2.6 billion.

■ Macro Performance of IMIDRO in Mining and Mineral Industries Sector

- Development of IMIDRO since its establishment up to 2021
- Projects inaugurated from 2002 to Nov. 2018
- Inauguration and operation of 111 projects, valued at \$14.4 billion
- Direct and indirect generation of employment to more than 45,000 and 100,000 people respectively
- Projects which would be inaugurated by 2021, investing over \$16 billion, direct employment of more than 42,000 job-seeking people
- Implementation of 54 projects
- Helping develop 49 projects (valued at \$6 billion), construction of which is underway by large private sector companies.

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National network of NGOs and charities for cancer plans to join UICC

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Joining the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) has been a matter of importance for the members of Iran's national network of NGOs and charities for cancer, CEO of MAHAK, a charity society dedicated to treating pediatric cancer in Iran, has said.

UICC rapidly increasing membership base of over 1000 organizations in more than 160 countries, represents the world's major cancer societies, ministries of health and patient groups and includes influential policy makers, researchers and experts in cancer prevention and control. UICC also boasts more than 40 strategic partners.

The organization is dedicated to taking the lead in convening, capacity building and advocacy initiatives that unite and support the cancer community to reduce the global cancer burden, promote greater equity, and to ensure cancer control continues to be a priority in the world health and development agenda.

Arasb Ahmadian, who is also the director of the national network of NGOs and charities for cancer governing board, said that the national network is a non-governmental organization comprising 40 NGOs supporting patients with cancer.

Ahmadian explained that joining UICC would ease knowledge exchange and Iran's presence in international events, it also helps cultivate relations between Iranian and foreign specialists and finally improve treatment services for patients suffering cancer as well as their families.

According to the UICC official website Behnam Dahehpour Charity Organization, Cancer Institute of Imam Khomeini Medical Center, MAHAK "Society to Support Children Suffering from Cancer", Noor Cancer Charity (NCC), KASSA, the society to support children suffering from cancer, and Reza Radiotherapy and Oncology Center are members of the international union from Iran.

Elsewhere in his remarks Ahmadian said



that in the long run the national network of NGOs and charities for cancer is aiming to device a cancer control plan in line with Health Ministry's programs to battle the disease, so that NGOs could also have a hand in national cancer campaign and also help the govern-

ment in delivering their responsibilities in the fight against the disease.

The national network is striving to help in early detection of cancer, offering more effective treatment and improve the knowledge in palliative medicine, he concluded.

Hawaii is considering a bill that bans cigarette sales to anyone under 100

The legislature finds that the cigarette is considered the deadliest artifact in human history."

So begins the text of a new bill introduced in Hawaii's State House, calling for a phased ban on cigarette sales in the state by 2024.

Hawaii has some of the most restrictive cigarette laws in the nation. In 2016, it became the first state to raise the age to buy cigarettes to 21. Now, its new bill calls for raising the cigarette-buying age to 30 by next year, up to 40, 50 and 60 in each subsequent year, and up to 100 by 2024.

That would effectively clear Hawaii's store shelves of cigarettes, although tourists could still bring them in.

And curiously, Hawaii would offer its centenarians the chance to buy cigarettes near the end of their life -- if they could find them.

CNN has reached out to the bill's sponsor, Rep. Richard Creagan, for comment.

Creagan, who is an emergency room doctor, told the Hawaii Tribune-Herald, "Basically, we essentially have a group who are heavily addicted -- in my view, enslaved by a ridiculously bad industry -- which has enslaved them by designing a cigarette that is highly addictive, knowing that it is highly lethal. And, it is."

The age limits would not apply to e-cigarettes, cigars or chewing tobacco.

Federal law requires states to set the minimum tobacco-purchasing age at 18, and the government enforces the measure by withholding FEMA grants from states who don't comply. Currently, most states allow 18-year-olds to buy cigarettes, and four have raised the minimum age to 19.

The bill notes that Hawaii "is suffering from its own addiction to cigarettes in the form of the large sums of money that the State receives from state cigarette sales taxes," to the tune of \$100 million annually.

One reason for the law's staggered rollout is to give the state time to find ways to adjust for the lost cigarette tax revenue.

In 2015, the National Academy of Sciences released a report that argued increasing the age to buy tobacco to 21 would have a "considerable impact" on the age at which someone takes their first puff. The report also suggested "if someone is not a regular tobacco user by age 25, it is highly unlikely he or she will become one."

Creagan told the Hawaii Tribune-Herald he's confident the bill will survive any court challenges.

Unlike Second Amendment gun rights, the US Constitution does not recognize smoking as a fundamental right. In 2012, a federal appeals court upheld a lower court ruling against a smoker who challenged an anti-smoking ordinance in Clayton, Missouri, on grounds that it violated his constitutional rights.

(Source: CNN)

Which countries eat the most meat?

You may have heard an increasing number of people vow to reduce their meat eating lately - or cut it out altogether.

This often forms part of a bid to become healthier, reduce their environmental impact, or consider animal welfare.

A third of Britons claim to have either stopped eating meat or reduced it, while two thirds of those in the US say they are eating less of at least one meat.

This trend is partly thanks to initiatives such as Meat-free Mondays and Veganuary. At the same time, a number of documentaries and high-profile advocates of veganism have highlighted the potential benefits of eating less meat. But have these sentiments had any effect on the ground?

■ Rising incomes

What we do know is that global meat consumption has increased rapidly over the past 50 years.

Meat production today is nearly five times higher than in the early 1960s - from 70 million tons to more than 330 million tons in 2017.

A big reason for this is that there are many more people to feed. Over that period the world population more than doubled. In the early 1960s there were around three billion of us, and today there are more than 7.6 billion.

While population is part of the story, it doesn't entirely account for why meat production increased five-fold.

Another key factor is rising incomes.

Around the world, people have become richer, with the global average income more than tripling in half a century.

When we compare consumption across different countries we see that, typically, the richer we are the more meat we eat.

There are not just more people in the world - there are more people who can afford to eat meat.

■ Who eats the most meat?

We see a clear link with wealth when looking at patterns of meat consumption across the world.

In 2013, the most recent year available, the US and Australia topped the tables for annual meat consumption. Alongside New Zealand and Argentina, both countries topped more than 100kg per person, the equivalent to about 50 chickens or half a cow each.

In fact, high levels of meat consumption can be seen across the West, with most countries in Western Europe consuming between 80 and 90 kilograms of meat per person.

At the other end of the spectrum, many of the world's poorest countries eat very little meat.

The average Ethiopian consumes just 7kg, Rwandans 8kg and Nigerians 9kg. This is 10 times less than the average European. For those in low-income countries, meat is still very much a luxury.

These figures represent the amount of meat per head available for consumption, but do not account for any food

wasted at home or on the shop floor. In reality, people eat slightly less meat than this, but it's still a close estimate.

■ Middle-income countries driving the demand for meat

It is clear that the richest countries eat a lot of meat, and those on low incomes eat little.

This has been the case for 50 years or more. So why are we collectively eating so much more meat?

This trend has been largely driven from a growing band of middle-income countries.

Rapidly growing nations like China and Brazil have seen significant economic growth in recent decades, and a large rise in meat consumption.

In Kenya, meat consumption has changed little since 1960.

By contrast, the average person in 1960s China consumed less than 5kg a year. By the late 1980s this had risen to 20kg, and in the last few decades this has more than tripled to over 60kg.

The same thing happened in Brazil, where meat consumption has almost doubled since 1990 - overtaking almost all Western countries in the process.

India is one notable exception.

While average incomes have tripled since 1990, meat consumption hasn't followed suit.

(Source: BBC)

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Arjantin
Zafar...
nice cases ready to move in.

Iranian Space Agency supports space-based businesses

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry has ordered the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) to establish space technology and space-based service working group to provide financial facilities for space-based businesses, IRNA reported on Monday.



The working group meets a part of financial needs of the applicants which are active in the field of aerospace market through assessing and evaluating their businesses.

Software, hardware, security and content are the four main sections of the working groups, according to which the loans are provided for the applicants.

According to Morgan Stanley, it is estimated 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.

E-cigarettes twice as likely as other therapies to help smokers quit tobacco

A major study found that people using e-cigs to stop smoking reported less irritability, restlessness and poor concentration.

E-cigarettes are almost twice as effective at helping smokers give up tobacco than other alternatives such as nicotine patches or gum, according to a major new study.

There is already evidence that they are considerably less harmful than conventional cigarettes. Public Health England has called for them to be made available on the NHS within five years, but this is the first time their effectiveness at helping smokers quit has been measured on a large scale.



In the trial, 886 smokers attended NHS Stop Smoking Services in London, Leicester and East Sussex.

They were randomly given either a nicotine replacement treatment of their choice, or an e-cigarette starter pack with one or two refill bottles.

All participants received weekly one-to-one behavioral support for at least four weeks.

The results, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, showed e-cigarettes were used more frequently and for longer. In addition, e-cigarette users experienced less severe urges to smoke, one and four weeks after quitting.

They also reported less irritability, restlessness and poor concentration in the first week after giving up smoking.

Just one experimental cigarette leads to a daily habit for most people, study claims

Battery metal among smoking cancer compounds, Public Health England warns

Japanese marketing firm rewards non-smokers with extra days off Monitoring of the participants after a year found that 18% of the e-cigarette users had kicked the habit, compared to 9.9% of those using other nicotine replacement therapies including patches, chewing gum, lozenges, inhalators and sprays.

Lead researcher Professor Peter Hajek, from Queen Mary University of London, said: "This is the first trial to test the efficacy of modern e-cigarettes in helping smokers quit.

"E-cigarettes were almost twice as effective as the 'gold standard' combination of nicotine replacement products.

"Although a large number of smokers report that they have quit smoking successfully with the help of e-cigarettes, health professionals have been reluctant to recommend their use because of the lack of clear evidence from randomised controlled trials. This is now likely to change."

Nearly half of the six million smokers in the UK wrongly believe vaping is as harmful as smoking.

Welcoming the study, Martin Dockrell, from Public Health England, said: "This landmark research shows that switching to an e-cigarette can be one of the most effective ways to quit smoking, especially when combined with face-to-face support.

"All stop smoking services should welcome smokers who want to quit with the help of an e-cigarette."

While many scientists agree that they are much less harmful than tobacco products, e-cigarettes are themselves not without risks.

The nicotine in them is highly addictive and number of studies have shown that they contain a wide range of potentially toxic substances, the long-term effects of which have yet to be quantified.

(Source: news.sky.com)

First digital economy development park opens in Mashhad

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The first digital economy development park in Iran was inaugurated during a ceremony in the city of Mashhad on Monday.

A total of 120 companies can be established in the park, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced.

He said that another digital economy development park with a capacity for 150 knowledge-based companies has been established in district 22 of Tehran.

The parks are like science and technology parks and benefit from capital venture and the ICT Ministry supports the places through investment, he explained.

During past years, oil-based economy and natural resources were spent to provide infrastructure for public transportation, which was not successful, he said.

The reason was that the services were based on state-run management, he explained.

However, an IT-based business decrease costs and create job and wealth



The digital economy development parks are like science and technology parks and benefit from capital venture and the ICT Ministry supports the places through investment.

Economic structure should be in favor of startups: VP



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The current economic structure of Iran is not in favor of startups and the situation should be changed, the vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari said, ISNA reported on Monday.

Today over 4100 knowledge-based companies with tens of thousands of billions of rials turnover are operating, which is noteworthy in national economy, he said.

Sattari made the remarks during a meeting with the economy minister Farhad Dehpasand and some other officials which was attended by entrepreneurs and

owners of startups and knowledge-based companies on Monday.

He said that several Iranian entrepreneurs is active in knowledge economy and are successful in their private business.

"To prevent oil economy, we should support entrepreneurs to have good income. Knowledge-based companies decrease the dependence of Iran on oil economy. Hence they should be supported," he explained.

He noted that knowledge economy, which is against traditional economy, has developed during recent years.

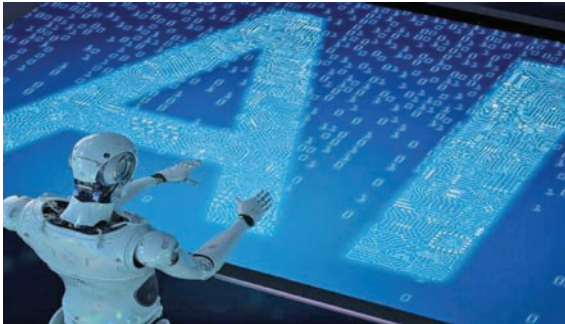
Don't be fooled, most "smart things" aren't so smart

Over the past year, the industry has made great strides in enabling intelligence in the form of trained AI models that can be ported to anything from an applications processor used in a car or smartphone to a microcontroller used in a security camera or appliance. This is referred to as inference processing rather than the deep learning training that is performed on massive server systems in the cloud. And, there is significant value in making devices around us, usually referred to as edge devices, intelligent in terms of privacy, security, reliability, and efficient use of network bandwidth. However, OEMs appear hesitant to make the shift as seen at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

The industry was quick to adopt the "smart" moniker for everything from watches to homes to buildings and even cities, but the vast majority of all these "smart things" are really just connected things. The intelligence often lies in a remote cloud server. Smart speakers, smart doorbells, smart appliances, smart lights...are all just connected devices that leverage intelligent models in the cloud. So, you may ask, what's wrong with this model?

Imagine a smart house that has smart doors, windows, AC, lights, appliances, etc. This can eventually add up to hundreds of smart solutions all connected to a wide variety of different cloud services, depending on the OEM and/or service provider. In most cases, the consumer has no control over what data is collected, how often it is collected, how it is used or by whom. The first issue this brings up is privacy.

Also, consider that each one of these internet connections is a potential hole in your network that can be exploited by hackers. That brings up the second issue - security. And, if your internet connection goes down, you may have no control over all those "smart things." Even worse, imagine your lights coming on at full intensity after a power outage waking and blinding you in the middle of the night. This was the case with Philips Hue



lighting, the issue has since been corrected. This brings up issue number three - reliability.

And finally, you have all these devices transmitting data continuously over your internet connection. If you have unlimited data, that can be just fine, but if you are on a limited data plan like those of us using satellite, then you have another problem, which is network bandwidth costs and data caps. Even consumers on an unlimited data plan may experience slower response times when data traffic is high or if your service provider chooses to regulate your data usage. How long would you be willing to wait for your lights to turn on?

Now, I can understand why most of the device vendors chose not to deploy more localized AI models. For one, the technology was not available when many of the IoT solutions were initially developed. A second reason is a combination of cost and complexity. But there is also a third and more concerning reason: they don't want to give up access to the raw data, which can be more valuable than the device. Consider all the potential buyers for this data.

Wouldn't your electric company want to know more about your usage patterns, your health insurance company about how much TV you watch or games you play, or

AerUP Innovation Event focusing on aerospace industry



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Experts and owners of aerospace industry have gathered at the 2nd International AerUP Innovation Event, which opened at the Amirkabir University of Technology on February 5 and will last until March 5.

The event aims to strengthen teamwork, perseverance and establish startups, the secretary of the event Mehdi Sabzehparvar said.

He said that satellite imagery can be useful in decreasing accidents on roads, railway or even in marine and

coastal hazards.

"The future is for aerospace industry which strengthens connection in the field of aerospace between countries and empowers students for market," he said.

Workshops and panels will be held on the sidelines of the event. On February 19 the entrepreneurs can hold meetings with industry owners during an event named Aertalk.

The event aims to introduce aerospace applications to public in their early life.

any consumer company about your interests and buying patterns? To be fair, much of this data is already collected every time you hop on a browser, purchase something over the internet, or stream content, but those are all conscious decisions by the consumer, not information generated from ambient devices around you.

I am very disappointed at the lack of device OEMs making solutions that are more intelligent at the edge. I believe those companies that do improve edge intelligence will ultimately be the industry leaders. Even Apple, who does not exhibit at CES, took a swipe at this issue with a billboard that says "what happens on iPhone, stays on your iPhone". I'm not sure I want Apple to know everything about me either, but it helps make the point for more intelligent things, not just connected things.

This topic even led to a debate between my colleague Kevin Krewell and I during a meeting with a major technology provider that enables many of these devices. There is the case for sharing data that can be used for the greater good, like auto and traffic information that could potentially save lives in real-time or improve AI driving models over time. But, even if you could make that case for every application, the networks and cloud services could not handle the exponentially increasing amounts of data that these devices are creating. We also did a podcast to recreate this debate on the Smart Home that you can listen to on Sound Cloud.

So, my message to the industry is that there is a difference between a connected device and an intelligent device, and the latter is important. And to the staff at Ring that argued with me that the cloud is more secure than local intelligence, think again! I would also venture a guess that most of the current solutions and services are in violation of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The way forward is smart things that are intelligent, not just connected.

(Source: forbes.com)

Can nanotechnology build the AI of the future?

Due to the scale of research undertaken when dealing with nanoparticles, it is difficult to quantify some of the variables in the setting, as they cannot be recorded. Moreover, interpreting these results is also a behemoth task, owing to the same reasons. However, AI is a perfect fit for these tasks, as it can not only optimize the data and algorithm design for the technology, but also estimate multiple parameters and interpret results from experiments.

This has also led to multiple nanotechnology facilities to begin utilizing AI in their research segments, owing to the high degree of accuracy and effectiveness that AI brings to the table in nanotechnology. Moreover, in applications that require a high degree of precision, AI can also enable the intricate preprogramming of nanobots'. This includes medical applications, as the minimal invasiveness of these bots is sought after in the medical field.

Nanotechnology can also enable the trans-

formation of stem cells to bone cells on command, thus providing a solution for multiple diseases. The manipulation of stem cells by AI can also result in the creation of human organs for the replacement and repair of damaged ones. Guided by the AI, the nanobots can generate an organ from stem cells.

By utilizing an AI, nanobots can also differentiate between good and bad cells, something that cancer researchers have been trying to determine for many years.

Moreover, nanobots can also rely on unsupervised machine learning to help them make these decisions.

With the help of a vast library of data on the human body, and the difference in the appearances of these cells from normal cells, a model can be trained to identify which cells are infected and which aren't. This will be targeted by the nanobots in order to tackle the problem and destroy only the affected cells.

(Source: analyticsindiamag.com)

Climate change will melt vast parts of the Himalayas, study says

At least a third of the ice in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, an area that includes the world's highest peaks Mount Everest and K2, could melt by the end of this century according to an assessment released Monday -- even if there is aggressive action to curb greenhouse gases and meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement.

The report highlights previous studies that predicted glacier volumes in this region could decline between 45% and 90% through the 21st century.

Rising temperatures are a serious threat to the eight countries including China, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. Fresh water from the region's glaciers flows into 10 major river basins, contributing to the drinking water, irrigation and energy needs of approximately 1.9 billion people, or about a quarter of the world's population.

The "consequences are pretty extreme. We are concerned, and we are worried," said one of the report's authors, Philippus Wester, chief scientist with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development. "Urgent climate action is needed."

Glaciers retreating
Glaciers have been retreating and thinning in the area since the 1970s, the report says, but there's been an accelerating rate of retreat since then. This loss has caused severe economic damage and floods, landslides and deadly epidemics. Global warming has also reduced snow cover and degraded permafrost.



The consequences of inaction will be devastating, impacting food and water supplies and raising the risk of mass population displacement, the assessment says.

Climate change will reduce how much food farmers will be able to produce in this part of the world. About 70% of the population of this

region are farmers, and there is already great food insecurity there.

Warmer water temperatures will encourage the growth of invasive species. Extreme floods and droughts may "destroy the food production base of the region," the report said. Rivers that farmers and energy companies rely on, like the

Climate change will reduce how much food farmers will be able to produce in this part of the world. About 70% of the population of this region are farmers, and there is already great food insecurity there.

Ganges, Yangtze, Mekong and Indus, will also be hurt by glacier melt.

Ultimately, climate change will probably increase the risk of violent conflict and add to the political instability.

And it's not just this region that will be affected. An ice melt could push sea levels higher around the world.

Creating a baseline
The Hindu Kush Himalayan Assessment was put together by more than 200 authors aiming to create a baseline of knowledge to understand the region that includes China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

The report says that "in spite of its importance, relatively less is known" about the region and its ecosystems. The authors hope it will be used to encourage cross-border cooperation among the regions leaders to find ways to prevent the potential devastation that climate change can bring.

"This is a wake-up call," Wester said. "Can we come together as humanity and rise to the occasion? I think we can. Yes, a lot of people want to be in denial. Yes, this is a story we don't want to hear because of our day-to-day issues, but the technology is there, and we have ways of reducing greenhouse gas. I'm an optimist, but time is running out, and we need to address this now, not next year or later. We need to have this conversation now. Otherwise, we are in trouble."

(Source: cnn.com)

Climate change is going to change the color of the oceans by the end of the century: new study



More than 50 percent of the world's oceans will have changed color by the end of the century as a result of climate change, scientists said.

In a study published in Nature Communications, a team of researchers led by Stephanie Dutkiewicz, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, looked at how phytoplankton would respond to warming global temperatures over the coming decades.

Phytoplankton are microscopic, often single-celled organisms that live in water. Like other plants, they use chlorophyll to capture sunlight and turn it into energy via photosynthesis. They consume carbon dioxide and release oxygen.

The phytoplankton that live in the sunlit part of the ocean are hugely important, as they serve as the base of the marine food web. They also play a role in regulating the transfer of carbon to deeper parts of the ocean, so understanding how climate change impacts phytoplankton will become increasingly important in the future.

Wavelengths of light

Ocean color changes depending on how sunlight interacts with what's in the water. While water absorbs everything except for the blue part of the spectrum, other organisms can absorb and reflect different wavelengths of light. Phytoplankton can absorb blue, but less green. This means that in areas where numbers are high, the water appears greener.

For their study, the researchers developed a model simulating the growth and interactions of different phytoplankton species, and ran simulations based on the planet warming by 3C. This is the midrange of the level of warming expected under a "business-as-usual" scenario, where greenhouse

gas emissions continue on their current trajectory, with no significant scaling back.

The team combined a system looking at changes to the hue of the ocean over the last two decades with one that predicted how phytoplankton would react to rising temperatures and ocean acidification -- where the pH level of the water becomes more acidic as the ocean absorbs more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. As a result, the simulation could show changes to the light being absorbed and reflected to the ocean based on the presence of phytoplankton.

Changes to the color
Findings showed that changes to the color of the ocean would take place as early as 2055. The subtropics--which include California, Texas and Florida--will become more blue, while areas near the poles, where warmer temperatures will lead to more diverse phytoplankton, will become greener.

"There will be a noticeable difference in the color of 50 percent of the ocean by the end of the 21st century," Dutkiewicz said in a statement. "It could be potentially quite serious. Different types of phytoplankton absorb light differently, and if climate change shifts one community of phytoplankton to another, that will also change the types of food webs they can support."

She continued, the "changes won't appear huge to the naked eye, and the ocean will still look like it has blue regions in the subtropics and greener regions near the equator and poles. That basic pattern will still be there. But it'll be enough different that it will affect the rest of the food web that phytoplankton supports."

(Source: Newsweek)

Diversity in the CD4 receptor protects chimpanzees from infection by AIDS-like viruses



Beatrice H. Hahn, MD, a professor of Medicine and Microbiology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, and her colleagues have been studying the origin of HIV-1 in non-human primates for decades. They previously discovered that simian immunodeficiency viruses (SIVs) infecting wild-living chimpanzees and gorillas jumped the species barrier into humans on four occasions, one of which spawned the AIDS pandemic. Understanding how these viruses are transmitted within and between species may reveal clues for novel vaccine strategies in humans.

HIV and SIV infect and kill immune cells called CD4 T cells, a process that ultimately leads to AIDS. Publishing this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Hahn's lab and an international team of collaborators, found that the CD4 surface protein, which is used by HIV and SIV as the receptor to enter immune cells, is highly variable among wild chimpanzees.

Characterizing fecal samples from over 500 chimpanzees across sub-Saharan Africa, they found, to their surprise, nine CD4 variants. They went on to demonstrate that this diversity in CD4 protects chimpanzees from their own strain of SIV, as well as potentially dangerous SIVs carried by other monkey species on which they prey.

SIVs infect over 40 primate species in sub-Saharan Africa and can be deadly. Hahn's group showed in previous studies that SIV-infected chimpanzees in the wild have a higher mortality than uninfected chimpanzees and can develop an AIDS-like disease, like that in humans.

"CD4 is known to have evolved rapidly in primates, but the reason for this has remained unclear," said Hahn. "Now we find that mutations in the chimpanzee CD4

reduce susceptibility to SIV infection, which could provide a selective advantage to apes bearing these CD4 variants."

Several mutations
To get into host cells, HIV and SIV use their outermost, or envelope, glycoprotein to bind to the outermost region of the CD4 receptor. To "counteract this, chimpanzees have evolved several mutations in this CD4 domain that blocks this interaction," said co-first author Ronnie Russell, a doctoral student in Hahn's lab.

The team found that these mutations include amino acid changes in contact residues as well as the addition of bulky sugar molecules, called glycans, at the CD4-envelope binding interface. "Glycans on the chimpanzee CD4 clash with glycans on the SIV envelope, which impedes virus entry into the cell," said co-first author Frederic Bibollet-Ruche, Ph.D., a research assistant professor of Microbiology in Hahn's lab. This type of glycan-glycan interaction has not been seen before as an anti-viral mechanism.

Unlike chimps, humans lack protective glycans on the virus-binding domain of the CD4 protein. "This may explain our relative susceptibility to SIV cross-species infection, which has occurred at least a dozen times within the last century or so," said co-author Paul Sharp, Ph.D., an evolutionary biologist at the University of Edinburgh.

Although chimpanzee SIVs are highly divergent from their human counterparts, previous work by the Hahn group showed that they share unexpected antibody cross-reactivity with HIV at the very tip, or apex, of their envelope spike. This finding raised the possibility that HIV and SIV envelopes could be used in combination to focus a protective antibody response to this conserved epitope in a vaccine.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Physicists create exotic electron liquid

By bombarding an ultrathin semiconductor sandwich with powerful laser pulses, physicists have created the first 'electron liquid' at room temperature. The achievement opens a pathway for development of the first practical and efficient devices to generate and detect light at terahertz wavelengths -- between infrared light and microwaves. Such devices could be used in applications as diverse as communications in outer space, cancer detection, and scanning for concealed weapons.

In conventional electronic devices, electricity requires the movement of electrons (blue spheres) and their positive counterparts, called holes (red spheres), which behave much like the gas molecules in our atmosphere. Although they move rapidly and collide infrequently in the gas phase, electrons and holes can condense into liquid droplets akin to liquid water in devices composed of ultrathin materials.

By bombarding an ultrathin semiconductor sandwich with powerful laser pulses, physicists at the University of California, Riverside, have created the first "electron liquid" at room temperature.

The achievement opens a pathway for development of the first practical and efficient devices to generate and detect light at terahertz wavelengths -- between infrared light and microwaves. Such devices could be used in applications as diverse as communications in outer space, cancer detection, and scanning for concealed weapons.

The research could also enable exploration of the basic physics of matter at infinitesimally small scales and help usher in an era of quantum metamaterials, whose structures are engineered at atomic dimensions.

The UCR physicists published their findings online Feb. 4 in the journal Nature Photonics. They were led by Associate Professor of Physics Nathaniel Gabor, who directs the UCR Quantum Materials Optoelectronics Lab.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

New star trek-like 'replicator' prints 3D objects with light

3D printing technology has been around for years, but it hasn't taken off as many industry-watchers expected. One of the major issues is that 3D printing even small objects take a long time, and the objects you get at the end still require some cleaning up. Researchers from the University of California Berkeley have developed a technique that can create objects in a single step using light. They call it "The Replicator," a reference to the essentially magical technology features throughout the Star Trek series and movies.

The Berkeley team took inspiration from computed tomography (CT) scans. A CT scanner captures 2D X-ray images of the patient, and then a computer reassembles those slices into a 3D model to give doctors a look inside the body. The replicator essentially runs that process in reverse.

It starts with a 3D model, and a computer program builds 2D slices out of that model. Those slices are composited into a video sequence that shows the object rotating. To get that virtual representation into the real world, you just need a little light at just the right wavelength.

The replicator uses a tube of synthetic resin to produce the object. In the test below, the team used a scale model of Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker" statue. A projector beams the computer-generated video onto the resin tube. The light solidifies the resin as the video plays. The video shows the model rotating, so the tube rotates at the same rate to ensure the "slices" end up in the right 3D shape. The result is a little Thinker formed from liquid resin in just a few minutes.

The researchers are excited about what this technology could make 3D printing more useful for rapid prototyping and the production of custom medical devices. Because the material is liquid and solidifies rapidly, you can even embed solid objects inside the resin. The objects also come out smooth, whereas regular additive 3D printingSEEA-MAZON_ET_135 See Amazon ET commerce produces rough edges and need to be smoothed out.

(Source: extremetech.com)

Female brains appear to be more youthful than males, study suggests

Scientists have just found a new distinction between the brains of the two sexes: age-related changes to the brain occur more slowly in women than in men.

The jury is still out on whether cognitive differences between men and women are created by nature or nurture - or to what extent they even exist - but we do know that average structural differences between the sexes are a real thing.

This latest research now indicates that female brains, on average, appear to be about three years more youthful than the brains of males of the same age when it comes to brain metabolism.

This difference could be why women tend to stay mentally sharp for longer than men, the researchers said.

"We're just starting to understand how various sex-related factors might affect the trajectory of brain ageing and how that might influence the vulnerability of the brain to neurodegenerative diseases," said neuroscientist Manu Goyal of the Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

"Brain metabolism might help us understand some of the differences we see between men and women as they age."

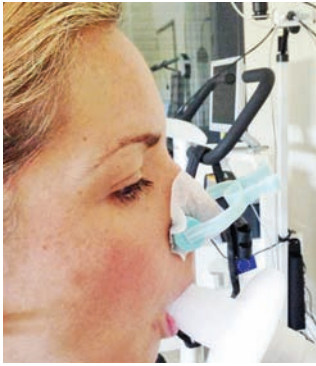
Scientists had already established that age-related grey matter volume decrease occurs more quickly in male brains than female brains. It's also been demonstrated that gene expression in the brain changes more rapidly in ageing men than women, resulting in a reduced ability to build and break down molecules in the male brain.

These pieces of evidence are suggestive of a form of neuroplasticity in the female brain, (assuming male brains as the baseline, which is something scientists do), but no one had looked at metabolism - how the brain runs on glucose - until now.

As you age, the brain's use of glucose changes. In children, a metabolic process called aerobic glycolysis features heavily. It's associated with brain development, increasing in sync with synaptic formation and growth.

This process slows down as we approach adulthood, and continues to slowly decline. The brain still uses sugar for cognitive function, but aerobic glycolysis plateaus at a low level usually by the time people are in their 60s.

(Source: sciencealert.com)



Sufficient, Proper fertilization Provided for Future Crops: CEO of ASSC

Sufficient and proper provision of fertilization has been carried out for future crops, the Public Relations and International Affairs Dept. of Agricultural Support Services Company (ASSC) reported.

Eng. Hamid Rasouli Member of the Board of Directors and Chief Executive of Agricultural Support Services Company (ASSC) made the above remark and emphasized, "with the coordination made in this regard, various types of agricultural fertilizers have been provided for the future crop farming year."

There is no worry about the provision of fertilizers for the next crop year, he said, adding, "in the current farming year, consumption volume of fertilization has

increased in the past 10 months as much as 28% as compared to the past years."

He put the number of agents in fertilizer distribution network at 3,500, adding, "with the coordination made in this regard, domestic petrochemical companies managed to meet the domestic demand of farmers to fertilizer especially in the second half of the current year (Sept. 21 - Dec. 21).

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eng. Rasouli added, "presently, over 2.1 million tons, equal to 84% of assignments of the Ministry of Agriculture, has been provided in the first 10 months of the current year (March 21 - Jan. 21) from domestic and foreign resources.

It is for the third year that agricultural fertilizers in the country [including urea, phosphate and potassium fertilizer] has not experienced considerable price hike.

He also pointed to the strategic storage of 225,000 of various types of agricultural fertilizers in storages of the company across the country and said, "given the suitable and proper situation of supplying fertilizer from domestic and foreign resources, the company has taken giant strides to increase its production capacity."

In this regard, 81% of agricultural fertilizer of this company is provided from domestic resources, he said, adding, "in the meantime, urea fertilizer has got the lion's share of domestic resources."

Houses to be built for families with no financial providers

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — All underprivileged families with no financial providers will be supplied with housing units in the next Iranian calendar year (March 2019-March 2010), Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation director has said.

It is planned to construct some 1,000 residential units for people under the Foundation's coverage in six provinces of the country,



Mehr quoted Seyed Parviz Fattah as saying on Monday.

The project will be implemented in cooperation with Planning and Budget Organization and an NGO active in this field, he added.

Some 500 units will be built in rural areas and the rest in urban areas, he said, adding that the construction of each unit in rural areas will cost 500 million rials (about \$12,000) and in urban areas around 650 million rials (nearly \$16,000).

Referring to a project constructing 10,000 housing units for the financially struggling families in southern part of Kerman province, he stated that the Foundation is taking steps toward granting houses to the families with no financial providers.

Health Ministry teaches disaster preparedness to 2.5m families

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Health Ministry has taught disaster preparedness to 2.5 million families in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2018), Mohammad Esmail Motlaq, an advisor the ministry has said.

Between the years 1392 (March 2013-March 2014) to 1397 (March 2018-March 2019) families preparedness against disasters have increased from 8.5 percent to 27 percent, ISNA news agency highlighted.

He went on to say that healthcare centers preparedness also increased from 21 percent to 36 percent, he added.

The number of families taught about disaster preparedness was 4 million in the same period and increased by 2.5 million in the first half of the current year, he concluded.

LEARN ENGLISH

Global Warming

A: And therefore, **global warming** is the greatest **deception** of the early 21st century. Questions?

B: Uh, yeah. In the lecture you said there's more evidence in the scientific record supporting global cooling?

A: Well, yes, essentially, the historical record supports a theory of climate cycles. Warming and cooling are cooperating processes in the **planetary eco-system**.

B: If that's true and the planet is getting cooler, what explains the rapid melting of the **polar ice** caps and the dramatic rise in the global average temperatures?

A: But are global temperatures rising? If you look at the data from nineteen seventy-five, you'll ...

B: You'll be **misled**. If you were serious, you would look at the record starting in the 1880's. Then you would see how dramatically the earth's temperature has changed.

A: Young lady, I **beg to differ**. Look, the point of the lecture was to **emphasize** that there is evidence for both sides, and I'm **putting forth** the argument that there's greater evidence in support of the global cooling hypothesis. Look, it's an **indisputable** fact that the public is being **manipulated** and scared into believing there's some kind of climate crisis; this **scaremongering** is done, quite simply, for political reasons. B: But even without the uncomfortable reality that **greenhouse gases** like carbon dioxide contribute to global warming, isn't the topic appropriate for politicians to discuss?

A: Not if they want to use your tax dollars and mine to fund completely unnecessary initiatives.

B: Yeah, like conservation, protecting **endangered species** and investing in renewable energy. At the very least, you have to **concede** that this debate has the potential to end our dependence on foreign oil. Buying oil supports **autocratic** countries that use these revenues to devastating **ends**.

A: Why, I've never been so disrespected in all of my days. I'm a professor, a scientist and researcher of high regard.

B: Yeah, and a **duplicitous** one at that. Everyone knows you're **in the pocket** of the oil lobby. Why should we trust your **so-called** findings more than tobacco institute studies which say smoking doesn't harm health? You're full of it.

A: Some people just cannot handle civil debate!

■ **Key vocabulary**
global warming: the increase of the world's temperature
deception: the act of making others believe something false
planetary: of or relating to planets
eco-system: everything that exists in a certain environment
polar ice cap: the thick layer of ice or snow on the poles
mislead: be led to make believe something not true
beg to differ: a polite way to show you do not agree with someone
emphasize: highlight
put forth: give out, announce the public
indisputable: so true that does not need to be discussed anymore
manipulate: influence someone's ideas for your own benefit
scaremongering: saying something so as to frighten people
greenhouse gas: a gas that increases the global temperature
endangered species: type of animal in danger of dying out
concede: to say that you do not deny something's true
autocratic: with total power
end: result or outcome
duplicitous: deceiving, dishonest
in the pocket of: being illegally bribed or paid by someone
so-called: used to show the name is not really suitable
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
fossil fuel: fuel made with dead animals or plants such as oil, gas, natural gas
deforestation: the action of cutting down forests
emission: the act of producing gas
endorse: support a point of view

‘Water transfer from Sea of Oman entails no considerable environmental risk’

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Transfer-ring water from Sea of Oman to central drought-ridden provinces of the country, provided that the environmental requirements are met, will not poses threats to the environment, Issa Kalantari, the Department of Environment (DOE) chief has announced.

To provide the amount of water needed for the country, agriculture and industries, there is no choice but to use seawater, the incredible and abundant resources, now and in the future, Kalantari stated, IRNA reported on Monday.

He went on to say that Iran located in an arid and semi-arid area, is facing environmental problems including water shortage, sand and dust storms due to low precipitation amounts coupled with climate change.

“Renewable water resources have drastically decreased to less than 80 billion cubic meters from 132 billion cubic meters over the past 50 years, and 50 billion cubic meters water consumption rate have increased to 95 billion cubic meters,” he lamented.



He stated that the country's water supply must be provided in any way, adding, while setting up a suitable place for desalination plants, taking into account all the standards for water transfer must be carefully inspected.

All environmental criteria and requirements for the construction of water desalination system must be employed, so that later no threats will be posed to aquatic and marine creatures, he further noted. Chabahar and Konarak counties located

‘Organ donation rate grows 60-fold in 18 years’

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Organ donation rate has increased by 60 times over the past 18 years, though the growth is not considerable compared to the global scale, head of the transplantation and treatment of diseases department at the Ministry of Health has announced.

Some countries including China have grown 122-fold in terms of organ donation over the past 10 years, ISNA quoted Mehdi Shadnough as saying on Monday.

Although, Iran ranks 26 in organ donation in the world, it can claim better ranks given some plans being implemented in this regard, he highlighted, adding, we will achieve better results certainly by the next year (March 2019-March 2020), as many barriers have been removed last year.

In the past, kidneys were mostly removed from a healthy donor and surgically placed in an individual with kidney failure, while currently some 57 percent of kidney donor transplants in the country are among brain-dead donors, he explained.

Referring to the country being successful in liver transplant surgeries, he noted that, some 5,500 liver transplants have taken place in the country so far.

He further explained that Shiraz University of Medical Sciences conducting over 700 liver transplants annually achieved success in this regard.

Expressing that kidney transplant surgery costs one seventh of dialysis, he stated a five-year dialysis period brings economic burden amounting to 3.5 billion rials (nearly \$83,000) for the country, while the kidney transplant costs about 500 million rials (about \$12,000).

“We tried hard that patients waiting for transplant not to be influenced by the recent economic challenges facing the country,” he said, adding that the fund required for



transplant will be provided to the universities of medical sciences nationwide by the end of the next month.

Nationally, over 8,600 people are on the transplant waiting list for kidney, which is hoped to face a decline as soon as possible, he lamented.

Organ donation of brain death has reached up to 60 percent, he said, lamenting that the country ranks 21st regarding organ donation from brain dead patients in the world, while ranking 14th regarding organ transplant from alive patients.

He went on to add that if we move ahead with the current trend, we will achieve 45 percent increase by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026), although, we can enhance the success reaching

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Sand and dust storm (SDS) mitigation plan will be implemented in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan as of the next Iranian calendar year (beginning March 21), Department of Environment (DOE) chief has announced.

A total fund of \$150 million from the National Development Fund has been proposed to counter dust storms in Sistan-Baluchestan province, IRNA quoted Issa Kalantari as saying on Tuesday.

Referring to the SDSs hitting southeastern part of the country causing the residents severe health problems, he noted that the president is pursuing the issue and as long as the fund is provided the

plan will go into effect.

This year, 120-day winds of Sistan have been haunting the province for over 160 days, he further lamented, adding, Hamoun wetland, transboundary wetland on the Iran-Afghan border, being withered also worsens the SDSs generating huge amount of dust, so urgent measures must be taken to contain the issue.

120-day winds of Sistan raging from northeast to southeast with high speed in summer, affects large areas of Sistan-Baluchestan province, and when the temperature reaches the highest level, it will cause storms, soil erosion and vegetation depletion as well as carrying abrasive sand and particles.

These winds are the sequence of monsoon in India, which get power in Afghanistan especially in the Thar desert and then pass through the flat areas of Afghanistan to enter Iran.

Particulate matter (PM) concentration and SDSs also exacerbates by the increase in 120-day winds, as strong SDSs speeding over 100 kilometers per hour have stricken the province for several times since March 21, which is unprecedented in past 33 years.

According to the long-term data in 2018, last year was the second year the province has been hit with storms with wind speeds more than 100 kilometers per hour compared to the past 55 years.

in Sistan and Baluchestan province, are among the most important coastal areas capable of water transfer due to connection to ocean waters, so water must be transferred and desalinated from these areas as soon as possible, he highlighted.

Appreciating measures compatible with environmental standards taken in Chabahar county, he noted that all the development plans are permissible by the DOE as long as complying with environmental standards, not exposing risk to the environment.

Environmental risks caused by construction projects or development plans, can lead to depopulation of the regions as well as utilization of oil and gas resources in Asalouyeh city in Bushehr Province which caused major health problems for the residents, he concluded.

In May 2018, Parvin Farshchi deputy head of the DOE for marine affairs said that there is a strong possibility that we initiate the plan to transfer water from Sea of Oman to drought-ridden provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan and Khorasani Razavi by the next [Iranian calendar] year (March 2019), ISNA reported.

75 percent in case of proper planning.

World Health Organization explains that organ transplantation is often the only treatment for end state organ failure, such as liver and heart failure. Kidney transplantation is by far the most frequently carried out transplantation globally.

According to the figures revealed by International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT) Spain leads the world in organ donation.

Figures published for 2017 reveal that 2,183 people in Spain became organ donors last year after they died. That's 46.9 pmp — a standard way of measuring the rate of donation in a country, The Independent reported in July 2018.

Spain's closest contender is Croatia, with 38.6 pmp (2016). It has maintained its position as the clear leader for the past 26 years. In a press release, Spain's National Transplant Organization confidently describes the country as unbeatable.

According to the data published on IRODaT by the end of 2017 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 11.43. In 1996 Iran's per million population of actual deceased organ donors was 0.1, which compared to the current per million people in the population (pmp) shows a great increase.

Some 5,000 people die of brain death annually in Iran, out of 3,000 brain deaths reported last year being qualified to be organ donors, only 926 donated their organs.

In May 2018, the Masih Daneshvari hospital's manager Ali Akbar Velayati said that some 10,000 people are waiting in transplant lists and every day some 10 people waiting for an organ lost their lives.

Omid Qobadi told IRNA in October 2018 that some 5 million Iranians have organ donor cards.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Industry ministry making no move to promote electric motorcycles: official

Vahid Hosseini, head of the national working group for air pollution mitigation, has criticized the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade for not taking any actions in manufacturing and promoting electric motorcycles.

As per a statute passed by the national working group for air pollution mitigation the industry ministry had to take action in manufacturing and developing electric motorcycles to tackle air pollution over the past year but so far no visible action has been taken, Hosseini regretted. Normally, governments worldwide provide customers with subsidies for encouraging cleaner transport options such as electric motorcycles, ISNA quoted him as saying on Saturday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“bene-”

■ **Meaning**: good, well

■ **For example**: He smiled in a **benevolent** sort of way when he said this.

PHRASAL VERB

Wear on

■ **Meaning**: if time wears on, it passes very slowly, especially when you are waiting for something to happen

■ **For example**: I was feeling more tired as the night wore on.

IDIOM

Sail close to the wind

■ **Explanation**: to do something risky or dangerous

■ **For example**: If you keep sailing close to the wind, the police are going to arrest you eventually.

وزارت صنعت به مصوبه دولت درباره موتورسیکلت‌های برقی عمل نکرده است

وحید حسینی دبیر کارگروه ملی کاهش آلودگی هوا گفت: وزارت صنعت هیچ اقدامی برای اجرای مصوبه دولت مبنی بر تولید و توسعه موتورسیکلت‌های برقی انجام نداده است.

حسینی، با اشاره به اینکه بر اساس مصوبات کارگروه ملی کاهش آلودگی هوا، وزارت صنعت باید حداقل طی یک سال اخیر در حوزه تولید و توسعه موتورسیکلت‌های برقی وارد عمل می‌شد، تصریح کرد: متأسفانه این وزارتخانه تاکنون هیچ اقدامی در زمینه تولید و توسعه موتورسیکلت‌های برقی انجام نداده است.

به گزارش روز شنبه خبرگزاری محیط زیست وی گفت: همه جای دنیا رایج است که دولت‌ها برای توسعه دستگاه‌های پاک سوبسید می‌دهند.

Bahrainis firm to continue peaceful struggle for change: Al-Wefaq

➔ Since February 14, peaceful protest rallies have been held regularly, demanding that the Al Khalifah family relinquish power and let a just system representing all Bahrainis be established.

The protesters have also been complaining against widespread discrimination against the Shia majority in the kingdom.

Manama has responded to the protests with lethal force, drawing international criticism. In March 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were also deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Bahraini authorities have also detained human rights campaigners, broken up major opposition political parties and revoked the nationality of several activists.

Since the start of the popular protests, the Manama regime has dissolved key opposition factions, including al-Wefaq and the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), arrested prominent opposition figures and rights activists, and conducted mass trials of civilians at military courts.

Rights activists have lashed out at Manama for the rampant torture and sexual abuse of political prisoners as well as numerous death sentences, lengthy jail terms, revocation of citizenships, enforced deportations and hefty financial penalties against political activists and Shia scholars in the country.

Critics argue that defendants in the mass



trials, all Shia Muslims, are victims of torture and denied access to any legal representation during the investigation period.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have repeatedly expressed deep concern over the deterioration of human rights in Bahrain, saying the situation reveals the regime's campaign to silence voices of dissent in the sheikhdom.

■ **Sheikh Qassim's words 'road map for future'**

Meanwhile, Bahrain's top religious schol-

ars have welcomed last week's statement by Bahrain's top Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim, describing it as a "road map" for the country and its future.

In the statement issued last Friday, the senior cleric hailed Bahraini people's relentless struggle for "rights, justice and freedom."

Bahraini scholars said in a statement on Monday that they had received "with great passion and eagerness" Sheikh Qassim's words that contained a "map, a strategy,

foundations...and a signal."

They also called on the people of Bahrain to be fully prepared to mark the anniversary of the uprising.

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 Association.

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.

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 Khalifah had allowed Sheikh Isa Qassim to travel to the United Kingdom for medical care.

Sheikh Qassim – who holds a one-year passport – is currently on a visit to the holy Iranian city of Mashhad after visiting the holy Iraqi city of Najaf.

(Source: Press TV)

Republican-led Senate breaks with Trump over Syria, Afghanistan withdrawal plans

The Republican-led U.S. Senate has backed an amendment opposing President Donald Trump's plans for a quick withdrawal of American troops from Syria and Afghanistan, citing concerns that such moves will benefit Russia and Iran.

The senators voted 70-26 in favor of the non-binding and largely symbolic amendment on Monday, which disputed Trump's claims about defeating Daesh and said the terrorist group still posed a "serious threat" to the U.S. mainland.

Upon announcing his plans to evacuate Syria and drastically reduce troop levels in Afghanistan in December, Trump said he was returning American soldiers home in a few months because Daesh was no longer a threat.

However, the new amendment, drafted by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, argued that while there had been progress in the fight against Daesh in both Syria and Afghanistan, the Trump administration had more to do in order to ensure the terror outfit's "enduring defeat."

It further warned that "a precipitous withdrawal" from the two countries could cause instability in the region and leave behind a vacuum that Iran and Russia would fill.

Trump's announcement has been met with heavy backlash from both sides of the aisle. It also led retired General Jim Mattis to hand in his resignation as Defense Secretary.

Before the vote on Monday, McConnell said he brought the bill to let senators "speak clearly and directly about the importance" of the missions in Afghanistan and Syria.

Last week, after senators pushed the amendment through, he told reporters: "Withdrawal of the United States forces from the ongoing fight against these groups... could allow terrorists to regroup, destabilize critical regions, and create vacuums that could be filled by Iran or Russia, to the detriment of United States' interests and those of our allies."

■ I defeated all Republicans, people agree with me: Trump

In an interview aired by CBS on Sunday, Trump made it clear that he was not going to halt the withdrawal and retract one of his main campaign promises just because Senate Republicans said it was being done "precipitously."

"Precipitously? We've been there for 19 years. I want to fight. I want to win, and we want to bring our great troops back home," Trump said.

"I ran against 17 Republicans. This was a big part of what I was saying, and I won very easily. I think the people out in the world – I think people in our country agree," he said, referring to the 2016 presidential primaries, where he defeated over a dozen of Republican candidates to win party nomination.

He claimed that even the Taliban were weary of war and had agreed to peace talks to end the conflict.

"And we'll see what happens with the Taliban. They want peace. They're tired. Everybody's tired. We'd like to have – I don't like endless wars. This war. What we're doing is got to stop at some point," he said.

■ War unites Republicans, Democrats: Rand Paul

The vote drew an angry response from Senator Rand Paul, who accused both parties of forming a "war caucus."

"What is the one thing that brings Republicans and Democrats together?" Paul asked. "War. They love it, the more, the better. Forever war, perpetual war."

The Kentucky lawmaker hailed Trump for being "bold enough and strong enough" to bring the war in Afghanistan to an end.

"How do you leave precipitously after 17 years?" Paul asked. "We are no longer fighting anyone who attacked us on 9/11."

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan began after the September



11, 2001 attacks against World trade Center in New York City.

■ Middle East bill moves forward

The vote on Monday added the new amendment to a broader Middle East security bill which is currently moving through Congress and addresses a range of issues involving America's regional interests.

The Senate voted 72-24 in a procedural vote later on Monday to advance the bill.

To become law, the Middle East bill needs to pass the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, which is unlikely due to concerns about a provision that aims to curb the "Boycott, Divest and Sanctions" movement against Israel and its violent treatment of Palestinian people.

This was the second time in the past two months that Republicans in the Senate supported measures contradicting Trump's foreign policy, although legislations to change his policies have yet to become law.

(Source: agencies)

Hamas, Islamic Jihad call for formation of Palestinian national unity government

Palestinian resistance movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad have demanded the quick formation of a new national unity government, stressing the need for further cooperation between the two groups in the face of challenges facing the Palestinian nation.

The two movements, in a joint statement released following a lengthy meeting between their representatives in the Egyptian capital city of Cairo on Tuesday, emphasized that a national unity government must be established in a bid to hold new parliamentary elections in Palestinian territories, and secure Palestinian unity.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced on January 30 that the Palestinian legislative polls will be held in East Jerusalem al-Quds, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to enable the Palestinian citizens to elect their representatives through ballots.

"The Palestinian leadership is keen to achieve the national Palestinian unity by implementing what had been agreed upon

in Cairo in 2017," Abbas said, adding that "the Palestinian leadership is committed to its implementation."

Last December, Abbas announced that the Palestinian Constitutional Court had decided to dissolve the Palestinian parliament, better known as the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).

The court had also called for holding new parliamentary election in the Palestinian territories after six months of dissolving the parliament.

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

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

Hamdallah headed the Palestinian National Consensus Government, which was formed after Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement in 2014.

Fatah leaders said there was no point in keeping the government in power in the wake of the continued crisis between their faction and Hamas.

They also argue that since their faction is the largest group in the PLO, it should have a strong presence in any government.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad also stressed the need for closer interactions in various fields in order to defend "the Palestinian nation, the resistance front and its firm principles."

"Our delegates praised Palestinian people for their spirited resistance, particularly the armed struggle against the Occupation (Israeli regime)," they stated.

The two resistance movements then called for an immediate end to divisions among Palestinian political factions to thwart US

President Donald Trump's so-called "deal of the century."

The deal, a back channel plan to allegedly reach a peace settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, was proposed by the US administration in September 2018.

Although the plan has not been released, leaks signal it will consist of the same tried and failed ideas. All Palestinian groups have already rejected Trump's plan.

While little is known about the controversial deal, leaks have suggested that it regards East Jerusalem al-Quds as Israeli territory, whereas Palestinians view the eastern sector of the occupied city as the capital of their future state.

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

(Source: Press TV)

New head of UN observer mission lands in Yemen

Retired Danish general Michael Lollsgaard arrived Tuesday in Sanaa to head the U.N. observer mission in war-ravaged Yemen.

Lollsgaard replaces Patrick Cammaert, the Dutch general who had been tapped a little over a month ago to lead the mission deployed in the lifeline Red Sea port city of Hodeida.

The new mission head made no comments upon his arrival in Sana'a, an AFP correspondent said, and it was not clear when exactly he would begin his mission in Hodeida.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council has called on Yemen's warring parties to pull their forces out of the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah and two other ports "without further delays" under a recent UN-brokered ceasefire deal.

In a statement on Monday, the 15-member UN body expressed concern over alleged violations of the Hudaydah ceasefire agreement, which was reached last December in

Rimbo, a town near the Swedish capital Stockholm, between Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement and the former Saudi-backed regime.

"The members of the Security Council called on the parties to seize this opportunity to move towards sustainable peace by exercising restraint, de-escalating tensions, honoring their commitment to the Stockholm Agreement and moving forward with swift implementation," the council said.

The council further asked the UN's Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths "to continue to keep them closely informed of developments so that they may consider further action as necessary in support of a political settlement."

The Houthi movement and forces loyal to the Riyadh-backed regime of ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi have, over the past weeks, traded accusations of truce violations in Hudaydah, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis.

North Korea insulating nukes, missiles against strikes: UN

A confidential report to the UN Security Council says North Korea is working to ensure that its nuclear and missile capabilities would not be destroyed by any military strikes.



The report said UN sanctions monitors had "found evidence of a consistent trend on the part of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) to disperse its assembly, storage and testing locations."

The report seen by Reuters on Monday was sent to a 15-member UN Security Council sanctions committee ahead of a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and U.S. President Donald Trump later this month.

In the wake of the first summit between Trump and Kim, which was held in June in Singapore, they agreed to work toward denuclearization, but that agreement, made in a written document, was broadly worded.

UN sanctions not effective

Subsequent diplomacy between the two sides has also made little progress in recent months, mainly because the U.S. refuses to lift harsh sanctions on the North.

The UN report also said harsh sanctions on North Korea were proving ineffective.

"The country continues to defy Security Council resolutions through a massive increase in illegal ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products and coal," the report said. "These violations render the latest UN sanctions ineffective."

The council has imposed a series of strong economic sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear and ballistic missile tests.

The monitors said they had detected "new sanctions evasion techniques that defeated the due diligence efforts of the region's leading commodity trader, as well as the U.S. and Singaporean banks that facilitated the fuel payments and a leading UK insurer that provided protection and indemnity cover to one of the vessels involved."

Since the last summit in Singapore, the North has suspended missile and nuclear testing, demolished at least one nuclear test site, and agreed to allow international inspectors into a missile engine test facility and another nuclear testing site.

North Korean authorities, however, have complained about continued U.S. and UN sanctions, calling them a "source of mistrust."

(Source: agencies)

Indian opposition parties plan common economic blueprint to unseat Modi

An alliance of regional parties in India is working on a combined economic plan, one of its leaders said, in the latest sign that Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces an increasingly united opposition in the upcoming general election.



That plan is likely to include a landmark policy floated by India's main opposition Congress party to provide the poor with a minimum income if it wins polls due by May, N Chandrababu Naidu, the politician who helped forge the common front, told Reuters in an interview.

The alliance – consisting of 23 parties that came together in a giant rally in Kolkata last month – would focus on poverty eradication, agriculture, employment and a "minimum income for every family", he added.

"So many political parties are working (on a) consensus. The farmers' crisis is the biggest issue, unemployment is the biggest issue," Naidu said. "The economy (is where) you have to concentrate."

Modi's ratings have dropped to their lowest-ever level amid discontent over a lack of jobs for young people and a weak farm economy, according to an India Today poll last month.

Polls have also forecast his ruling alliance will fall short of a majority in the election, which could potentially allow a coalition of regional parties to take a shot at coming to power.

However, there are questions over who could lead the opposition alliance, or whether regional parties would be open to supporting Congress chief Rahul Gandhi should his party emerge with a significant number of seats.

"A prime minister will be decided afterwards with consensus," Naidu said, ruling out selecting a figurehead before the polls. "First of all we have to win the elections."

As chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, Naidu has been credited with implementing business-friendly policies that attracted firms like Microsoft to the southern state.

His Telugu Desam Party, one of the largest regional parties in India's parliament, was part of a coalition led by Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) till last March, when he broke away after disagreements over funding for Andhra Pradesh.

Since then, he has emerged as one of the main architects of an informal alliance seeking to unseat the BJP.

"I'm telling you anybody is better than Narendra Modi because he won't listen to anybody," Naidu said. "He doesn't have any comprehensive position."

(Source: Reuters)

American Lindsey Vonn crashes out of world super-G

American ski queen Lindsey Vonn, in her final season, crashed out of the world championships super-G in dramatic fashion on Wednesday.

The 34-year-old, who has announced she will retire after the championships in Are, Sweden, went down hard, but was able to ski down after receiving medical attention.

Vonn misread a bump high up the hard-packed course that pitched her forwards into a pole and then slid into the safety netting. Medical staff were quickly on the scene to help her get gingerly back to her feet, to applause from the crowd around the finish line.

No sooner had the commentator announced that Vonn had form on the hill, having won two world silver medals in Are in 2007, than her skis kicked back off the rise to groans from the crowd.

Race leader Mikaela Shiffrin was shown on the big screen television clutching her head as her teammate, who is just four wins short of Ingemar Stenmark's World Cup record of 86, slid out at pace into the bright red netting.

It was a case of deja vu for Vonn, who suffered a season-ending injury in the opening super-G of the 2013 world championships in Schladming. Vonn will bow out after Are after 19 illustrious seasons that have seen her scoop a record 20 crystal globes, including four overall titles. She is also the 2010 Olympic downhill gold, and won the world speed double in Val d'Isere in 2009.

(Source: AFP)

Motor racing - Azerbaijan GP extends F1 deal to 2023

The Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku will continue at least until 2023 after the organisers of the event renewed their contract, Formula One management said on Tuesday.

The renewal is the first to be signed in 2019, with the Azerbaijan Grand Prix following the Belgian, Chinese, German, Japanese and Singapore races extending their deals over the previous two years.

"We are very pleased to have renewed this agreement which will see the Azerbaijan Grand Prix feature on the FIA Formula One world championship calendar for many years to come," F1 Chairman and CEO Chase Carey said in a statement confirming the three-year extension.

"In just a short space of time, this race has become one of the most popular of the season, always producing closely fought and spectacular racing."

Azerbaijan was keen to renegotiate its deal post-2020 to pay less in race-hosting fees and gain more commercial benefits, promoter Arif Rahimov had said last May.

"This new agreement will allow our race to maximise its commercial revenues through increased fan-engagement activities and a new sponsorship approach," Azerbaijan's sports minister Azad Rahimov added. "With these exciting opportunities in mind, extending our contract was never in question and we are delighted to stay in this wonderful sport for another five years at least."

Briton Lewis Hamilton triumphed in Baku last year before the Mercedes driver capped the season with his fifth world championship title.

(Source: Reuters)

Hazard: I have made decision over future

Eden Hazard has said he has made a decision on his Chelsea future, but has not expanded on what it is.

The 28-year-old had said he had wanted to leave Stamford Bridge after last summer's World Cup, and that a move to Real Madrid -- a club he had been strongly with linked with -- would be a "dream."

Hazard has 18 months left on his Chelsea contract and it is unclear whether he will extend his stay beyond 2020.

"I know what I'm going to do," the Belgium international said in an interview filmed for an RMC documentary, scheduled to be aired in France on Wednesday evening. "I have decided."

Hazard has repeatedly refused to end speculation regarding a potential move to Madrid.

Recently, he was asked directly whether he would be interested in making the switch to the Bernabeu, and replied: "Why not?"

Sources told ESPN FC earlier this season that Chelsea were prepared to offer Hazard a contract worth in excess of the £290,000-a-week that N'Golo Kante committed to if he agreed to spurn interest from Madrid and sign a long-term extension.

But their efforts have been in vain with Hazard repeatedly stating that he does not want to clarify his future until the end of the season -- a stance designed to keep his options open in the event that Madrid decide to make a concerted effort to sign him.

Hazard joined Chelsea in the summer of 2012 and has won a Europa League medal, two Premier League titles, the Carabao Cup and the FA Cup -- while he was voted double player of the year in 2014-15.

He could add to his medal haul at Stamford Bridge on Sunday when Chelsea face Manchester City in the Carabao Cup final.

(Source: ESPN)

Kobe: Harden's play amid streak not title friendly

James Harden might be on a scoring tear that hasn't been seen in decades, but Kobe Bryant doesn't think the Houston Rockets can win a championship with the reigning MVP continuing to play this way.

"Well, I think he has to do what he has to do in order for his team to win," Bryant said in an interview with ESPN's The Jump. "And there's certain levels to it. So, there's the style of play in which he's using, which I'm not a fan of in terms of winning championships. I don't think that style's ever gonna win championships."

"But at the same time, you have to keep your team's head above water to win games," Bryant told ESPN's Rachel Nichols and Tracy McGrady. "So, you have to do what you have to do to win games. And he's doing it."

Harden extended his streak of scoring at least 30 points to 27 games on Monday night with 44 points, 8 rebounds and 6 assists in a 118-110 win over the Phoenix Suns. It is the third-longest such streak, behind Wilt Chamberlain's streaks of 65 and 31.

(Source: ESPN)

Barcelona challenge to prove ultimate test of Real Madrid resurgence

For all the talk of Real Madrid's season being in crisis, Los Blancos are now just three games away from securing a major trophy.

After suffering three consecutive La Liga defeats in October, the third -- the 5-1 Clasico loss to Barcelona -- proved to be the final straw for Julen Lopetegui, Real have recently started to show signs of life in the post-Cristiano Ronaldo era.

The mini resurgence under Lopetegui's successor Santiago Solari, which has seen the club climb to within two points of second place Atletico Madrid and reach the Champions League last 16, will face the ultimate test Wednesday as Real travel to the Camp Nou to again face arch-rivals Barca in the first leg of their Copa del Rey semifinal.

Solari, who has overseen a run of seven wins in the last eight games, will be boosted by the news Barca talisman Lionel Messi is unlikely to feature after suffering a thigh injury in Saturday's draw against Valencia. The Argentine is set to undergo further tests ahead of Wednesday's match but reports suggested he trained apart from his teammates on Monday.

"For me there are two predictions: One with Messi, one without Messi," Marca journalist Juan Castro tells CNN Sport. "Without Messi I think both teams have the same possibility (of reaching the final)."

"But with Messi, which isn't very likely right now, the clear favorite is Barcelona. Both teams arrive at the game with a good feeling, Solari has recovered a lot, (Karim) Benzema has an unbelievable recent record and Vinicius is the new sensation of Real."

■ Ronaldo-less Real's troubles

Benzema's recent resurgence has seen him score six goals in his last four games,



with the Frenchman previously having scored just twice in 13 matches.

It's that inconsistency in front of goal which has blighted Real this season, as well as a leaky backline, with Benzema being forced to single-handedly shoulder the responsibility of replacing Ronaldo's 50+ goals every season in Gareth Bale's continued absence through injury.

The failure to adequately replace the Portuguese star, who joined Juventus in July for a reported \$117 million transfer fee, falls squarely at the feet of Real president Florentino Perez, Castro says, despite Lopetegui being made the fall guy.

"Real's troubles this season haven't only been due to Ronaldo's absence, but the main reason is his absence," Castro says. "Real made some mistakes in their preparation for this season but the biggest one was permitting

Australia soccer body ramps up campaign to free jailed Bahraini refugee



Football Federation Australia have ramped up their campaign to free jailed Bahraini refugee player Hakeem Al Araibi and pledged A\$10,000 (\$7,263) on Tuesday to kickstart a fundraising drive to help efforts to have him returned to Australia from Thailand.

Araibi was arrested in Thailand last November on behalf of the Bahraini government. A Bangkok court on Monday ordered him to continue be detained for another two months until an extradition hearing could be held. [nL3NiZZiAP]

The FFA and Australian Government, as well as football's world governing body FIFA and the international players' union FIFPro have all advocated for the release of Araibi, who has said he fears for his safety if he is returned to Bahrain.

"Hakeem Al-Araibi is a permanent Australian resident and footballer at Pascoe Vale FC," FFA chief executive David Gallop said in a statement on Tuesday.

"After a thorough process, he was assessed by the Australian Government to be a refugee. This is a fundamental human right that must be protected.

"We ask that the Government of Thai-

land release Hakeem to safely return to his family and home in Australia as a matter of urgency." Teams from Australia's top level men's A-League and women's W-League were photographed ahead of their matches last weekend behind #SaveHakeem banners.

"The level of support for Hakeem went up another level over the weekend," Gallop added. "More and more fans and players are actively calling for Hakeem to be released, both in Australia and around the world."

"I urge this vocal support to continue."

Araibi, who fled Bahrain in 2014 before being granted permanent residence in Australia, where he played for Melbourne's second tier Pascoe Vale soccer club, was arrested on an Interpol notice issued at Bahrain's request.

Interpol later cancelled the notice. Araibi was tortured by Bahraini authorities because of his brother's political activities during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011, New York-based Human Rights Watch has said. Araibi was convicted of vandalising a police station in Bahrain and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in absentia.

(Source: Reuters)

Klopp believes referee was affected by offside error in Liverpool's draw



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said the referee's performance was affected by an assistant referee's mistake for Sadio Mane's goal against West Ham.

Mane's opener stood despite James Milner being offside in the build-up.

Michail Antonio equalised for West Ham before the break but Klopp says referee Kevin Friend "did not want to open the gap any more" in the second period.

"I heard our goal was offside, I'm pretty sure the ref knew that," Klopp told BBC Sport after the 1-1 draw.

"In 50-50 situations it was always a free-kick for the other team, which was hard and did not make life easy."

Speaking to Sky Sports, the German added: "As a human being, if I know I have made a big mistake in the first half, I don't want to open the gap any more."

"Referees are obviously human beings, and I understand that, but I didn't during the game because I had no clue that our goal was offside."

Liverpool could have snatched a winner through Divock Origi with the last kick of the game, although the Belgium striker

"But Lopetegui did not have the right amount of time. I don't think it was his fault, I think it was a question of time and not a question of what Solari has brought to that team because if you go into the details, Solari has lost a lot of games as well."

"I will say the big detail from Solari's side was to bring fresh blood to the team like Vinicius and Sergio Reguilon, which is very important because in his place was Marcelo who was untouchable."

"Solari had the courage to put Reguilon instead of Marcelo, so two big decisions and the third one was to play Lucas more than Gareth Bale. I think those three were big decisions were for Solari."

■ Champions League? 'Why not?'

Despite a problematic and largely underwhelming season so far, Castro believes there is a "high chance" Real can win one or more trophies this season.

While any hope of winning just a second La Liga title in seven years has long since evaporated, Real's know-how in knockout competitions, particularly the Champions League, mean it's hard to discount them from potentially securing the double.

"La Liga is obviously lost," Castro says. "The Copa of course, they have only three games ahead to win the title, so of course it's possible and even more without Messi in the first match."

"And the Champions League, why not? I mean, some of the Champions League titles in Real Madrid's history have been in the worse moments than this particular season."

"Real Madrid on the big stage really are superior, they have a superior mentality, they grow a lot, so you can never so no to Real."

(Source: CNN)

José Mourinho Spain tax fraud settled in multi-million deal

Ex-Manchester United boss José Mourinho has agreed a prison term in Spain for tax fraud but will not go to jail.

A one-year prison sentence will instead be exchanged for a fine of €182,500 (£160,160). That will be added to a separate fine of €2m.

Spain rarely enforces sentences of less than two years for non-violent or first-time offenders.

He was accused of owing €3.3m to Spanish tax authorities from his time managing Real Madrid in 2011-2012.

Prosecutors said he had created offshore companies to manage his image rights and hide the earnings from tax officials.

Image rights cover the use of a person's likeness, voice, signature and mannerisms - and can be very lucrative for footballers and managers.

Mr Mourinho's move to Manchester United in 2016 was even delayed after it emerged his previous team Chelsea owned the trademark to his name.

Spanish prosecutors said that Mr Mourinho, a Portuguese national, had set up multiple business entities in the British Virgin Islands and elsewhere to manage his image rights.

They argued that was designed to obscure his financial gain from such deals - and he left it undeclared in his tax



statements after he moved to Spain.

He is the latest high-profile football personality to strike a deal with Spanish authorities, which are pursuing a crack-down on tax evasion or fraud by the country's many resident star players.

In January, Cristiano Ronaldo accepted a fine of €18.8m and a suspended 23-month jail sentence, in a case which was also centred around tax owed on image rights.

He was playing for Real Madrid at the time of the offence between 2010 and 2014 - the same team Mr Mourinho was managing at the time of his own tax violation.

Unlike the Ronaldo case, Spanish media were not told about Tuesday's hearing, so there was no crowd to meet the former Manchester United manager, who lost his job in December.

Another former Real Madrid star, Xabi Alonso, is also facing charges over alleged tax fraud amounting to about €2m, though he denies any wrongdoing.

Marcelo Vieira, who still plays for the club, accepted a four-month suspended jail sentence last September over his use of foreign firms to handle almost half a million euros in earnings.

Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Neymar have also found themselves embroiled in legal battles with the Spanish tax authorities.

As in many of the cases, Mr Mourinho's deal which spared him from prison had been agreed in advance with tax officials.

(Source: BBC)

Sardar Azmoun accuses Iran football federation of lying

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national team striker Sardar Azmoun has accused Iran football federation of telling lies about the 2019 AFC Asian Cup's preparation.

Iran suffered a heavy 3-0 defeat against Japan in the Asian Cup semifinal and failed to qualify for the final match.

Shortly after, Carlos Queiroz stepped down from his post as Team Melli coach. The Portuguese coach also said participation at Asian Cup was only possible due to the financial aid provided by the Qatar Football Association.

Now, Azmoun has supported his former gaffer and has accused the Iranian federation of withholding the truth about Team Melli's preparation.

"Everything the football federation says is a lie. The federation did nothing for us, and Qatar paid for everything in our training camp in Aspire Academy," Azmoun said.

"We flew economy class to Tehran while it could be harmful to a player's [health] like me who wanted to play 90 minutes for his national team. They also said we were given cash prize for beating Oman and China, but they gave us nothing. We don't want awards, we just want them not to lie," Azmoun, who has recently joined Zenit, explained.

"How could we have won the title under this circumstance? Besides, from the beginning of the competition many put us under pressure by saying Iran must win the title," Azmoun concluded.



Iran's Mahtab Nabavi wins gold at World Para Taekwondo C'ships



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Mahtab Nabavi from Iran claimed a gold medal at 2019 World Para Taekwondo Championships on Tuesday.

The Iranian para athlete came first at -58kg k 41 division.

The World Championships help the Iranian fighter in her bid to qualify for next year's Paralympic Games in Tokyo with maximum ranking points available at the G-10 tournament.

Taekwondo is due to make its Paralympic

debut at Tokyo 2020.

The event, set for 5-6 February in Antalya, Turkey, has brought nearly 400 athletes from 69 nations – nearly twice as many as the last edition – together for bragging rights and valuable ranking points.

Seven new nations are competing for the first time, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Switzerland, Slovakia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Host Turkey leads the way, with 56 athletes registered.

Persepolis forward Godwin Mensha drops bombshell by moving to Esteghlal



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis Nigerian striker Godwin Mensha dropped a transfer bombshell by joining Persepolis arch-rivals Esteghlal on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old hitman has penned an 18-month deal with the Iranian giants for undisclosed fee.

Mensha made surprise move to Esteghlal after being deemed surplus to requirements at Persepolis in January. Persepolis have signed Croatian

striker Mario Budimir as Mensha's replacement.

Persepolis and Esteghlal are preparing for the second half of the Iran professional League and 2019 AFC Champions League.

Esteghlal are in Group C with Al Hilal from Saudi Arabia, UAE side Al Ain and Qatar's Al Duhail.

Persepolis have been drawn in Group D along with Al Sadd of Qatar and Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli.

Top 10 richest clubs in the world

Football is more than just a game now; it is a huge corporation. Every football club in the world is now a part of something bigger – they are a business and every business is judged by the money it makes.

With that in mind, here are the 10 richest clubs in terms of revenue generated.

#10 Tottenham Hotspur – €428.3 million

Tottenham might not have won anything of late and they might also have spent a lot of money on the new stadium, but even with all of that, they lie at number 10 on this list. Imagine what trophies could do to them.

#9 Arsenal – €439.2 million

Arsenal are another club that haven't won anything major but at least they have some recent FA Cup accolades. As a result of that and their consistent figure in European football, they are number 9.

#8 Chelsea – €505.7 million

Chelsea complete the London hat-trick here. The Blues have made significantly more money than their London sisters and it could go further up if they manage to win something this year.

#7 Liverpool – €513.7 million

It has been a long time since Liverpool last won a trophy. However, they were in the final of the Champions League



last season and are currently leading the Premier League, helping them be at number 7.

#6 PSG – €541.7 million

In terms of raw cash, PSG might be on the top of the list. When it comes to generating money, however, they are still behind the big boys. Nevertheless, they are number 6 here, which shows how far they have come.

#5 Manchester City – €568.4 million

Another cash-rich club, Manchester City are now consistently in this list due to the fact that they are one of the most consistent clubs in the Premier League. They won the competition last season and could repeat it this season too.

#4 Bayern Munich – €629.2 million

The Bavarians have led the Bundesliga for a long time. In fact, one would have to go back to early years of this decade to find a season where they didn't win the league. As a result of the dominance and strict financial execution, they are at four here.

#3 Manchester United – €666 million

The Red Devils have an apt number in terms of revenue as 666 is the number of the devil. The Old Trafford outfit might not have won anything major since Sir Alex retired but such is the power of the club that they still make a lot of money.

#2 Barcelona – €690.4 million

Barcelona have been among the most successful clubs of the 21st century and have arguably the greatest player of all time in their team. So it is only natural for them to be at number two.

#1 Real Madrid – €750.9 million

And the number one team is Real Madrid. The Galacticos have won four of their last five Champions League matches and became the first club to make a revenue of €750 million or more. For the 12 years running, they top the list of revenue generated.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Chelsea frustrated by Courtois broken promises claim - sources

Chelsea are frustrated by Thibaut Courtois' claim that director Marina Granovskaia went back on a promise to sanction his sale to Real Madrid last summer, sources have told ESPN FC.

Courtois refused to turn up for pre-season training in an attempt to force through a move to Madrid, and Chelsea agreed a £35 million deal to sell him after activating the €80m (£71.5m) buyout clause in Kepa Arrizabalaga's contract with Athletic Bilbao, who would come in as a replacement.

In an interview with Belgian newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws published at the weekend, Courtois said he informed Granovskaia of his desire to leave Chelsea in March of last season and was assured by her that he would be allowed to go at the end of the campaign.

"In March I had a meeting with Marina [Granovskaia] in which I told her that I would like to leave -- living in London and the busy schedule made it impossible to see my kids, who lived in Madrid," Courtois said. "Are you going to find something?" she replied. "I told her: 'Don't worry.' That's

good,' she said. 'We will let you go and we will find a replacement.' But, suddenly after the World Cup, a departure wasn't that obvious anymore. All possible targets seemed too expensive. That was not what we had agreed on."

But sources at Chelsea have told ESPN FC no such guarantee was given, adding that Courtois' agent informed them in June that no club had indicated a willingness to make a formal offer to sign Courtois during that summer window.

Chelsea's preference when no solid interest manifested itself was for Courtois to stay and sign a new contract or, failing that, for him to see out the final year of his existing deal.

Madrid responded with a £35m bid and head coach Maurizio Sarri recommended that Courtois be allowed to leave amid concerns that keeping him would have a negative impact on the dressing room, prompting Chelsea to make Kepa the world's most expensive goalkeeper.

(Source: SoccerNet.com)

NYCFC signs Romania star Alexandru Mitrita as Designated Player

New York City FC has signed Romania international midfielder Alexandru Mitrita as a Designated Player, the club announced on Monday.

Mitrita, 23, joins from Romanian side Universitatea Craiova after putting pen to paper on a multi-year contract.

NYCFC paid an \$8.5 million transfer fee, MLSSoccer.com reported, citing a source with knowledge of the deal. That would be the third-highest transfer fee ever paid by an MLS club, after Atlanta United's purchases of Pity Martinez (reported between \$14M-\$17M) and Ezequiel Barco (reported \$15M).

He has already joined the team at their preseason training camp in Abu Dhabi.

"I'm very happy to be a part of this team and I'm looking forward to getting started," Mitrita said in a team statement. "It is a great joy for me and I will do my best to play at a high level. I want to make everyone who believes in me proud that we were able to achieve this transfer."

"I know this is a good group and I'm going to a club where young players can develop and grow. The team has a very good coach who has experience with lots

of great clubs in Europe.

"MLS is a very strong league, otherwise I would not have come here. I don't want to say too much now in terms of goals and objectives -- I prefer to see how things progress. I want to take things step-by-step and give my all in every match and we will see what we can achieve together."

A longtime Romania youth international, Mitrita has made five senior appearances for his country since making his debut in March of last year.

"Alexandru is a very talented attacking threat who can score goals and create chances when running at the opposing team," said NYCFC sporting director Claudio Reyna. "At almost 24, he's part of an exciting younger generation coming out of Romania."

"He comes to New York during a stage in his career where he's extremely motivated to make the next step after recently breaking into the Romanian national team. He possesses an innate desire to win and is focused on becoming an important player for our Club as we challenge for the Supporters Shield and MLS Cup."

(Source: ESPN)

IPL restarts: Sanat Naft 0 – 0 Sepahan

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sepahan football team were held to a goalless draw by Sanat Naft in Abadan on Tuesday in the first match of the Iran Professional League (IPL) second half.

Now, Persepolis or Padideh could leapfrog the Isfahan based football team if one of them emerge victorious at the end of the match on Wednesday in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Also, struggling team Padideh were held by Saipa 2-2 in Rasht and Zob Ahan played out a goalless draw with Nassaji in Isfahan.

Sepahan stay on top with 32 points, followed by Padideh and Persepolis who are second and third respectively with 31 points.

Iran names squad for 2020 AFC U-23 Championships

TASNIM — Zlatko Kranjcar has named his 26-man squad for the upcoming 2020 AFC U-23 Championships Qualifiers.

Iran have been drawn along with Iraq, Yemen and Turkmenistan in Group C.

The AFC U-23 Championship 2020 is scheduled to take place in Thailand. It will act as the AFC qualifiers for the men's football tournament at the 2020 Olympics.

■ Squad:

Mehdi Ghaedi, Allahyar Sayyadmanesh, Mehdi Nourollahi, Reza Azari, Omid Noorafkan, Amir Roostaei, Abolfazl Razzaghpour, Mohammad Khodabandehloo, Hamid Reza Taherkhani, Mohammad Amin Asadi, Shahab Adeli, Mohammad Moslemipour, Meraj Esmaeili, Nima Taheri, Mohammad Mehdi Mehdikhani, Mohammad Aghajanzpour, Sina Zamehran, Alireza Arta, Hossein Saki, Reza Jabireh, Vahid Namdari, Mehrdad Pourabolphasem, Aref Aghasi, Mohammad Reza Azadi, Mohammad Khorram Alhosseini and Ali Shojaei.

Injury delays Fellaini debut for China PR's Shandong

Marouane Fellaini's debut at Chinese club Shandong Luneng FC has been delayed to allow the former Manchester United midfielder treatment for a calf injury, his new coach said.

The 31-year-old arrived in Hong Kong on Sunday to meet with teammates and sign autographs for fans, but missed training and flew home to Belgium that night for treatment.

Fellaini had been expected to make his first appearance with the club at Hong Kong's annual Lunar New Year Cup invitational on Tuesday.

"Of course we are very happy that he is joining the club," Shandong coach Li Xiaopeng told reporters. "But between his health and the game, we think that his health is the more important."

Li did not say whether the Belgium international would recover for the start of the Chinese Super League (CSL) on March 1.

Manchester United announced last Friday that Fellaini would join Shandong after 177 appearances in five-and-a-half seasons, scoring 22 goals.

The former Everton player, who last year signed a new and improved deal until 2020, was a key figure at Old Trafford under previous manager Jose Mourinho.

But he has featured only once, as a late substitute, in United's seven Premier League games since Mourinho was sacked and his injury ruled him out of recent matches.

At Shandong, Fellaini joins fellow European Graziano Pelle -- the 33-year-old Italian striker who joined the club from Southampton in July 2016.

The club finished third in the CSL last season, 10 points behind champions Shanghai SIPG, and were runners-up in the Chinese FA Cup.

Shandong will appear in the playoffs of the 2019 AFC Champions League, facing the winners of the preliminary stage tie between Bangkok United and Hanoi FC.

(Sources: AFP)

Halep appoints Belgian Van Cleemput as new coach

Former world number one Simona Halep has appointed Thierry Van Cleemput as her new coach and will officially begin working with the Belgian at next week's Qatar Open.

Halep had planned to fly solo for the first few months of 2019 after former coach Darren Cahill left to spend more time with his family in Australia.



French Open champion Halep began speaking with Van Cleemput at last month's Australian Open after he split with world number 21 David Goffin midway through the tournament, according to a report on the WTA website.

Van Cleemput had worked with his compatriot for the last five years, overseeing Goffin's rise to the top-10.

World number three Halep, whose pre-season was shortened due to a back issue, made the fourth round at Melbourne Park where she lost to American Serena Williams in three sets.

Halep will represent Romania in their Fed Cup tie against Czech Republic in Ostrava this weekend before tournaments in Doha and Dubai.

(Source: Reuters)

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One can purchase the world with contentment, and live in happiness with benevolence.

Imam Ali (AS)

FAJR FILMFEST MIRROR

“Yalda” is about forgiveness: director

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Director Masud Bakhshi has said that his movie “Yalda” is not about an eye for an eye, but rather about forgiveness.

Speaking at a press conference during the 37th Fajr Film Festival on Monday, he said that forgiveness is a universal and human issue.

“Yalda” tells the story of a 26-year-old woman, who has been sentenced to death for having murdered her rich 65-year-old husband. She is invited to the most popular live TV reality show in Iran to be possibly forgiven by the only daughter of the victim who has asked for lex talionis — the law, applicable in Iran, of “an eye for an eye”.

The film is a co-production by Iran, France, Germany, Switzerland and Lebanon.

Jacques Bidou, the French producer of the film, also said, “The world and Europe are in need of Iranian cinema and they should learn from it.”

Art Bureau exhibit celebrates 40th anniversary of Islamic Revolution

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Art Bureau in Tehran is playing host to an exhibition of artworks to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

The exhibit displays a collection of 400 paintings, illuminations, miniatures and sculptures created by over 80 artists, the Persian service of ISNA reported on Sunday.



A portrait of the founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini by Ali Eslami-Moqaddam is on display at an exhibition at the Art Bureau in Tehran. (ISNA)

The artworks, which have been selected from the treasury of the Art Bureau, are on the themes of the Islamic Revolution and the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Beside each artwork, a brief bilingual biography of the artist in Persian and English has been installed.

Portraits of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, are also on view.

There are plans to publish the book of the collection on display.

Sadi’s Bustan published in Italian

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — An Italian translation of Persian poet Sadi’s masterpiece Bustan (The Orchard) has recently been published by Centro Essad Bey Publications in Italy.

Carlo Saccone, an Italian professor of the Persian language at the University of Bologna, is the translator of the book entitled “Il Verziere”.

Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi (C. 1213-1291) is one of the greatest figures of classical Persian literature famous worldwide for his Gulistan (The Rose Garden) and Bustan.

Iranian suspect in Mykonos murders case publishes memoirs

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Kazem Darabi, an Iranian suspect in the 1992 Mykonos Restaurant assassinations case in Berlin, has published his memoirs, explaining how he was sentenced to life imprisonment and his life during 15 years in captivity in Germany.

Darabi was sentenced in 1997 for having a hand in gunning down four members of the Kurdish opposition in the Mykonos Restaurant in the German capital in 1992.

Under German law, life sentences are reviewed by authorities after 15 years to decide whether the guilty party can be released. On December 10, 2007, Darabi was released prematurely after 15 years of imprisonment and subsequently deported to Iran.

Darabi attended a meeting held at the Art Bureau in Tehran on Monday to unveil his “Teahouse Painting” written by Mohsen Kazemi and published by the Sure-Mehr Publications in Tehran.

Speaking at the meeting, Kazemi said that he began to write down Darabi’s memoirs in silence, adding, “Darabi did not talk to anybody about the book, he remained in silence as he tolerated the years in prison.”

Darabi for his part complained about the situation he had been through and said, “I was in the prison cell for five years, but neither any journalist nor any organization from Iran made an objection. I have been released for 10 years but no Iranian judiciary official has visited me or asked about me.”

“If a German citizen is imprisoned in Iran, how would his government treat him? My 30-year-old paralyzed daughter is in



Kazem Darabi holds copies of his memoirs “Teahouse Painting” during the unveiling of the book at the Art Bureau in Tehran on February 4, 2019. (Mehr/Mohammad Moheimani)

Germany and I cannot go visit her. I was imprisoned just because they (Germany) merely wanted to blame Iran for the assassinations,” he explained.

He also said that he chose “Teahouse Painting” as the title of the book since he regarded the “Mykonos” Restaurant a teahouse whose story has been narrated

by him.

Darabi concluded that the publisher has promised to translate the book into German, Arabic and English.

Troupes from 12 countries to attend Fajr theater festival

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Troupes from 12 countries will be performing in the international competition of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

“Despite the economic problems facing the country, we tried not to cancel the international competition of the festival,” the director of the festival, Nader Borhani Marand, said at a press conference.

Troupes from Norway, France, Finland, Syria, Belgium, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Romania, Lebanon and Azer-

baijan as well as Iranian theater groups will participate at the festival.

Moreover, the director of the international section of the festival, Saeid Asadi, announced that the National Showcase for Iranian Dramatic Arts will be held during the festival.

The showcase is aimed at introducing Iranian theatrical productions to guests coming from other countries including Nigeria, Japan, Belgium, Russia and several others.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will take place in Tehran from February 11 to 23.



Fajr International Theater Festival director Nader Borhani Marand attends a press conference at Tehran’s City Theater Complex on February 5, 2019. (Mehr/Majid Asgaripur)

American scholars miss Iranian book honors over U.S. government shutdown

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Four American scholars have missed the 36th Iran’s Book of the Year Awards due to the partial federal government shutdown over President Donald Trump’s demand for border wall funding, an organizer announced on Tuesday.

Maurice Pomerantz, George Archer, Hussein Ali Abdulsater and Yousef Casewit have failed to prepare the necessary

documents for travel to Iran over the partial federal government shutdown, Khaneye Ketab Institute Managing Director Niknam Hosseinipour told the Persian service of IRNA.

According to protocol, Iran cannot announce them as winners or send them the awards, he lamented.

Pomerantz, an associate professor of literature at New York University Abu Dhabi, was scheduled to receive an award

for his first book “Licit Magic: The Life and Letters of al-Sahib b. Abbad” about letters of the tenth-century vizier and litterateur al-Sahib b. Abbad and their political, social and cultural dimensions.

Iowa State University Professor Archer was to be honored for his book “A Place Between Two Places: The Quranic Barzakh”.

Hussein Ali Abdulsater, an assistant professor of Arabic culture and Islamic

studies at the Department of Classics of the University of Notre Dame, was slated to receive an award for “Shi’i Doctrine, Mu’tazili Theology”.

Casewit is an assistant professor of Quranic studies at the University of Chicago. He was to receive to the honor for the book “The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barrajan and Islamic Thought in the Twelfth Century”, a study on Ibn Barrajan’s life and teachings.

There will be no regression in Iran: Rouhani

1 → The winning scholars then received their awards from Rouhani.

Canadian scholar Sheila S. Blair’s “Islamic Calligraphy” was selected as book of the year in the art category. The book has been translated into Persian by Valiollah Kavusi.

In the story translation section, the award went to British writer Kim Slater’s “Smart” translated into Persian by Mojgan Kalhor.

“Be Cautious! The Birds Are at the Breakfast Table”, a poetry collection by Iranian author Hossein Tavallai, won the award in the children’s book section.

Iranian novelist Reza Amirkhani’s “Salvation” (“Rahesh”) won the award in the contemporary prose category.

In the contemporary verse section, the award was shared by “The Sad Soul of a Poet” by Seyyed Reza Mohammadi and “Domino” by Abuzar Pakravan.

“Flower Drum Song” author C.Y. Lee dead at 102

NEW YORK (AP) — C.Y. Lee, whose novel “The Flower Drum Song” became a best seller and the basis for a popular stage musical and Oscar-nominated film despite mixed critical reactions and concerns about stereotypes, has died at age 102.

Lee’s son, Jay Lee, told The Associated Press that his father died Nov. 8 in Los Angeles. The family decided at the time not to make his death public.

“The Flower Drum Song,” a story of generational conflict set in San Francisco’s Chinatown, came out in 1957, and quickly became a popular read. The New York Times’ Idwal Jones praised Lee’s “objective eye,” but also faulted the book for its absence of “deeper notes” and its affinity for “slang and sex” and “popular taste.” (The author would later acknowledge he wanted to reach a large audience).

Lee’s debut novel attracted the attention of screenwriter Joseph Fields and composers Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Their musical adaptation, originally directed by Gene Kelly, ran on Broadway from 1958-60 and was revived in 2002, with a book by “M. Butterfly” playwright David Henry Hwang. A 1961 film version, among the first major Hollywood productions to feature an Asian cast, received five Academy Award nominations despite being called by The New Yorker an “elaborate fraud” and a showcase for



This Sept. 28, 2002 file photo shows author C.Y. Lee in New York. (AP Photo/Gino Domenico, File)

crude stereotypes.

Lee has since been praised as among the first Asian novelists to break through commercially in the U.S. and Hwang is among those who thought the book underrated. “Flower Drum Song” was out of print at the time Hwang worked on the Broadway revival and he had to track it down from a Seattle book seller.

“I thought, ‘Oh, it’s such a shame this author and this book have been lost, particularly the bittersweet tone of the novel,’” Hwang told the AP in 2001.

“C.Y.’s book is complicated in terms of texture about what it means to be an American — the things you gain and the things you lose — but it ultimately affirms the value of this social experience.”

A native of China who emigrated to the U.S. during World War II, Chin Yang Lee wrote several other novels, including “China Saga” and “Gate of Rage,” based on pro-democracy protests in 1989 centered on Tiananmen Square.

“Miss Bala” fumbles as “Glass” leads slowest Super Bowl weekend in two decades

LOS ANGELES (Variety.com) — M. Night Shyamalan’s “Glass” remained victorious at the domestic box office for the third weekend in a row — not that the Universal Pictures thriller had much competition.

“Glass” added another \$9.5 million, enough to top box-office charts as newcomer “Miss Bala,” a drug-cartel drama starring Gina Rodriguez misfired with \$6.7 million from 2,203 venues. With this weekend’s bounty, “Glass” has made \$88 million in North America.

Revenues in North America topped out at \$71 million, according to Comscore, marking the lowest haul for a Super Bowl weekend in almost 20 years. The biggest weekend in football traditionally slows ticket sales at multiplexes, but a dearth of new high-profile releases brought back the worst returns since 2000. A polar vortex across the midwest and northeast didn’t exactly help business. As temperatures dropped below negative 50 degrees in some portions of the country, moviegoers opted to stay posted indoors and away from their local movie theater.

Rodriguez, best known for starring in the CW series “Jane the Virgin”, debuted in third place as “Miss Bala” struggled to entice audiences. Directed by “Twilight” helmer Catherine Hardwicke, “Miss Bala” is based on the popular 2011 Mexican crime movie. The film came in at the lower end of expectations, though the studio was bracing for a slower start given the expected competition from the Super Bowl. Given its \$15 million production budget, “Miss Bala” will need to pick up steam during its theatrical run to



Actor Bruce Willis attends the European premiere of “Glass” in London, Britain January 9, 2019. (Reuters/Henry Nicholls)

get in the black. Sony anticipates that “Miss Bala” will get a box office boost heading into Presidents’ Day weekend.

STXfilms and Lantern Entertainment’s “The Upside” landed in second place, bringing in a solid \$8.8 million in its fourth weekend of release. The feel-good drama starring Kevin Hart and Bryan Cranston has now generated \$75.5 million at the domestic box office. Overseas, “The Upside” has pocketed \$7.6 million to date for a global total of \$83.2 million.

A pair of superhero flicks rounded out the top five. Warner Bros.’ “Aquaman” landed at No. 4 with \$4.7 million, while Sony’s “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” fell not far behind with \$4.4 million. “Aquaman,” the latest comic-book adventure from DC’s Extended Universe, has now earned \$323.5 million in North America and a massive \$1.1 billion worldwide. The cartooned web-slinging adventure “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” has generated \$175 million in its 12 weeks of release, earning the distinction as Sony’s highest-grossing animated movie.