



Iranians, including Jews, celebrating 40 years of progress despite pressure **2**



Iran has 'many options on table' if EU delays its commitments **2**



Iran futsal move up to third place in world ranking **15**

Condolences on martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (SA)



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Bahman 22 rallies will be firm response to enemies' plots

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Iran, Iraq set up payment mechanism to facilitate trade

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Central banks of Iran and Iraq reached an agreement to set up a payment mechanism to facilitate banking ties between the two countries, the portal of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) reported. The agreement was signed during a meeting between CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati and his Iraqi counterpart Ali Mohsen Al-Allaq in

Baghdad on Tuesday. Based on the agreement, Iraq's energy dues will be paid according to CBI instructions and future revenues will also follow this agreement's framework. In the meeting, Hemmati who visited Iraq to discuss expansion of banking relations, expressed hope that the trade balance between the two neighboring countries would increase even more. **→4**

Ayatollah Sistani, PM Abdul-Mahdi: Iraq won't be used against others

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraq's top religious leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani on Wednesday criticized recent statements by U.S. President Donald Trump in which he said U.S. troops should stay in Iraq to "watch Iran". According to the Associated Press, Ayatollah Sistani said Iraq aspires to have "good and balanced relations" with all of its neighbors "based on mutual interests and

without intervention in internal affairs." Iraq "rejects being a launching pad for harming any other country," the grand ayatollah said during a meeting with UN Iraq envoy Jeanine Henis-Plasschaert. Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi also said on Tuesday that his country will not accept being used for any acts of aggression against other states. **→2**

UAE funneling Western-supplied arms to notorious militants in Yemen

An investigation by Amnesty International reveals that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a key party to the Saudi regime-led coalition waging war on Yemen, has been funneling Western-supplied arms to "out-of-control" militias notorious for committing war crimes against Yemenis. The Britain-based rights group made the revelations in the open-source investi-

gation titled 'When arms go astray: Yemen's deadly new threat of arms diversion to militias' published on Wednesday. In a press release, Amnesty said the investigation "has highlighted how the UAE is arming out-of-control militias operating in Yemen with a range of advanced weaponry - much of it sourced from Western countries, including the UK." **→13**



EDITORIAL
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40 years of America's failure against Islamic Revolution

This year is on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Trump, like other U.S. presidents, has been defeated in opposition to the Iranian nation. Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to grow in the region and the world. Undoubtedly, in the future, a much worse defeat awaits the president of the United States.

Over the past 40 years, the presidents of the United States have tried different ways in contrast to the Iranian nation: to support the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran to impose a variety of unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Iran!

But today, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be strong in its movement in the world. Undoubtedly, Donald Trump will be defeated like any other U.S. official.

Over the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown that it will resist the pressure of the enemies, especially the United States. Iran will not fail on this path. The message of the Iranian nation to Trump is also very clear in this regard.

The president of the United States is having difficult days. It is now about nine months since Trump left the nuclear deal. Trump and his advisor, John Bolton, thought that Iran would be willing to give the United States a great deal during this time, but the passage of time showed that the United States was isolated in confrontation with Iran!

The strategic and unjustifiable mistake of the United States President, Donald Trump, in his withdrawal from the nuclear deal and imposing secondary sanctions against Iran, is now discussed in different circles. Many western media and news sources speak of Trump's terrible mistake in this regard.

They believe that by this decision, Trump was isolated in the international system, and failed to have other players' agreement in cooperating with him to put sanctions on Iran, and thus failed to achieve his economic goals against the Islamic Republic. In other words, Western media and analysts believe that, despite the fact that Trump's economic pressures on Iran are more severe than in the time of Obama, he will be less successful than his predecessor in pursuing his economic goals in confrontation with Tehran. **→7**

'Iran's recent missile tests were not in material violation of UNSCR 2231'

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Mahsa Rouhi, associate of the Project on Managing the Atom and International Security Program at Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University, says Iran's recent missile tests were not in material violation of UNSCR 2231.

Research fellow at the International Institute

for Strategic Studies adds that "UNSCR1929, which was superseded by 2231, explicitly demanded that Iran halt launches of missiles "capable" of carrying atomic payloads."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ Some argue that Iran missile test is in violation with international agreement such as UNSCR 2231. But as you know this resolution just "call upon" on missile that can carry nuclear warhead. What is your idea?

A: While certainly provocative, Iran's recent

missile tests were not in material violation of UNSCR 2231, which "calls" upon the Islamic Republic not to launch missiles "designed" to be capable of carrying nuclear weapons. In contrast, UNSCR 1929, which was superseded by 2231, explicitly demanded that Iran halt launches of missiles "capable" of carrying atomic payloads. While they may appear inconsequential, the differences in wording between the defunct Resolutions 1929 and existing 2231 are significant, particularly in diplomatic parlance. **→13**

U.S. 'deep state' and Trump's anti-Iran rhetoric

By Mudassir Sheikh

ISLAMABAD — The U.S. deep state refers to a shadowy government consisting of an integration of Wall Street controlled U.S. intelligence community, Washington think tanks and the military-industrial complex that yields absolute control over popular governments and propagate the agenda of deep politics.

Deep state as referred to by Tom Hayden is a state within the state whose evidences of foreign

interference dates back to 1962 CIA's "Operation Northwoods" against Cuba.

CIA has also been instrumental in orchestrating 'false flag attacks' in addition to toppling democratically elected leaders like Guatemala's president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973, Haiti's president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

The deep state overshadowed U.S. government during Obama's tenure in 2009 when the coup in Honduras was orchestrated by CIA.

The foreign powers like Israel and Gulf monarchies are strongly tied with the U.S. deep state. According to the former Italian president Francesco Cossiga who also revealed the existence of Operation Gladio, the 9/11 tragedy was perpetrated by CIA and Mossad. If we even accept the mainstream narrative that al-Qaeda was behind the 9/11, it again justifies the role of CIA behind 9/11 as al-Qaeda itself was the creation of CIA and Bin Laden was a CIA intelligence asset. **→6**

"International Political Theology" should be added to International Politics: Prof.Kubalkova

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Vendulka Kubalkova from University of Miami says that many thinkers of modernity were theologians.

Visiting Professor, VSE, Economics University, Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, Czech Republic adds that only since the Enlightenment

of the late 17th and 18th century, intellectuals believed that the inevitable consequence of modernity was the decline of religion.

Former senior Fulbright Professor at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University also adds that "International Political Theology" (IPT) should added to International Politics (IP) and

International Political Economy (IPE).

Author of "Religion in International Relations: A Return from Exile" says "That is to say, to add to the study of the pursuit of power (IP) and the pursuit of wealth (IPE) also a pursuit of meaning (IPT). IP, IPE, and IPT rhymed, but of course, it could not happen." **→7**



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Culture minister hosts followers of monotheistic religions for dinner

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi (L) greets Zoroastrian clerics in Tehran on February 5, 2019 during a dinner party hosted by his organization for the followers of the monotheistic faiths at the Enqelab Hotel.



ARTICLE
Alexis Bandrich Vega
Cuba's ambassador to Tehran

Note on the 40th anniversary of the Islamic revolution

The massive mobilizations that will take place these days in different parts of the Iranian geography will show the majority support of the people to its Islamic Revolution, which put an end to the dictatorial monarchy of Shah Reza Pahlavi backed by the United States, and materialized the desire to establish an independent republican and Islamic system. The rejection of any interference in the internal affairs of the country and the threatening policies of the White House and its allies, which slow down their development and seek to foment unrest and instability in the noble and hospitable Persian people with illusion, rises these days to provoke a "regime change". Iran does not need "a lot of support from the US, at the appropriate time" as promised by the President of that country.

History has shown that when more pressures are submitted to a country, more energetic efforts are made to defend its independence, its sovereignty and self-determination, to defend its right to development and justice for its people.

The Joint Comprehensive Action Plan between Tehran and the 5 + 1 Group established a series of limitations on the Iranian nuclear program to exclude its hypothetical military dimension in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. But no ordinance was lifted, and in fact new sanctions were imposed during the short-lived and unconstructive permanence of the US, within the Agreement. His departure from it was an offense to International Law, to the will of the rest of the signatories and the Security Council of the United Nations, to the efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to international disarmament and peace. However, these realities have not denied the spirit or the will of the Iranians. **→2**

Dear readers,
The next issue of the Tehran Times will be published on Tuesday, February 12.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

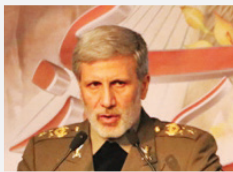


Leader has ordered structural reforms, Majlis speaker says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ordered structural reforms within a four-month period.

Speaking at the administrative council of Qom province, Larijani criticized red tape in the country, saying for example that the process of investment by the private sector should not last more than several days in order to motivate investors.

He also said the U.S. is seeking to put maximum pressure on Tehran in order to hinder Iran's economic development and harm Iran's relations with other countries, but by exiting the nuclear deal, the U.S. isolated itself.



1357 copters have been overhauled despite sanctions

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Wednesday that the Iran Helicopter Support and Renewal Company (IHSRC) has managed to overhaul 1357 helicopters despite the sanctions.

Brigadier General Hatami further said the Islamic Republic is a turning point toward joy and growth on the one hand and the peak of the enemies' spite toward Iran on the other, IRNA reported.

"The enemies believed that we wouldn't see the fortieth anniversary of the [Islamic] Revolution, but the enemies and their masters had failed to understand the philosophy of the revolution," he added.



Admiral: Iran is main regional player

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, said on Wednesday that Iran is the main player in the West Asia region.

"Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the main player in the region and no country can take an action in the region without Iran's presence or decision," he said in a conference held at the Holy Defense Museum.

He also said Iran is a source of "inspiration" to independent countries.

"We had no such a status in the international system before the revolution. Today, no one can deny status of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he added.



Iran to develop range of land-to-sea missiles to 300km

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Criticizing lack of military technology during the Shah's rule prior to the 1979 revolution, a top military official said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic plans to extend the range of its land-to-sea missiles beyond 300 kilometers.

According to Fars news agency, Rear Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi also said the Navy's active presence in the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and open seas is another achievement of the Islamic Revolution and this shows the potential and military power of the Army.



Iran, EU to hold expert-level talks on INSTEX

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran and its three European partners in the 2015 nuclear deal will soon begin talks in Paris, France, in an effort to work out the operational details of a newly-launched financial mechanism meant to protect Tehran-Europe trade ties against U.S. sanctions.

On a visit to Paris on Tuesday, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi reached an agreement with French officials to hold the first round of expert-level discussions in the near future on the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchange (INSTEX), the official name of the non-dollar trade mechanism.

The planned talks will involve Tehran and the three shareholders of the trade system, namely France, Germany, and Britain.



Afghan envoy calls Islamic Revolution 'unique' event

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Afghanistan's ambassador to Tehran has issued a message on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, describing it as a "unique" event in the modern era.

"The Islamic Revolution in Iran was one of the greatest revolutions in the present time which is unique from democratic aspect and also resistance and persistence in face of numerous challenges," Nasir Ahmad Nour said in his message.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution ended the rule of the despotic regime of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and replaced with an Islamic republic system under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

EU proved incompetent in face of U.S. nuclear deal exit: Rouhani

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the European Union's performance in the face of Washington's withdrawal from the 2015 proved ineffective.

Speaking to foreign envoys in Tehran on Wednesday on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic revolution, Rouhani said by quitting the deal, the U.S. complicated situations not only for Iran, but for the region and the larger world.

"In these years we showed that we are very meticulous in signing a commitment, but stand faithful to it. The JCPOA is a symbol of Iran's commitment to international treaties," he said, adding, "We upheld our commitments more thoroughly than the other parties."

The president then referred to Washington's Iran policy and said, "America has always faced defeat in its plots, including disintegration, coup d'etat, war, and sanctions on the Islamic Republic."

The president added, "Even if America



"We have created security in a volatile region."

abandons its wrong path, apologizes for the past interference, and talks respectfully to our nation, we are prepared to accept

their repentance."

Underlining that the Iranian nation relied on its domestic capabilities to withstand war,

Iran has 'many options on table' if EU delays its commitments, Salehi says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, has said Iran has "many options on the table" if Europeans delay their commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal.

Salehi made the remarks in an interview with Al-Mayadeen TV channel broadcast on Tuesday.

Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to slow down its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the deal in May and reinstated sanctions against Iran. However, after months of delays, EU introduced its special mechanism known as INSTEX for non-dollar trade with Iran on January 31.

Iran able to design, build nuclear reactors

On Iran's ability to enrich uranium at the highest level, Salehi said Iran enjoys highly competent human resources in all fields including nuclear technology.

Salehi, a nuclear physicist, added while other countries import reactors and related technologies, Iran has the knowhow to design, manufacture and manage major parts of nuclear reactors.

Salehi said Iranian nuclear scientists are currently testing the eighth generation of centrifuges, predicting that it will take

some 5 to 6 years that such centrifuges enter the nuclear fuel cycle.

He added all Iran's nuclear researches are carried out based on the JCPOA, reminding that the deal does not restrict researches related to advanced centrifuges.

Iran has not lost anything in the technical realm after the signing of the JCPOA and this has fueled Trump's anger, he opined.

"We accepted some restrictions to adhere to our commitments under the JCPOA, but these restrictions have not had a significant effect on the speed of Iran's nuclear industry development. If it is decided to return to the pre-JCPOA era, we will remove uranium enrichment restrictions based on our needs."

Expressing Iran's readiness to provide regional countries with nuclear science and services to build research reactors, Salehi said such a cooperation can provide a good ground for reviving the lost trust between Iran and the Persian Gulf Arab states.

Salehi, who acted as foreign minister from 2011 to 2013, also said the West does not allow regional states to master nuclear fuel cycle unless they decide to achieve political independence.

Iran has paid enormous cost to prove its right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and other regional states may not be ready to bear such huge expenses, the nuclear chief remarked.

"Bahman 22 rallies will be firm response to enemies' plots"

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the nation's huge turnout in the Bahman 22 rallies (Feb. 11) marking the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution will be an "overwhelming response" to the enemies' plots.

The Bahman 22 rallies this year are of special importance as Iran has come under renewed, toughest, and illegal sanctions by the U.S. and Donald Trump's national security advisor John Bolton had said that the Islamic Revolution will not see its 40th anniversary.

In remarks after cabinet session, Rouhani also criticized

the Trump administration for its disrespectful attitude toward the Iranian nation, saying everyone knows the problems facing the region and the world are the results of America's interference and its unwelcome presence in the region.

The Bahman 22 rallies will fall on Monday.

Rouhani added, "The regional nations are well aware that Iran has always helped with the peace and stability in the region."

Mentioning the atrocities committed by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) terrorist organization in the wake of the Islamic Revolution, the president said the MEK's sponsors were the

Ayatollah Sistani, PM Abdul-Mahdi: Iraq won't be used against others

1 → In an interview with CBS television network broadcast on Sunday, Trump highlighted the importance of a military base in Iraq, saying it was crucial to the surveillance of Iran's activities.

However, Abdul-Mahdi said, "There are no U.S. military bases in Iraq; but there are indeed trainers operating within the framework of the international coalition. We disagree with the American side and reject such a standpoint."

"I will not allow Iraq to be used by any country against another. Iraq should not be a party to any battle between two states."

On Monday, Iraqi President Barham Salih also hit back at Trump's com-

terrorism, and sanctions, Rouhani said, "We have created security in a volatile region."

"Those who created al-Qaeda and Daesh planned to create a fake Islamic revolution. But they realized their big mistake."

Zarif: West Asia filled with war, extremism due to foreign meddling

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also spoke at the event, saying that the West Asia region has been filled with war, extremism and destructive actions due to foreign interference.

However Iran is a stable country which helps and facilitates peace and stability in the region, Zarif pointed out.

He emphasized that since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has always stood on the right side of history.

"Today, we are proud that we have stood on the right side of history in the Iraqi and Syrian people's fight against terrorism, Yemeni people's fight against foreign invasion and the proud Palestinian people's fight against the Zionist regime's conspiracies," the chief diplomat remarked.

Iran reiterates that U.S. must leave Syria

Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, also said on Wednesday that Syria's victory over terrorists has served as a victory for "the axis of resistance."

"The axis of resistance" refers the resistance of Syria, Hezbollah and Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

After a meeting with Muallem, Velayati told reporters that Iran-Syria relations are "strategic" and such relationship will continue.

Velayati, a veteran politician who acted as Iran's chief diplomat in the 1980s and 1990s, also said American troops should withdraw from Syria.

"Whether they want to or not, the Americans must leave Syria," he asserted.

"Now 90 percent of Syrian soil is under the control of the government and the rest will soon be freed by the Syrian army," Velayati.

For his part, Muallem congratulated Iran on the 40th anniversary of victory of the Islamic Revolution and called his meetings with the Iranian officials "constructive".

The Syrian foreign minister held separate talks on with Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani on Tuesday.

Americans and Zionists.

"Iran is a victim of terrorism," he said, adding, "Iran and Iranians have always taken a firm stance against terrorism."

While America has always been a troublemaker for the region and the world, the Islamic Iran, on the other hand, has been the solution, he argued.

Rouhani added that Iran will continue making every effort to establish peace and security in the region, especially in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He also pointed to Washington's interference in Latin American countries, citing Venezuela as an example.

Note on the 40th anniversary of the Islamic revolution

1 → After the Islamic Revolution triumphed in 1979, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro indicated to establish bilateral relations with this nation and these have been strengthening and increasing with the passing of the years.

We know that the revolutionaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran have carefully followed the history of Cuba, they know the thoughts of José Martí, of Che and of course of Fidel.

The revolutions of both peoples have several points in common and one of the most important axes of similarity is their anti-imperialism. Both countries have been subjected to cruel sanctions, blockades and terrorist attacks. Both peoples have had to resist, and at the same time have achieved important achievements and victories in different sectors such as education, health, science, and

culture, internationally recognized.

As Fidel expressed during his visit to Iran in 2001 "against Iran, as against Cuba, the United States has not been able to use its gigantic military, technological and media apparatus, because they have lost the battle of ideas and ethics".

Before the tomb of Imam Khomeini, Fidel honored the man who knew how to defeat "the most powerful and best armed gendarme of the empire".

Today the atmosphere of war and the danger of it spreading is very high, aggravated by the irresponsibility of the US, and its allies, who believe that they can escape unscathed from any adventure.

The United States of America is desperate at the loss of

power and with this the ability to dispose of the resources of the world at his ease. It is in a rampant race to recover spaces, resources and influences. Its current administration has opened confrontation fronts practically in all regions of the planet, stirring up conflicts that can have incalculable consequences, of which they will not escape either.

As part of the celebration of National Unity Day, I would like to convey on behalf of the people and the Government of Cuba the most sincere congratulations to the Iranian people and Government, and reiterate our support and admiration for their firm will to defend their homeland, its culture of persistence and resistance.

Eternal glory to the martyrs and heroes of the Islamic Revolution of Iran

S-300 missile system activated in Syria: Israeli company

An Israeli satellite imaging company claims a number of launchers for S-300 missile defense systems provided to Syria by Russia have been seen in an erected position, indicating that they are now ready to use.

ImageSat International (iSi) said on Tuesday images show three of the four S-300 launchers belonging to the long-range surface-to-air missile systems are in an upright position in the town of Masyaf in the western Syrian province of Hama.

"Due to the current regional tension and the detected erection of the launchers, it is possible that the mentioned activity indicates an increase of the operational level and alertness," the company said.

It cited specific concern after noticing that only one of the launchers had been camouflaged.

"This situation is rare and raises question marks about the operational level of the whole battery and specifically of the covered and folded launcher," it noted.

At the request of Damascus, Russia and Syria have maintained close defensive cooperation in battling terrorists in the country.

The cooperation has flown in the face of Israel's efforts at undermining Syria's defenses, with the regime repeatedly targeting Syrian military positions.

Last September, a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft was shot down and all the 15 servicemen on board were killed during Israeli airstrikes in the northwestern Syrian province of Latakia.

Moscow held Tel Aviv responsible for the downing and ordered the delivery of the S-300 defense systems to Syria.

A month after the systems arrived in Syria, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin told Russia's Sputnik news agency that the delivery would be followed by additional steps, without providing any further details.

He also issued a veiled warning to Israel, saying Russia hoped Tel Aviv would exercise "good judgment" on the shipment of the S-300 batteries to Syria.

■ **Top U.S. general 'not consulted' before Trump's Syria withdrawal**

Meantime, a top United States general — who is in charge of military operations in the Middle East — says he "was not consulted" prior to President Donald Trump's announcement about the U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria.

The U.S. Army General Joseph Votel, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, said on Tuesday that he had not been asked for advice by Trump on a decision that 2,000 American troops stationed in Syria would be pulled out of the war-torn country.

"I was not aware of the specific announcement. Certainly we are aware that he had



expressed a desire and intent in the past to depart Iraq, depart Syria," Votel said during a hearing held by the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Pressed further by Senator Angus King (I-Maine) on whether he was consulted ahead of Trump's December announcement, Votel replied, "I was not consulted."

On December 19, Trump claimed victory against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists in Syria and announced that he was planning to pull out some 2,000 U.S. troops from the conflict-torn country, and also cut in half the roughly 14,000 American forces in Afghanistan.

The announcement resulted in the resignation of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, the U.S. anti-ISIL coalition envoy Brett McGurk and Pentagon chief of staff Rear Admiral Kevin Sweeney who disapproved of the president's decision.

Trump, nevertheless, seemingly gave in to pressure to slow down the troops pullout two weeks later, granting the U.S. military up to four months to withdraw.

During his testimony on Tuesday, Votel dismissed Trump's claims that ISIL has been defeated and said the fight against the terrorist group was "not over," warning the Takfiri outfit could regroup after the U.S. troops left.

"It is important to understand that even though this territory has been reclaimed, the fight against ISIS (ISIL) and violent extremists is not over and our mission has not changed," he told the Senate hearing.

"We do have to keep pressure on this network ... They have the ability of coming back together if we don't," Votel added.

The top U.S. spy officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee last week that ISIL "will exploit any reduction in [counterterrorism] pressure to strengthen its clandestine

presence and accelerate rebuilding key capabilities."

The U.S. deployed troops and equipment to Syria in 2014 as part of a Washington-led coalition that is supposedly fighting ISIL.

The terror group is widely reported to be financed by the House of Saud regime and partially trained and protected by American forces in Syria to support the terror campaign against the Syrian government and ordinary citizens.

■ **Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorists move chlorine barrels to northwestern Syrian town**

Elsewhere, members of the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), have reportedly moved barrels with banned chlorine to a town in Syria's militant-held northwestern province of Idlib, using vehicles of the so-called White Helmets civil defense group.

Head of Damascus-based Syrian Human Rights Network, Ahmad Kazem, told Russia's Sputnik news agency on Tuesday that the members of the Western-backed aid group, which has been repeatedly accused of cooperating with Takfiri terrorists and staging false flag gas attacks, have started to install cameras in a number of hospitals in a bid to implicate Syrian government forces with the use of chlorine.

"According to our data, several chlorine containers were transported from [the northwestern Syrian city of] Jisr al-Shugur to Khan Shaykhun town, in the south of the Idlib province. The transportation took place under coordination and cooperation between the White Helmets and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorists. The containers with the toxic substance were transported in two ambulances," Kazem pointed out.

The rights activist went on to say that the containers were later put into freezers, so the chemicals could be used for attacks against civilians.

On October 21 last year, informed sources, requesting not to be named, told Syria's official news agency SANA that Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorists had moved banned chlorine and sarin munitions from the small city of Ma'arrat Misrin, located 50 kilometers southwest of Aleppo, to Jisr al-Shughour.

The sources added that the munitions were transported inside a refrigerator truck used by White Helmets and under the supervision of the Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria (TIP) militants.

Speaking during a press briefing in the Russian capital Moscow on January 31, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, warned that White Helmets were making preparations to film scenes of staged chemical attacks in Idlib province.

The United States has warned it would respond to any possible chemical weapons attack by Syrian government forces with retaliatory strikes, stressing that the attacks would be stronger than those conducted by American, British and French forces last year.

On April 14, 2018, the U.S., Britain and France carried out a string of airstrikes against Syria over a suspected chemical weapons attack on the city of Douma, located about 10 kilometers northeast of the capital Damascus.

Washington and its allies blamed Damascus for the Douma attack, an allegation rejected by the Syrian government.

On September 11 last year, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov censured the U.S. threats to use military force against Syria as part of Washington's blackmail policy.

"Unlike the United States, Britain and their allies, Russia provides particular facts on a daily basis through its Defense Ministry, the Foreign Ministry as well missions in New York, The Hague and Geneva. We particularly name geographical points, where preparations are underway for certain terrorist groups backed by the U.S. and its allies to carry out provocations," Ryabkov said.

Western governments and their allies have never stopped pointing the finger at Damascus whenever an apparent chemical attack takes place.

This is while Syria surrendered its stockpile of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the United States and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry. It has also consistently denied using chemical weapons.

(Source: Press TV)

Turkey condemns Macron plan for national day marking 'Armenian genocide'



Turkey Wednesday hit out at President Emmanuel Macron's announcement that France would make April 24 a "national day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide."

"We condemn and reject attempts by Macron, who is afflicted by political problems in his own country, to try and save the day by turning historical events into a political matter," Turkish presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin said in a statement after the French leader's announcement Tuesday.

Macron said Tuesday: "France is, first and foremost, the country that knows how to look history in the face," during a speech to the Armenian community at a dinner in Paris.

Turkey and Armenia have long been at odds over the treatment of Armenians during World War I.

Armenians say up to 1.5 million of their people were killed during the war. But Turkey — the Ottoman Empire's successor state — denies that the massacres, imprisonment and forced deportation of Armenians from 1915 amounted to a genocide.

"The claims of a so-called Armenian genocide have no legal basis at all, and go against historical realities. It is a political lie," Kalin said. "No one can sully our history," the spokesperson added.

The French president said he had previously informed his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan of his decision.

France was one of the first major European nations to recognize the mass killings as "genocide." More than 20 other countries have followed suit.

Armenians commemorate the massacres on April 24 — the day in 1915 when thousands of Armenian intellectuals suspected of harboring nationalist sentiment and being hostile to Ottoman rule were rounded up.

(Source: AFP)

Lebanon to rely on Russian strategy for return of Syrian refugees



Lebanon's minister of state for displaced affairs says his country will stick primarily to the Russian strategy for the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland.

"The Russian strategy will be adopted as a basis for our approach towards the return of Syrian refugees to Syria," Saleh Gharib told China's official Xinhua news agency on Wednesday.

He also did not deny the possibility of visiting Syria, or conducting a direct dialogue with high-ranking government officials in Damascus to secure the return of Syrian refugees.

"Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri is very much aware of the sensitivity of this issue, and all necessary steps will be taken in this regard," Gharib pointed out.

The strategy to help Syrian refugees go back to their homes was drawn up following a meeting between the United States President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in the Finnish capital city of Helsinki on July 16, 2018.

It specifies around 76 residential neighborhoods in Syria's central provinces of Homs and Hama, the northwestern province of Idlib as well as Damascus to enable the return of 360,000 Syrian refugees as a first step.

The strategy also entails the rehabilitation of houses in the mentioned areas, which would allow the return of 500,000 more Syrian refugees within two years.

Lebanon's official National News Agency reported on December 24 last year that more than 1,000 Syrian refugees had returned to their homeland from various areas in the neighboring country.

The return of refugees took place in the southern Lebanese cities and districts of Tripoli, Aarsal, Tyre and Nabatieh, and under the supervision of Lebanon's General Security in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Refugees returned home using buses sent by Syrian authorities and arrived at al-Zamrani, Jdeidat Yabous, al-Dabbousiya border crossings from Lebanese territories.

The refugees underwent medical checks and polio vaccines were administered to children. They were then transferred to Syria's northern and central provinces of Idlib and Homs in addition to other areas in the crisis-stricken country.

More than 1,000 Syrian refugees returned to their homeland from different areas in Lebanon, including Nabatieh, Bekaa, Tripoli and Shabaa on December 16, 2018.

Arabic-language Elnashra online independent newspaper reported that the return of refugees took place under the supervision of Lebanon's General Security Directorate in cooperation with the Lebanese army.

More than one million Syrian refugees are registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon.

Beirut estimates that the true number of Syrians in Lebanon stands at 1.5 million.

(Source: Xinhua)

Second Trump-Kim summit to be held in Vietnam on February 27-28

The United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will hold a much-anticipated second summit on February 27-28 in Vietnam.

Trump made the announcement during his annual State of the Union address to Congress on Tuesday.

It was not immediately clear in which Vietnamese city the meeting would take place. Possible locations are the capital, Hanoi, and the seaside city of Danang.

"As part of a bold new diplomacy, we continue our historic push for peace on the Korean Peninsula," Trump told Congress. "Much work remains to be done but my relationship with Kim Jong Un is a good one."

Kim and Trump met for the first time in June last year in Singapore.

That summit produced a vaguely worded pledge on denuclearization but progress has since stalled amid disagreements over the interpretation of their agreement.

On Wednesday, Stephen Biegun, Washington's envoy for North Korea, was scheduled to hold talks in Pyongyang to map out what he called "a set of concrete deliverables" for the second meeting.

In his speech on Tuesday, Trump also gave himself credit for averting a major war on the Korean peninsula.

"If I had not been elected president of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea," he said.

Trump raised fears of war in 2017 when he threatened to rain "fire and fury like the world has never seen" on North Korea because of the threat its nuclear weapons and missiles posed to the United States.

But following the Singapore talks, Trump has been eager to hold a second summit in spite of a lack of concrete progress in persuading North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program.

The Singapore summit yielded a vague commitment from Kim to work toward the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, where the U.S. troops have been stationed since the 1950-53 Korean War.

In the U.S. view, North Korea has yet to take concrete steps to give up its nuclear weapons. It has complained that the United States has done little to reciprocate its freezing of nuclear and missile testing and dismantling of some nu-



clear facilities. North Korea has repeatedly urged a lifting of punishing U.S.-led sanctions, a formal end to the war, and security guarantees.

(Source: agencies)

Netanyahu election rival moots West Bank settlement removals

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's toughest election rival voiced openness Wednesday to a future removal of settlements from the occupied West Bank, sparking debate over diplomacy with the Palestinians as a U.S. peace plan looms.

The secret plan is widely expected to be unveiled after Israel's April 9 ballot.

Pollsters see Netanyahu's conservative Likud party winning around 30 of Parliament's 120 seats, setting him up for a fifth term. He has ruled out removing settlements from the West Bank, among areas where Palestinians want statehood.

Benny Gantz, a popular ex-general whose new Resilience party is gaining ground against Likud with as many as 24 projected seats, stepped into the settlements minefield Wednesday.

"We need to find a way not to have domination over other people," Gantz told Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper when asked about prospects for accommodation with the Palestinians, whose negotiations with Netanyahu stalled in 2014.



Citing Israel's unilateral 2005 Gaza withdrawal, Gantz added: "We need to take the lessons and apply them elsewhere."

The Gaza pullout was a boost for Hamas, which has since fought three wars with Israel.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's spokesperson gave a cautious welcome to Gantz's remarks.

"It's encouraging, if he succeeds and he sticks to this opinion," Nabil Abu Rdeineh

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	158535.5
IFX	1934.85

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,881 rials
GBP	54,414 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$61.92/b
WTI	\$53.63/b
OPEC Basket	\$62.32/b
Gold	\$1,314.55 /oz
Silver	\$1579/oz
Platinum	\$821.70 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



294 industrial infrastructure projects to be inaugurated by Feb. 11

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The deputy head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) announced that on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Islamic revolution, some 294 industrial infrastructure projects, using 2.7 trillion rials (about \$64.2 million) of credit are to be inaugurated throughout the country by February 11, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Making the remarks in a news conference, Fathali Mohammadzadeh added that 42,700 industrial units have been registered in the country which provide 860 jobs. “Some of these units are semi-active and 200 trillion rials (about \$4.7 billion) is required to put them back online,” he said.



Liquidity almost at \$410b in a month

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s liquidity stood at 17.25 quadrillion rials (about \$410.7 billion) during the seventh month of the present Iranian calendar year, Mehr (October 22- November 21, 2018), according to a report released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

The CBI announced that the liquidity figure shows 21.1 percent growth in comparison with the same period in the preceding year, Tasnim news agency reported.

Iran, Iraq set up payment mechanism to facilitate trade

1 → “Iraq is Iran’s biggest trade partner, and expansion of banking ties is a necessity for sustaining this positive relation.” He said.



CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati (L) and his Iraqi counterpart Ali Mohsen Al-Allaq exchanged banking agreement documents signed in Baghdad on Tuesday.

The official further noted that CBI has come up with desirable financial strategies for continuing trade with Russia, Turkey, India, China and other trade partners.

“Now, I am also confident that following this agreement and considering our good relations with Iraq we will achieve great results very soon.” He said.

Al-Allaq for his part pointed to the agreement as a basis for strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries. He said the central bank of Iraq will take all necessary measures to remove barriers in the way of bilateral economic cooperation.

Brazil’s central bank may mull key rate cut, just not today

When Brazil’s central bank meets on Wednesday, its outgoing President Ilan Goldfajn will leave the door open for his successor to deliver an unprecedented borrowing cost cut at his first policy meeting.

Since at least 1996, when the country’s current monetary policy board was created, no incoming bank governor has ever cut the benchmark Selic in his first meeting. Roberto Campos Neto, who was appointed by President Jair Bolsonaro and will face his Senate confirmation hearing as soon as this month, could be the first. The chances are so good that when Campos Neto attended an event in Rio de Janeiro last month, several former central bank chiefs joked how it was going to be smooth sailing for him and how he was lucky.

“Much of the groundwork was done over the last two and a half years, and the next central bank chief inherits better conditions,” said Mauricio Oreng, senior strategist at Rabobank in Sao Paulo. “The chance of a cut in the next decision is gaining certain momentum,” he said in reference to the March monetary policy meeting over which Campos Neto is expected to preside.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Iran-Singapore joint commerce committee holds 1st official meeting

ECONOMY **TERHAN** – The first official meeting of the Iran-Singapore joint commerce committee was held in Tehran on Wednesday, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCI) reported.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from Iran’s Foreign Ministry and ICCIMA as well as Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) including Mohammad Reza Karbasi, ICCIMA deputy head for international affairs, and Ali-Akbar Nazari, the Foreign Ministry’s representative in Iran-Singapore joint commerce committee.

In the meeting, Karbasi expressed hope for the establishment of Iran-Singapore joint chamber of commerce, noting that the formation of the Iran-Singapore joint committee is



an effective step toward better communication between the two countries’ businessmen as well as the two sides chambers of commerce.

Further in the event, Nazari mentioned Iran and Singapore’s great potentials for economic cooperation, saying “Singapore has a very special significance for Iranian businessmen and undoubtedly the formation of this committee is an important step towards exploiting the two sides’ capacities.”

According to a report presented by the representative of TPO in the meeting, the value of Iran’s imports from Singapore stood at \$762 million in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 – January 20, 2019), while the country’s exports to Singapore were only \$40 million.

Rouhani to inaugurate South Pars new refineries within 2-3 weeks

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The new refineries of South Pars gas field will be inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani during the next 2-3 weeks, Iran’s Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced in a press conference on Tuesday.

The refineries belong to phases 13, 22-24 of the gas field that their development has costed \$10 billion, the minister said.

The four mentioned refineries will

receive three billion cubic feet of gas per day, of which two billion cubic feet will be supplied by the offshore platforms of phases 13, 22, 23, and 24 and the rest one billion cubic feet will be transferred from phase 14 to these refineries, Zanganeh explained.

South Pars refineries account for refining 74 percent of gas produced in Iran, according to the managing director of South Pars Gas Company (SPGC), which is in charge of implementing development

phases of the huge gas field.

In a press conference last month, Mohammad Meshkinfam put the current refining capacity of South Pars refineries at 2 billion cubic feet per day.

The huge offshore field, Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world’s reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.



Iran strong enough to avoid destabilization despite U.S. sanctions: Russian diplomat

By staff and agency

Russian Ambassador to Iran Levan Dzagharyan has said that Iran is a strong country and can avoid destabilization despite return of the U.S. sanctions.

“Of course, the economic situation in Iran has worsened a bit after the introduction of U.S. sanctions. The Iranian media state it with anxiety and representatives of the country’s leadership generally admitted this fact. At the same time, Iran is a strong country with powerful economic potential. It is not the first time they are at gunpoint of American restrictions. I believe that the Iranian leadership and the nation have enough strength to prevent destabilization of the situation,” he told TASS in an interview published on Wednesday.

He said Russia condemns the U.S. policy of imposing “illegal sanctions” and urged



the European countries not to give in to U.S. pressure on Iran.

Ambassador Dzagharyan said that the Europeans must show the political will to keep the nuclear deal alive and ensure that Iran will enjoy benefits of the deal after the U.S. withdrawal.

At a meeting in Bucharest on January 31, 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.

■ Russia, Iran give up dollar in settlement payments, says ambassador

Moscow and Tehran have given up the dollar in settlement payments and plan to shift completely to national currencies, with

euro to be used if there are no other options, Dzagharyan said in the interview with TASS.

“It is crucial for Russia to shift to national currencies in settlement payments with Iran. We will be using all existing means to bring the mentioned indicators to the highest possible level,” he noted, adding that virtually Moscow “has already given up the dollar in cooperation with Iran.” “We will rely on the Russian ruble and the Iranian rial, and on the euro if absolutely necessary, if there are no other options,” the diplomat emphasized.

“That is a challenging task, though I believe that the banking structures of the two countries have the potential required to successfully implement the tasks,” he added.

In the autumn of 2018, Russia’s Energy Minister Alexander Novak said that about 25-30% of settlements between Russia and Iran were conducted in national currencies.

Aussie dollar goes down under as global slowdown forces RBA shift

The Australian dollar nosedived after its central bank opened the door to a possible rate cut in a remarkable shift from its long-standing tightening bias, a further indication of global economic slowdown.

The policy shift caught some investors off-guard as only just the previous day the RBA had steered clear of an easing signal when holding its official cash rate at a record low 1.50 percent for the 30th straight month.

The Australian dollar plunged 1.5 percent overnight and was set for its biggest daily drop in a year.

Elias Haddad, rates and FX strategist, at Commonwealth Bank of Australia said that while there was a risk the Aussie dollar could test \$0.70, a more pronounced downward move was unlikely.

“As a bank we have pushed out our call for a 25 basis point rate hike by one year to November 2020 from November 2019,” he said.

Australia’s central bank is the latest to signal policy easing in the face of global economic headwinds.

Last week, the U.S. Federal Reserve all but abandoned plans for further rate hikes,

citing slowing global growth as a risk to the world’s top economy. The European Central Bank has also sounded less certain that it will start tightening later this year.

Donald Trump’s combative State of the Union address added to the gloom on markets as the U.S. president unveiled no new infrastructure initiatives and instead raised the prospect of another shutdown should financing not be forthcoming for the wall on the U.S.-Mexico border he wants to build.

As such the dollar settled near a two-week high.

In the annual speech outlining his priorities for the coming year, Trump said illegal immigration was a national crisis and reiterated his vow to build the border wall.

Futures trading indicated a weaker open to the U.S. stock markets with the S&P down 0.16 percent, and Nasdaq down 0.07 percent.

The MSCI world equity index, which tracks shares in 47 countries, was last down 0.07 percent at around 0900 GMT.

European stocks markets opened slightly in negative territory as a fresh new batch of earnings failed to lift spirits after Trump’s ad-

dress touched on trade and budget issues but provided investors with few insights.

Banks were the biggest drag on the STOXX 600, with shares BNP Paribas down 1.6 percent after France’s largest-listed lender lowered its profit and revenue growth targets for 2020 after a tough fourth quarter.

Germany’s DAX opened 0.2 percent lower, France’s CAC 40 was down 0.4 percent and Spain’s IBEX fell 0.1 percent. The euro zone blue chip index fell 0.3 percent.

■ Europe drags

Further weak data from Europe prompted demand for core euro zone bond yields as investors pushed back expectations that the European Central Bank will hold back from rate hikes.

German industrial orders fell unexpectedly on weak foreign demand in December, data showed on Wednesday, a further sign that companies in Europe’s largest economy are struggling with a slowing world economy and trade disputes.

Investors will also be looking to the European Commission’s winter macroeconomic forecasts, due to be published on Wednesday or Thursday. Large downward revisions to growth

and inflation are likely, according to analysts at Societe Generale.

“The EC forecast will give a pretty good guideline of how much the ECB will revise their own economic forecasts,” said CBA’s Haddad.

German 10-year government bond yields, the benchmark for the region opened one basis point lower on Wednesday at 0.16 percent, well off the 0.21 percent highs hit on Tuesday.

Italian debt was in focus with the Treasury planning to sell a 30-year bond via a syndicate of banks. Italian 30-year government bond yields jumped to three-week highs at 3.678 percent as investors sold bonds to make way for the new issue.

Sterling meanwhile was a shade lower at \$1.2930 after losing nearly 0.7 percent on Tuesday on weak Purchasing Managers Index data for Britain and uncertainty about Brexit talks.

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May will travel to Brussels on Thursday to tell EU leaders they must accept legally binding changes to the Irish border arrangements of Britain’s divorce deal or face a disorderly no-deal Brexit.

(Source: Reuters)

UK can avoid no-deal Brexit recession, says economic forecaster

Britain could avoid slumping into a recession in the aftermath of a no-deal Brexit, according to one of Britain’s leading economics forecasters.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) said the blow to the economy from a disorderly departure from the EU could be softened by contingency plans being put in place by the government and by Brussels. Ministers could also reduce the impact with tax cuts and additional public spending, further limiting the damage.

Britain’s oldest independent economics research institute – in forecasts likely to embolden Brexit supporters urging Theresa May to pursue a “managed no-deal” – said that economic growth would come close to zero in the first two years after a no-deal Brexit. However, it would avoid the recession that has been forecast by some experts.

Although warning that every Brexit outcome would still be worse for the UK economy than remaining in the EU, it said there was sufficient headroom for the government to stabilise the economy in the short term.

“Were the UK to exit the EU without a deal in March, we would expect a sharper slowdown in economic activity than in the central case,” NIESR said in a report published on Wednesday, adding: “How much the economy responds would depend on the extent to which policy steps in and eases the transition.” The report comes after the Bank of England warned that



Britain could plunge straight into a recession worse than the one that immediately followed the financial crisis 10 years ago, a scenario which has been used by the prime minister as a warning to MPs to vote for her EU withdrawal agreement to avoid inflicting significant damage on the economy.

While some measures have been proposed by both Britain and the EU to offset the impact of a no-deal scenario, many analysts warn that time is running out and that they may not be agreed upon in time.

Although a recession would be avoided under the no-deal scenario put forward by the NIESR, GDP growth over the long

run would remain below the level forecast should the prime minister secure a deal with Brussels. It also said it was still its central estimate that a deal could be agreed, leading to growth of about 1.5% this year.

However, offering a possible route-map for a no-deal scenario, the NIESR analysis said that additional support could be put in place by ministers and the Bank of England to curb the short-term impact to the economy.

Interest rates could be held steady at the current level of 0.75%, rather than raised, while measures could be taken to provide direct support to household income, including income tax cuts and higher benefits payments.

Such interventions would, however, come with a cost. The NIESR report said unfurling such a package could add as much as £60bn to government borrowing by 2023-24. It also warned that inflation could accelerate, eroding real wages and acting as a brake on the economy in future.

Amit Kara, head of UK macroeconomics at NIESR, said: “All this is not to say there will not be long-term economic costs. Those costs remain intact. These are just mitigating measures.

“Whilst it does make headlines or sensational news to suggest the economy will go into recession or not, I don’t think economists have the tools to be that precise. The big picture is I think there really will be a material slowdown,” he added.

(Source: The Guardian)

Oil falls 1 percent as supply concerns fade

Oil fell 1 percent on Wednesday after a report showed a rise in U.S. crude inventories, while concerns about the impact of U.S. sanctions on Venezuela on global supplies eased.

U.S. crude inventories rose by 2.5 million barrels last week, the American Petroleum Institute said on Tuesday. The government's official supply report is due later on Wednesday.

Benchmark Brent crude had slipped 62 cents to \$61.36 a barrel by 1000 GMT, after rallying about 15 percent in January. U.S. crude was down 48 cents at \$53.18.

"A bumper January for oil bulls is turning into a gloomy February as the supportive glow of Venezuela's deepening turmoil starts to fade," said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM.

He said the API figures showing rising stocks "do little to silence the U.S. glut alarm bells."

The U.S. announced sanctions on Venezuela's state oil company last week, a move that could curb supplies but the development has yet to push prices up



steeply..
"It would seem that the market is really

not too worried yet about the potential loss of Venezuelan barrels," analysts at JBC

Energy wrote.

"This is either because the market assumes that the size of the impact will not be large, or at least it will be of short enough duration," they wrote.

Concern about weaker global economic growth and the trade dispute between the United States and China have also weighed on sentiment. Oil fell on Tuesday after a survey showed euro zone business expansion nearly stalled in January.

U.S. President Donald Trump said in his State of the Union address that a trade deal with China was possible. Senior U.S. and Chinese officials are poised to start another round of talks next week.

Supply cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, including Russia, have been supporting prices.

The producers' alliance, known as OPEC+, began cutting production from last month to avert a new supply glut. OPEC has delivered almost three-quarters of its pledged cutback already, a Reuters survey showed.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC looking to extend the pact with Russia

Saudi Arabia and a group of OPEC members are reportedly trying to commit Russia and other oil-producing nations to continue managing supply for up to three more years.

The so-called OPEC+ coalition reached a historic deal in 2016 to slash output in a bid to end a punishing oil price downturn. The group of two dozen producers briefly lifted the caps last year, but agreed to fresh production cuts in December after a three-month collapse in oil prices.

OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo and some oil ministers have long sought to make the alliance permanent, but Russia essentially nixed that idea in December.

Now, some OPEC nations including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are trying to lock their allies into another several years of coordination, the Wall Street Journal

reports. Some of the nations are expected to debate the proposal when they meet in Vienna later this month, according to the Journal.

"It is an effort to put a formal framework around an ad hoc relationship," Helima Croft, global head of commodities strategy at RBC Capital Markets, told CNBC. She said OPEC clearly does not want Russia to abandon them.

An OPEC spokesperson was not immediately available to comment.

One OPEC official told the Journal the prospect of another price crash is pushing coalition members to agree on some sort of arrangement. A vow to continue cooperation would support oil markets because it would reassure traders the OPEC+ backstop would remain in place.

Brent crude has rebounded about \$12 a barrel to about \$62 a barrel after tumbling 42

percent, but the international benchmark is struggling to break through resistance around \$65 a barrel.

Moscow is better positioned to balance its budget at current levels than Saudi Arabia, which needs Brent prices at about \$73 a barrel to break even, according to the International Monetary Fund.

However, the new proposal is likely to face opposition from within the coalition. Iran in particular opposes steps towards institutionalizing the alliance, OPEC sources tell the Journal. The Islamic Republic worries that would concentrate decision-making in the hands of Moscow and Riyadh, its chief regional rival.

Russia and Saudi Arabia are the second and third biggest oil producers, respectively.

In recent years, a smaller group within the coalition tasked with monitoring compliance

to production quotas — the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee — has increasingly dominated the conversation. The Journal reports that Iran and non-OPEC member Oman have sought to reduce the number of JMMC meetings.

Other OPEC members including Algeria, Angola, Iraq and Nigeria have also pushed back on the idea of a permanent coalition that gives the Saudis and Russians more influence, according to the Journal.

In December, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak poured cold water on the idea.

"There is a consensus that there will be no such organization. That's because it requires additional bureaucratic brouhaha," Novak said, noting bipartisan U.S. legislation aimed at breaking up OPEC.

(Source: CNBC)

Exxon, Qatar bet on U.S. gas export with \$10 billion project

Exxon Mobil Corp. and Qatar Petroleum are officially moving forward with a \$10 billion liquefied natural gas export terminal in Texas, the latest in a series of massive projects designed to send U.S. shale supplies to growing markets across the globe.

U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry joined Qatari Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi in announcing the final investment decision at a Tuesday press conference in Washington. Perry said the project, which comes after more than half a decade of planning and deliberations, will enhance energy security for the U.S. and Qatar.

The move is a further sign of confidence that the shale revolution will cement U.S. dominance in global energy markets for years to come, with the country set to become the world's third-largest supplier of liquefied natural gas as soon as next year. Back in 2003, Perry said he was at the same location announcing a gas import facility at a time when the U.S. was reliant on foreign energy producers like Qatar.

"Here we are 15 or 16 years later, 180 degrees away," he said.

The investment from Qatar, the world's

biggest seller of LNG, comes as the nation seeks to pour \$20 billion into America's oil and gas fields despite having enormous reserves of gas itself. Golden Pass will join six other major LNG export projects either operating or under construction in the lower 48 U.S. states.

It may kick off another wave of construction, with projects like Venture Global's Calcasieu Pass facility in Louisiana also close to a final investment decision. Royal Dutch Shell Plc's Lake Charles joint venture in Louisiana with Energy Transfer LP has permits in hand but have yet to get the final go-ahead from sponsors.

The Golden Pass project is the first LNG project to receive a final investment decision since Cheniere Energy Inc. sanctioned an expansion at its Corpus Christi, Texas, facility last May. Before that, the last new LNG export project to get an investment decision was in 2015, as developers struggled to get buyers to sign long-term contracts that underpin multibillion-dollar liquefaction plants.

Sanctioning Golden Pass is "an aggressive move to really try to establish a large amount of the next generation of LNG capacity,"

Ira Joseph, head of power and natural gas at S&P Global Platts in New York, said in a telephone interview.

For Exxon, the project will help the world's largest publicly traded oil producer keep pace with Shell, which is the current leader in global LNG by some distance. Shell's position was boosted by its acquisition of BG Group Plc in 2016 and last year the Anglo-Dutch company, with its partners, gave the green light to build a \$31 billion LNG terminal in Kitimat, British Columbia.

Golden Pass awarded the engineering, procurement and construction contracts for the project to a joint venture of Chiyoda International Corporation, McDermott International Inc. and Zachry Group. It also executed a 20-year firm transportation agreement with Enable Midstream Partners.

The terminal will have the capacity to produce 16 million tons of LNG a year and will export its first gas by 2024, with construction to begin this year. Qatar owns 70 percent of the project, while Exxon has the remaining 30 percent.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil giants are pumping out torrents of cash

The world's biggest oil companies are pumping out cash like crude's at \$100 a barrel again, and investors love it.

Exxon Mobil Corp., Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Chevron Corp. and BP Plc smashed analysts' earnings estimates for the fourth quarter, giving investors assurance that their dividends and buybacks are secure even with oil trading near \$60.

Those companies together generated close to \$43 billion of cash flow from operations, the highest in more than four years. They achieved this despite a deep slump in crude prices at the end of the year, maintaining returns by keeping a tight grip on spending and squeezing more out of projects at lower prices.

"The 12-month rolling cash flow continues to point upwards, and I think that's what's important," said Oswald Clint, an analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein Ltd. "It isn't just refining-led improvements, it isn't just an upstream oil price, it's widespread across the businesses."

Clint expects the sector to generate record free cash flow in 2019, the second year in a row.

The market rewarded the companies' efforts. BP surged the most in almost three years after its profit beat even the most optimistic analyst estimate. Shell's B

shares gained 3.6 percent when it reported earnings on Jan. 31, while Exxon and Chevron increased by a similar amount on Feb. 1. France's Total SA, the fifth member of the oil-supermajor group, reports earnings Feb. 7.

The group's strong performance comes at a crucial time. They need to remain attractive for shareholders who stuck with them through a years-long downturn because of the reliability and size of their dividends. Shell's cash payout of almost \$15.7 billion was the largest in the world, besting its Big Oil rivals and other corporate giants such as Apple Inc. and AT&T Inc.

Beyond the dividend, major oil companies need to demonstrate they can maintain share buybacks, increase production, and still invest to grow. Shell's Chief Financial Officer Jessica Uhl said the company can "do it all." BP can curb debt, repurchase shares and invest with oil at \$50 a barrel, CFO Brian Gilvary said.

Chevron gave the market a pleasant surprise with a \$25 billion stock-buyback pledge. Exxon surpassed analysts' forecasts with the biggest refining bonanza in six years and Permian Basin crude output that almost doubled. Exxon Chief Executive Officer Darren Woods said he would ramp up both spending and asset

sales this year as the company plows billions into new drilling and refinery expansions.

"Exxon Mobil is taking steps to recapture its top spot among Big Oil by acquiring low-cost resources and moving away from high-cost assets," said Fernando Valle, an analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence. Its results "demonstrate that its turnaround plan is ahead of schedule."

Still, some concerns remain. BP's debt is rising and its gearing -- the ratio of net debt to capital -- has breached the upper end of its target range of 30 percent. Shell didn't replace all of the oil and gas reserves it produced last year, raising concerns among some analysts about future production. These issues could become significantly more urgent if oil prices were to fall again.

The companies are seeking to preempt these concerns by promising to remain efficient and disciplined with their spending and operations. For now, investors seem convinced, but companies will have to work hard to maintain this hard-won respect.

Asked in a Bloomberg interview what his focus for this year would be, BP's Gilvary said: "Capital discipline, capital discipline, capital discipline."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Five-Star Persian Plaza Hotel Inaugurated

Persian Plaza Hotel was inaugurated on Wed. Feb. 6 in the presence of head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (CHHTO), governor general of Tehran province and managers of top tour and travel agencies of the country.

Saeed Seyed Kazemi Chief Executive of Five-Star Persian Plaza Hotel was the first speaker in the inaugural ceremony of the hotel and said, "the Five-Star Persian Plaza Hotel was opened on Wed. Feb. 6 on the occasion of 40th glorious victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in the presence of Ali-Asghar Mounesan Head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), Anoushirvan Mohseni Band-Pey Governor General of Tehran Province, members of the Board of Directors of Tehran Hotelier Company, some managers of top tour and travel agencies.

He pointed to the salient specifications of the hotel and added, "this hotel has been constructed for business purposes. The nature of Persian Plaza Five-Star Hotel is for business purposes. Given its excellent location in the central part of metropolis Tehran, this hotel provides unique and excellent opportunity of easy accessibility to shopping malls and must-see sites in Tehran."

Persian Plaza Five-Star Hotel is the second hotel in Tehran which has a helicopter pad for landing, he said, adding, "this hotel is equipped with the most modern entertainment facilities and amenities and is able to host its domestic and foreign

guests in the best form possible."

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the significance of entertaining from guests and said, "existence of BAM Restaurant in this hotel is of salient specification of this hotel."

Also, Persian Plaza Five-Star Hotel is proud to provide the best possible facilities and amenities for its dear guests, benefited from the most experienced and competent manpower, he emphasized.

Moreover, the management of this hotel is proud to announce that this hotel will bring about suitable ground for the development and promotion of tourism industry in the country, CEO added.

It should be noted that Dr. Mohammad Zaghi is the owner and chairman of the Board of Directors of 8th five-star hotel in Tehran named Persian Plaza.

Under the management of Saeed Seyed Kazami, Persian Plaza Five-Star Hotel has been constructed in the administrative and trade center of the Middle East, Abbasabad, Tehran Province, located on a land area as large as 13,000 built-up area.

This project is the result of five-year incessant effort of OFOGH SEPID PASARGAD Company (Pvt. J. S Co.) which was constructed in two separate phases.

Persian Plaza Five-Star Hotel also is equipped with other amenities and services such as 100 rooms, entertainment and reception halls, restaurants, coffee shop, sports club, etc.



Sidestepping govt, Afghan politicians hold 'fruitful talks' with Taliban in Moscow

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

TEHRAN — Despite strong protest from the government in Kabul, senior Afghan politicians led by former president Hamid Karzai held two-day talks with a Taliban delegation in Moscow.

The talks, pertaining to the adoption of a new Constitution, interim government and women rights, were described as "fruitful" by the members of the Afghan delegation.

The two-day talks is the first time a Taliban delegation has officially met with senior Afghan politicians, although the participants were not representing the government.

"We are exchanging our views. So this is the first step which we are taking towards peace and inshallah (God willing) in the future we will have more meetings," the head of the Taliban delegation, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, was quoted as saying.

Afghan government has strongly denounced the Moscow talks since the Taliban delegation agreed to talk to Afghan politicians, except President Ashraf Ghani, hence sidelining the government.

President Ghani's supporters feel Moscow talks will provide legitimacy to the insurgent group and undermine the national unity government (NUG).

In an interview to Tolo News before the Moscow talks, President Ghani said the Afghan politicians participating in Moscow talks lack 'negotiating authority'.

"Where is their executive power," he asked. "Let hundreds of such meetings be held, but these

would only be paper (agreements) unless there is an agreement by the Afghan government; Afghanistan's national assembly and Afghanistan's legal institutions," he stressed.

Karzai, speaking on the non-inclusion of Afghan government in the talks, said he wants the talks to be inclusive in which the representatives of the Kabul government also take part.

"We understand that the government in Kabul needs to be part of these negotiations, we wish that they would have been here today," the former president was quoted as saying, adding it's an issue that the Taliban and the government must resolve.

Among those who participated in the talks included Karzai, presidential candidate Hanif Atmar, former Balkh governor Ata Mohammad Noor, leader of Hezb e Wahdat Mohammad Mohaqeq, besides others.

Two female politicians — human rights advocate Hawa Nooristani and former parliamentarian Fawzia Koofi — also were part of the delegation.

Koofi urged the Taliban to "listen" to the Afghan people and to adapt to the current Afghan society. "We have come a very long way and we don't want to go back," she was quoted as saying.

According to reports, the Taliban indicated that they want to amend the current Afghan constitution which they see as invalid and import of the West.

"The sovereignty and establishment of an Islamic system conforming to our religious and Afghan values is our legal right," Stanekzai was quoted as saying, adding that the insurgent group has a position on women's right too.



"The policy of the Islamic Emirate is to protect the rights of women in a way that neither their legitimate rights are violated nor their human dignity and Afghan values are threatened," he was quoted as saying.

Former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor, who was also part of the Afghan delegation, suggested the formation of an interim government that includes the Taliban as the way out of the logjam.

"The interim government will help find a way

for a transparent election," he was quoted as saying, referring to July general elections. "It will also help the political factions including the Taliban take part in the process."

President Ghani's supporters have accused the opposition leaders of rushing to peace talks with Taliban to push their own political agendas ahead of elections.

Afghan foreign ministry termed it a "political drama" and deputy foreign minister Idrees Zaman

took to Twitter to denounce the talks. "From the meetings in the lawns of Peshawar's Governor house to the sittings in Moscow and collective dementia of our political elite. Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it," he wrote.

Russian government has publicly distanced itself from the talks, but according to reports Russian envoy to Kabul Zamir Kabulov is behind the initiative.

Moscow had hosted a multilateral summit on Afghanistan last November, inviting officials from regional countries, besides a Taliban delegation. The talks were hailed as "groundbreaking".

Taliban has held several rounds of talks with the U.S. government envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in recent months, latest being six-day talks in Qatar last month, after which the two sides reportedly reached an agreement.

Following Qatar talks, President Ghani's office issued a statement saying Khalilzad had no authority to discuss the future Afghan administration, referring to reports about possible role for Taliban in the interim Afghan government.

"We have the experience of Dr. Najibullah's peace process, how he was cheated, the UN had given him the peace guarantee, but unfortunately it led to tragedy," he said last week, clearly expressing his frustration over the unfolding events.

Meanwhile, as the talks were underway in Moscow, violence continued in Afghanistan. The Taliban killed at least 47 security forces and policemen in separate attacks in the northern Kunduz, Baghlan and Samangan provinces over the past two days.

U.S. 'deep state' and Trump's anti-Iran rhetoric

1 → The Saudi regime also yields huge influence over the U.S. intelligence community as the complex milieu of Safari Club, BCCI and Adnan Khashoggi helped to consolidate CIA.

Iran and its allies are perceived as common enemies by Saudi monarchy and the Israeli regime thus it is quite obvious that they will use their influence of the U.S. deep in countering Iran. That is why Mike Pompeo in 2017 said that Saudi Arabia and Israel are working together to confront Iran and its allies and they are about to set up their joint military headquarters.

According to Yaakov Nagel, the former security advisor to Netanyahu and energy minister of Israel, Saudi Arabia is even ready to sacrifice the demands of Palestinian people for strengthening its ties with Israel. And recent events and statements by Saudi's crown prince have proved that right.

The former Israeli Defense chief of army staff Gadi Eisenkot in an interview to Sunday Times said that Israel has been directly engaged in supporting Syrian rebels with weapons and in 2018 Foreign Policy magazine reported that Israel is supporting at least 12 rebel groups in Syria with weapons and cash.

According to former U.S. vice president Joe Biden, hundreds of millions of dollars and a huge cache of military hardware was poured by Saudi Arabia to topple Assad government and the close cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel is meant to counter the Iranian influence in the region.

The US involvement and the common interests of Saudi Arabia and Israel are all set to implement their continuity of government procedures by repeating their anti-Soviet strategy into Syria as explained by Helena Cobban.

When the U.S. and its allies are on the verge of defeat in Syria, then a statement from John Bolton in which he said "we now have the best U.S.-Israeli relationship in our history, and the U.S. will remain committed to support Israel and its other allies in the region" and the statement from Mike Pompeo regarding Trump's Syria withdrawal in which he said that the U.S. withdrawal from Syria is merely a "tactical change" and U.S. will not change its military capacity to fight ISIS or Iran clearly indicates the intentions of the U.S. officials and their friends in the Middle East to overrule Trump's decision of Syr-

ian withdrawal that just needs a lame excuse which may have already come in the form of January 16, 2019 attack by ISIS terrorists in northern Syrian town of Manbij.

The protection of Kurdish population as a condition for U.S. withdrawal from Syria as proposed by John Bolton after his meeting with Netanyahu in Israel is in coherence with the interests of Israel. The Kurdish rebels were blocking the so-called Iranian corridor by Israel into Syria and additionally the statement of Bolton is favoring the interests of military industrial complex as Bolton himself has been part of a project of council for national policy under the name of New American century in 2006 that is meant promote corporate interests in Honduras and elsewhere.

On the other hand, Black Water founder Erik Prince in an interview with Fox business proposed to replace U.S. troops with private military contractors to defend the interests of US and its allies in Syria and according to him without their help, US allies would be "smashed by Iranian and Syrian forces."

So it is easy to conclude that Trump's decision of Syrian

withdrawal is negatively perceived by the U.S. deep state and the private military interests are well prepared to reap profits from the blood of Syrian people.

So keeping in view the continuity of government procedures, the deep politics of deep state, Israeli-Saudi war machine and the intentions of warmongers like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, there are extremely slim chances of a long-lasting peace agreement in Syria and even if it happens they may open a new front under different pretexts as they have done in the past thus undermining any wise decisions from the US president.

Additionally the dire warning of Eisenhower about military industrial complex which he described as a threat to democratic government, the role of Allen Dulles in the assassination of John F. Kennedy and a strong pro-Israeli-Saudi lobby poses a serious question about the authority of Donald Trump to control the pro-war elements within U.S. establishment and the anti-Iran policies of White House.

The writer is a student and independent researcher based in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Production of 200,000 tons of copper cathodes for the first time in 10 months



Eng. Mohammad Reza Bani Asadi Rad, the CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO), said: 'NICICO succeeded in producing 200,000 tons of copper cathodes for the first time in 10 months.'

Mespress released a report from NICICO saying that Mohammad Reza Bani Asadi Rad, emphasizing that in the evaluation of an economic enterprise, three keywords of production, development, and sale must be considered, stated that considering NICICO was listed in the Stock Exchange in 2006 and

has been operating accordingly, the aforementioned keywords come to fore. If a stock exchange company such as NICICO cannot realize any of the said goals, it loses the trust of its shareholders and its face is threatened.

Emphasizing that NICICO has assigned top priority to the maximal use of production capacity in the current year, he added, NICICO succeeded in producing 1 million tons of copper concentrates for the first in the late January for the first time, a 4% rise compared to the number specified in the policy.

Pointing to the fact that the substantial increase in the production of copper concentrate has had positive effects in smelting and refinery industries, Eng. Bani Asadi Rad asserted: 'With a 11% rise compared to the number of 178,600 tons specified in the production policy, NICICO managed, for the first time in its history, to produce 200,000 tons of copper cathodes within 10 months in 2018.'

According to the CEO of NICICO, this achievement was possible thanks to the 19% rise in the production of copper anodes (viz. 258,000 tons) by the smelting company within 10 months.

Referring to the 4% rise in the native copper, Eng. Bani Asadi Rad said: 'In this timeframe, NICICO succeeded in producing 245,100 tons of native coppers, the number specified in the policy being 244,680 tons.'

Asserting that NICICO is resolved to set new records by the end of this years, he said, in addition to success in production, NICICO was placed the 4th in the list of 50 active companies released by the Stock Exchange.

Experiencing an 1800-billion-to-



NICICO
NATIONAL IRANIAN
COPPER INDUSTRIES CO.

man increase in the capital, NICICO raised its capital from 6000 billion to 7800 billion toman and earned the third rank among companies in the Stock Exchange in terms of the face value of capital. This rise has alleviated the NICICO's concerns over the accomplishment of its development plans in the future, he added.

Bani Asadi Rad pointed out that NICICO is thinking of other financing methods than only increasing the capital, and said: 'National and international sales are going through smoothly; though the unjust sanc-

tions over the last 3 months have impeded the export process, we are sure to finance the estimated budget by the end of the year.'

In the end, Mohammad Reza Bani Asadi Rad said: 'NICICO's achievements are the fruits of indefatigable efforts and sincere empathy of the staff at all operational levels; thanks to the adoption of modern management methods, such as speeding the factory recovery and maintaining the equipment performance under unjust sanctions, energy consumption has been lowered and workforce productivity has been enhanced.'

“International Political Theology” should be added to International Politics: prof.Kubalkova

➡ Following is the full text of the interview:

■ When did religious issues become a matter of great interest in the theorizing of International Relations?

A: The interest in religion in the International Relations (IR) discipline, as it was established as an academic field in the U.S. and the UK after World War 1, goes back to the last century. Some IR scholars, Catholics, Protestants, or, just those influenced by Judeo-Christian faith, resisted processes underway in the U.S. study of IR of casting the discipline in the U.S. as a positivist, rationalist, social science, which like natural sciences, is objective, its findings universally valid. Among those objecting, there were some well-known figures: for example George Kennan, famous for his 1946 cablegram proposing a containment policy between the USSR and the USA. Besides those involved such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Kenneth Thompson, Arnold Wolfers, there was the towering figure of IR discipline Hans Morgenthau. Their goal was to insulate the study of power from the rationalist concept of a science of politics. As Morgenthau put it, a discovery of a meaning of the world – an ultimate foundation – became irretrievably lost: men, Morgenthau said, now “meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed.”

I had picked up this concern when I came up with an idea of “International Political Theology” (IPT) in 1998. I proposed it to be added to International Politics (IP) and International Political Economy (IPE). That is to say, to add to the study of the pursuit of power (IP) and the pursuit of wealth (IPE) also a pursuit of meaning (IPT). IP, IPE, and IPT rhymed, but of course, it could not happen. It has not “rhymed” with the U.S. IR discipline mainstream. My use of the term theology does not go as far as political theologians’ claim that political theorizing should have its ultimate ground in religious revelations. “Theology” was once synonymous with philosophy and science. Following the understanding of sociologists of religion, I took “theos” not in its common secular meaning as “erroneous beliefs in supernatural extraterrestrial existence”, but I took “theology” and “theos” to refer to the systematic study of discourses and relations amongst them concerning world affairs that search for—or claim to have found—a response, transcendental or secular, to the human need for meaning. My purpose was to find a way of bringing the study of religion and IR together in a manner which would minimize their distortion and facilitate their understanding.

The occasion of proposing IPT was a conference convened by two Ph.D. students at London School of Economics Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos in May, 1998 titled in a prescient way “Religion and International Relations.” The papers of the conference were published in 2000 in Millennium: Journal of International Studies, one of the pre-eminent British journals in the field of International Relations. In 2003 they were published by Palgrave Macmillan as a book Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile. I mention the 1998 conference in London since it took place before the events of September 2001 referred to as 9/11 which predictably forced the issue of religion into the forefront of attention of also scholars of IR. The conference was based on the claim that the global resurgence of religion confronted international relations theory and that the secular foundations of international relations discipline were not sustainable. The 1998 conference was in my view the foundational event. Except for Cecilia Lynch (UC Irvine) and myself (University of Miami) the participants hailed from the UK, Germany, Denmark and Israel. Others from the U.S. were not affiliated with IR discipline (e.g., Professor Esposito).

After the 9/11 events of 2001, in the first decade of the 2000s there followed a large number of articles and books, special issues of journals. They explored the Christian tradition of the 20th century – also referred to by some as Augustinian tradition, some reminding us that “all liberal concepts are secularized Christian concepts” (Carl Schmitt, 1922) or that “liberalism is Christianity without God.” Nicolas Guilhot (NYU) described it as a “revival of intellectual interest in and commitment to Christianity dating back to the 1930s.” The main professional organization in the U.S., the International Studies Association, has opened a section on “Religion and IR,” but it is not a part of the U.S. IR “mainstream.”

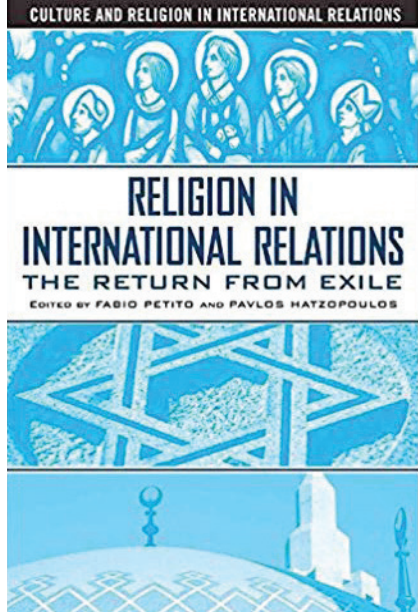
And this despite the key developments in other academic fields, sociology and philosophy: for example, the retraction by the sociologist Peter Berger, the leading proponent of the “secularization thesis” and Jurgen Habermas, the famous philosopher connected to the Western Marxist Frankfurt School naming the current era as “post-secular.” Not to mention the flurry of debates (and rebuttals) of the controversial “clash of civilizations,” a description of the post-Cold War by American political scientist Samuel Huntington in 1993. Despite that, the academic U.S. IR discipline is staunchly secular, positivist, rationalist.

■ Some argue that if the theory of International Relations means a constitutive



and critical theory, then bringing religion into International Relations is possible, but if the theory of International Relations is an explanatory-empirical theory, the theorizing religion in International Relations is not possible and, in fact, there is not theological positivism theory in International Relations. What is your opinion?

Your first question was so broadly based that I think I already answered it. But let me corroborate my answer by quotes from one of the top U.S. journals World Politics, by a Brandeis University political scientist. (Bellin, Eva R., “Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics.” World Politics 60. January (2008): 315-47). Eva Bellin is a professor of Arab Politics: she minces no words, but she might be representative of many mainstream IR theorists. IR books that



deal with religion, claimed Bellin, want to bring religion back into international relations, bemoaning the exile of religion from IR, ... are characterized by “majestic ambition, announcing the inauguration of grand theory but largely eschewing middle-level theorizing or empirically driven puzzle solving” (Ibid:338). These efforts, she says, do not yield generalizable hypotheses “to be linked to larger theoretical debates in political science, to be cumulative in the theoretical sense”. Bellin rejected the argument that Scott Thomas made in his 2005 seminal book, The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century, namely, that a positivist approach to the study of religion in politics is precluded because, as Thomas argued, in a “conscious world of human beings with intention and meaning,” it may be inappropriate to assume that events are “governed by general laws, patterns, and regularities like the natural world/physical world.” Bellin disagreed that meaning and conscious intent in human affairs preclude the goal of discovering law-like regularities with predictive power that can be discovered and tested. Religion, after all, according to Bellin, is a subset of ideas and is handled adequately by liberal IR scholarship. In other words all that is possible is an absorption or inclusion of religion but on the terms of political science- for example, establishing a religious economy school or the religious market theory, applying micro-economic analysis and the logic of rational choice to the study of religion, embracing

an economic model of church behavior as an economic firm.”

The above citation summarizes perhaps extreme but rejection to treat religion in IR seriously.

For more info see: <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/03/the-turn-to-religion-in-international-relations-theory/>

■ Some scholars such as “Michael Allen Gillespie” in the book “The Theological Origins of Modernity” believe that modernity was not initially against religion, and in later years, as a result of social, cultural and political conditions, it has led to secularism. So [b]ased on this conception, religion is not [in] conflict with modernity, so can it be said that religion is not conflict with the International Relations theory stemming from modernity?

It is a bit more complicated. You are making me leap across centuries and libraries of literature about Renaissance, the Age of Reason, Enlightenment! Plus to answer your question you have to look at the circumstances in which International Relations as a system of governance came into existence - to become then in the 20th century theorized.

To summarize and simplify a few terms. “The modern” became those who would give up obsolete superstitious thought of the medieval religious past, and espouse the new scientific thought of the secular present. Religious consciousness was to be replaced by an empirical, rational and instrumental orientation. And the context here is important: “modern” can mean all of post-medieval European history, in the context of dividing history into three large epochs: Antiquity, Medieval, and Modern. The term “Modern” is also applied to the period beginning somewhere between 1870 and 1910, through the present, and even more specifically to the 1910-1960 period. So Gillespie was right: many thinkers of modernity were theologians. Only since the Enlightenment of the late 17th and 18th century, intellectuals believed that the inevitable consequence of modernity was the decline of religion. The reason was supposed to be the progress of science and its accompanying rationality, replacing the irrational and superstition of religion. Nietzsche declared the death of God in 1882 and other seminal modern thinkers shared that view – notably Marx (religion as the opiate of the masses) and Freud (religion as an illusion).

However, it has not worked like this. It was discovered that religion has not been declining. On the contrary, in much of the world, there has been taking place what some call an explosion of religious faith.

The formation of the territorial system of states - central to your question - began in Christian Europe, in the era of Christian Reformation. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia was a treaty attempting to conclude the 30 year bloody internecine Christian wars in the small part of Europe, the Holy Roman Empire. The treaty adopted the principle cuius regio, eius religio literally translated as “Whose realm, his religion,” meaning that the religion of the sovereign ruler was to dictate the religion of those ruled. To stop the internecine wars, religion was removed from the interactions of states into the purview of individual states. So - in my view - religion has not really been returning from an exile but from the “basement” - from within/inside states to which it was confined. So this is the additional complication for IR theorists in theorizing religion. It has been pointed out that Islam would not ever toler-

ate the cuius regio, eius religio separation: Islam apparently does not have something similar to the Christian injunction “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” And the “ceasars” the rulers of the sovereign territorial states became in charge of religion on their territory, under their jurisdiction. Of course, skipping centuries of expansion of the European “Westphalian system” and its worldwide spread via colonialism IR discipline is even now stuck with the need to recognize the sovereign territorial system of states which is, I hope I explained, by definition secular.

Modernity seems to have an unexpected consequence: not necessarily secularizing; if anything it is pluralizing. The secularization process has been deemed an adjunct, a facilitator of modernity. It has not happened, nor we discuss modernization, subsumed now in the discourse of “globalization.”

■ Some argue that the current International Relations theory cannot explain some of the current phenomena of international relations and we need a religious theory of International Relations, especially with regard to religious issues. What is your opinion? In general, theorizing Religion in International Relations is feasible?

A: I don’t think those advocating the study of Religion in IR look for a particular one religion and in a globalizing world of the 21st century, it is neither feasible nor desirable. What might happen is the recognition that the world is plural, a “broad church,” recognizing religions, cultures, civilizations. Modernity seems to have an unexpected consequence: not necessarily secularizing; if anything it is pluralizing.

It is worth mentioning that the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami countered the “clash of civilizations” thesis of Samuel Huntington of the 90s with the idea, not of a clash but the dialogue and following his proposal the UN declared the year 2001 as a year of the “dialogue of civilizations.”

We witness a beginning of a significant change: the discipline of IR does not exist only as it did some hundred years ago in two countries, the U.S. and the UK: IR is now a globalized discipline. According to an authoritative survey (TRIP), in 2014 IR as a field of study existed in 32 countries, and nine languages and a mere three years later, in 2017, TRIP World Faculty Survey found IR in 40 countries on six continents.

It seems to be amazing since it was after all only in 1977 that Stanley Hoffmann had called IR “an American Social Science” serving primarily as a legitimizing tool for American foreign policy, dominated by scholars from the U.S., much of its content devoted to understanding the world from the

American point of view”. The ontology and the epistemology of the discipline, according to Hoffmann, were all American, demonstrably Eurocentric, America centered. Of course, IR is taught in a large number of some estimated 5000 tertiary outfits existing in the U.S., dwarfing studies of IR anywhere on the planet. In the globalized IR, the U.S. IR contingent continues to dominate the worldwide study of IR with its largest and best-funded academic community and the dominant journals.

But the literature advocating the search for and recognition of “non-Western” approaches is growing in which post-colonial studies now play an important role. So far many authors report, it has been difficult to shed the Western categories no matter how hard they are being rearticulated: they are a lens through which the world has learned to view itself, through models and concepts presented as objective, universally valid, but in fact, so it is argued, developed in and for the “West.”

■ If theorizing Religion in International Relations is possible, can this religious theory in International Relations explain all the unresolved issues and problems?

Having said that I don’t think one religious theory is possible nor would it in my view resolve the issues the world faces. Instead, following Khatami, we have to engage in a dialogue. There is now The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; there are many fora organized by a range of NGOs to foster a dialogue. Alas, there is not much of a connection between these initiatives and the academic IR discipline. But, to repeat, there is no longer just one Anglo-American discipline of IR but many and they will by definition reflect their respective cultures, civilizations, and religions. They all argue that they have to play a role in the understanding and the construction of the world.

For people like myself, an academic, university teacher, there is only one path - education. In the U.S. we have to add to the curricula these issues, and it is a difficult task. To do that IR becomes much broader than it is now - I call it International PLUS series of educational videos. IR is no longer about states, it is no longer just about some perspectives and excluding others – and claiming universality. It is not possible to set aside philosophical issues and understanding cultures, civilizations and religions: students have to grasp such questions as what is it that we know and how we know it.

40 years of America’s failure against Islamic Revolution



➡ Trump’s mistake in pulling out of the nuclear deal and opposing Iran can be analyzed both politically and economically. Trump’s European allies believe that by walking out of the nuclear deal, the U.S. president, has actually put the principle of multilateralism in the international system under question.

The isolation of Washington in the international system has now reached its peak. So far, many American analysts have warned about Trump’s deterrent policies in the U.S. foreign policy and economics. However, by picking up people such as Bolton and Pompeo, Trump has shown that he isn’t basically paying any attention to these warnings, and once he realizes that, there is no longer any opportunities to make up for his mistakes.

Finally, the United States has been defeated by Iran over the past 40 years and the trend will continue in the future. Meanwhile, the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, will become one of the symbols of the country’s failure to confront the Iranian people and the Islamic Revolution.

Death of a treaty: U.S. suspends INF with Russia

TEHRAN (FNA) — The Trump White House has suspended one of the last major nuclear arms control treaties with Russia, following heated conversations over accusations by Washington that Moscow is violating the Reagan-era agreement.

Even members of the US Congress say the decision has the potential to incite a new arms race - not only with Russia, but also with China, which was never a signatory to the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, widely known as the INF. And it comes as the US has begun building its first long-range nuclear weapons since 1991, a move that other nuclear-armed nations are citing to justify their own nuclear modernization efforts.

To one degree or another, the two moves appear to signal the end of more than a half-century of traditional nuclear arms control, in which the key agreements were negotiated in Washington and Moscow. President Trump claims he wants to replace the INF or to renew another major treaty, called New Start, which drove American and Russian nuclear arsenals to their lowest levels in nearly 60 years. That accord expires in 2021, just weeks after the next presidential inauguration. However, when it comes to serious coverage, that will be about that:

- The move to suspend and likely end the INF treaty, once considered the gold standard of arms control agreements, was telegraphed months ago. The US began accusing Russia of violating the treaty in 2014, when it alleged that Moscow was developing a new missile that would violate the range limits. The Russian government maintains that missile battalions it has deployed near European borders would not fly far enough to violate the treaty’s terms.

- John Bolton, the national security adviser, has made no secret of his desire to leave arms control agreements that limit American action. During the administration of President George W. Bush, Bolton was a major force behind the withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty with Russia. Last year, he and the Saudi-Israeli lobby backed Trump to end the 2015 Iran nuclear accord with world powers. In the INF treaty, Bolton had an easy target: Even President Barack Obama had considered exiting it.

- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the decision to suspend the accord, declaring that “countries must be held accountable when they break the rules”. That would be an enormously ambitious task. The Trump administration has already voided several other international treaties, including the Paris climate agreement and the Iran nuclear deal. For that reason and no other, the US government “must be held accountable” as it broke the rules.

- The US, which still possesses, by far, the world’s largest nuclear arsenals, cannot impose sanctions on other nations to force them to be restricted by international treaties when Washington itself is no longer restricted by the same treaties, including the INF.

- Pompeo says the US will terminate the INF accord in six months unless Russia destroys its growing arsenal of intermediate-range missiles and launchers. For any new or “better” treaty to happen, and to end the Cold-War-era outlook, the US needs to curb and eliminate its arsenal of intermediate-range missiles and launchers as well. On balance, the current agreement applies to both Russia and the US.

- It is hard to believe that after six months the Trump administration will negotiate in good faith. That will never happen. Any doubters should ask the Chinese government and the ongoing US trade war with China. The Trumpsters are reluctant to listen to reason, much less hold any kind of substantive talks with the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians, or the Venezuelans, or the international civil society. Their unilateral foreign policy, public and private comments, and self-imposed laws won’t let that to happen.

One thing is clear: If a new arms race begins, it will be the US to blame. While the makeover of America’s aging nuclear arsenal and laboratories began during the Obama administration, the ambitions to remake the United States’ nuclear capabilities have accelerated under Trump.

In the prevailing environment, don’t be taken by surprise if you hear the US has also begun deploying new weapons to counter China’s alleged efforts to cement a dominant position in the Western Pacific and keep American aircraft carriers at bay. President Trump and his war cabinet, the Military-Industrial Complex, and a host of forever war lobby, regime change addicts, resource-war planners and leaders, civilian and military, pose a growingly serious threat and make the world less safe.

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parking spot
Mr.Shayan: 09128440156

Apt in Ajudaniye
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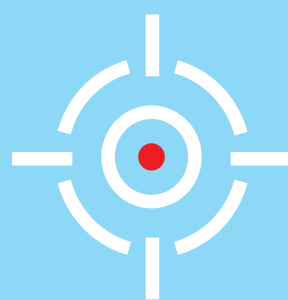
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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

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Fish oil supplements: a fish tale or a good catch?

The global value of the fish oil market is expected to surpass \$4 billion by 2022. Enthusiasts say it can help with age-related macular degeneration, rheumatoid arthritis pain, high cholesterol, asthma, depression, ADHD, heart disease, and may even help you get gorgeous hair.

If that all sounds too good to be true, well, you know. ...

But before you throw out your fish oil like 3-day old fish, get the facts. It may have some benefits for your heart, your joints, and your brain. But there are caveats.

■ What is fish oil?

Doctors and scientists first took notice of fish oil when research revealed that cultures that ate more fish -- Scandinavians and Inuits, for example -- had lower rates of heart disease. Many types of fish, including salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, sardines, and albacore tuna, contain omega-3 fatty acids -- a healthy type of fat. Two of the most important omega-3s in fish are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Researchers wanted to know whether taking fish oil straight -- without eating fish -- might help the heart.

"In clinical trials, the results are very mixed," says J.L. Mehta, MD, PhD, a cardiologist and professor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. "Some show benefits. Many do not."

■ Omega-3 supplements: benefits, risks, side effects

Omega-3 fatty acids are good for your brain and heart, but supplements may come with side effects.

But it's worth noting that the people who saw these benefits already had a host of heart-related health problems. Their LDL,



or "bad," cholesterol and triglycerides were high even though they took cholesterol-lowering medications. They also already had heart disease, or they had diabetes and at least one other thing that made heart disease more likely.

For people who've never had a heart attack and run a normal risk of ever having one, says Manson, "it's unlikely that 4 grams a day would be recommended. There's a threshold at which you'd stop seeing benefits."

A similar study found that a prescription form of 1.8 grams of EPA per day, in addition to a cholesterol-lowering medication, cut the odds of having heart attacks and other heart problems in people who had high cholesterol. Many of them also had heart disease, diabe-

tes, and/or high blood pressure. Although 1.8 grams is a lot less EPA than 4 grams, the study participants, who were Japanese, already got more fish oil directly from the fish in their regular diet than Westerners do.

So, exactly how much is 1.8 grams of EPA? Remember the cereal commercial that said "You'd have to eat four bowls of Raisin Bran to get the vitamin nutrition in one bowl of Total?" Well, you'd have to take 10 capsules -- five servings -- of an average over-the-counter fish oil supplement to get 1.8 grams of EPA. Want the full four grams? You'll need to take about 22 capsules. And no one is recommending that. Studies that show benefits of high doses of EPA use prescription-grade pure EPA.

Over-the-counter supplements have other ingredients, too, and they are not regulated and safety-tested like FDA-approved prescription drugs.

"Some people take multiple, multiple capsules. But we don't know that that's safe," says Manson. "Unless that's under the guidance of a clinician, avoid mega-dosing."

■ If your heart's already pretty healthy...

In lower doses, fish oil may help the hearts of people who are in pretty good health. In a study of 25,871 adults over 50 with an average risk for heart attack, the ones who took 1 gram of fish oil -- containing 460 mg EPA and 380 mg DHA (just a little more than you might find in a daily OTC dose) -- every day for 5 years had a 28% lower risk for heart attack during that time. But they didn't have a lower risk of stroke or death from heart disease. In fact, many studies that aimed to prove ordinary fish oil supplements lower risk for heart disease have failed to do so.

■ If it's not your heart you're worried about ...

Aside from heart health, researchers have studied the effects of fish oil on many other conditions. But the benefits are clear in only a few of them. Fish oil might relieve symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and lessen the need for pain medications, but only a little, the research shows. And in people who have a higher than average risk of getting Alzheimer's disease because they carry the APOE 4 gene mutation, high doses of DHA before symptoms of the disease arise may make having the condition less likely.

As for other conditions, the benefits of fish oil are either nonexistent or unclear.

(Source: webmd.com)

A diet rich in fiber and vegetables can relieve depression

A healthful diet can "significantly reduce" symptoms of depression. That's the definitive conclusion from a meta-analysis of existing randomized, clinical trials.

Adding more vegetables to your diet can significantly boost mood, especially for women, a new study concludes.

Researchers have long suspected that a poor diet can lead to poor mental health.

Although the underpinnings of mental health problems

are complex, some scientists have suggested that "diet is as important to psychiatry as it is to cardiology, endocrinology, and gastroenterology."

But does the overall existing evidence support this claim? Joseph Firth, an Honorary Research fellow at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom, led scientists who set out to investigate.

Firth and colleagues note that, while poor diet can

impact mental health negatively, this does not automatically mean that improving one's diet can ease symptoms of depression and anxiety.

So, to establish definitively whether a better diet can improve mood disorders, the scientists examined data on nearly 46,000 people and published their results in the journal Psychosomatic Medicine.

(Source: medicalnewstoday.com)

If you eat three dates every day for one week, this is what happens to your body

If you like sweetness on a Friday night, something new and exciting, or something that will give you energy and perhaps a little skip in your step, then you are likely someone who likes a good date or even several. Dates for dessert is healthy for the body and mind.

Moreover, if you eat three of these soft, squishy fruit every day for one week, you may consider dates a more regular occurrence because the following things will likely happen to your body:

■ Reduced risk of colon cancer

Along with insuring that food moves through the digestive system at a healthy rate, dates also make sure that the gut itself is healthy and free from harmful bacteria. And when the digestive system and gut are working well, then so is the colon, resulting in a reduced risk of colon cancer.

A study conducted by the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences found that those who consumed dates had enhanced colon health because dates increased the growth of good bacteria, inhibiting the growth of colon cancer cells.

■ You'll have quick, long lasting energy

Dates contain the natural sugars, glucose, fructose and sucrose that will give you a quick burst of energy when you need it. And unlike energy drinks, dates contain other healthy components like fiber, potassium, magnesium, vitamins and antioxidants that will keep those levels up, and not send you quickly crashing down.

■ Your digestive health will improve

If you want to keep things in your digestive system moving along nice and regularly, dates are just the thing to do that. In just a one cup serving or dates, you will get 12 grams of fiber. That's 48 percent of your recommended daily intake!

The right amounts and right kinds of fiber can benefit your digestive health by preventing constipation and promoting regular bowel movements. And dates are most definitely the right kind of fiber to do the job. In fact, a study published in the British Journal of Nutrition found that people who consumed 7 dates per day for 21 days showed improvements in stool frequency and increase in bowel movements compared to when they did not eat dates.

■ You could be smarter

Dates contain Vitamin B6 that has been shown to improve performance of brain by helping the body make serotonin and norepinephrine. Serotonin in turn regulates mood and norepinephrine helps your body cope with stress. Conversely, research has shown that low levels of Vitamin B6 is linked to depression.

So, when your brain is clear from stress, and in a good mood, then it is sharp and ready to learn and retain information.

■ Treatment for hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are veins in your anus and rectum that have become inflamed and swollen. This is often caused by constipation that leads to strain in that area at the far end of the digestive tract. This is a terrible and often very painful condition that fortunately can be treated and even reversed through a change in diet to reduce constipation. Many doctors recommend a diet high in fiber, and that includes dates to help things move along so that your hemorrhoids can heal.

(Source: foodprevent.com)

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

Australia has been home to hopping kangaroos for 20 million years

An ancient group of kangaroo relatives called balbarids had multiple ways of getting around, including hopping, bounding and climbing. The finding may mean we have to rethink how modern day kangaroos came to hop.

Kangaroo evolution has been difficult to piece together because there are very few fossils older than one or two million years. The prevailing view of kangaroo evolution is that they began hopping when the climate in Australia became drier and wiped out many forests, but new fossil evidence suggests that their relatives were hopping much earlier.



The fossil bones were found in Riversleigh in northeastern Australia

The balbarids were distant cousins of modern kangaroos and lived in forests when the Australian climate was wetter. They went extinct around 10 to 15 million years ago when the climate dried out.

One of the most complete skeletons, from a species in the balbarid family called Nambaroo gillespieae, suggests that these animals moved on four legs and did not hop like true kangaroos.

Benjamin Kear at Uppsala University, Sweden, and colleagues have now analysed a set of more fragmentary remains, including ankle bones, a calf bone and a claw. They suggest that some balbarids galloped, some hopped, and some climbed in trees.

That's true of modern kangaroos too, if you look beyond the most famous among them. There are rat kangaroos that scurry in the undergrowth and burrow, and tree kangaroos that live in the forests of New Guinea. Short-faced giant kangaroos, which went extinct 30,000 years ago, walked on two legs like us.

This versatility has been key to kangaroos' success, enabling them to exploit a huge range of terrestrial environments, says Kear. The origin of hopping goes all the way back to virtually the beginning of kangaroo evolution, he says.

That means we have to rethink how and when kangaroos came to hop. "Hopping didn't evolve with the climate; hopping was already there and took advantage of environmental change when it occurred," says Kear.

(Source: New Scientist)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Iguazu National Park

The Iguazu National Park is a World Heritage property of 169,695.88 hectares located in the State of Parana, in southern Brazil, adjacent to the Iguazu National Park, also a World Heritage property in Argentina.

Both properties, together with some protected areas, are contiguous major remnants of the interior Atlantic Forest, once a much larger forest area, along the junction of the Iguazu and Parana rivers where Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil converge.



Made up of many cascades producing vast sprays of water, it is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world. The surrounding subtropical rainforest has over 2,000 species of vascular plants and is home to the typical wildlife of the region: tapirs, giant anteaters, howler monkeys, ocelots, jaguars and caymans.

Located in Misiones Province in the Northeastern tip of Argentina and bordering the Brazilian state of Parana to the north, Iguazu National Park, jointly with its sister park Iguacu in Brazil, is among the world's visually and acoustically most stunning natural sites for its massive waterfalls. It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1984.

The river, aptly named after the indigenous term for "great water" forms a large bend in the shape of a horseshoe in the heart of the two parks and constitutes the international border between Argentina and Brazil before it flows into the mighty Parana River less than 25 kilometers downriver from the park. Large clouds of spray permanently soak the many river islands and the surrounding riverine forests, creating an extremely humid micro-climate favoring lush and dense sub-tropical vegetation harboring a diverse fauna.

(Source: UNESCO)

Yazd hotels, museums offering discounts to Chinese visitors

TOURISM DESK TEHRAN — Hotels and museums in the city of Yazd are offering deep discounts on accommodation and entry fees for Chinese travelers on the occasion of the Chinese New Year celebrations.

Three- to five-star hotels and some heritage museums will be offering discounts of 40 percent and 50 percent respectively until February 12 to mark Chinese New Year, CHTN quoted a provincial tourism official as saying on Monday.

In addition, some special ceremonies have been planned to entertain them, the official said, adding, "Chinese decorations and banners of greeting will also be installed."

"The scheme is to achieve prospects of tourism development in Iran... and to penetrate the Chinese travel market."

The number of Chinese tourists visiting Iran in 2017 fell short of expectations as just 80,000 of the total 100,000,000 outbound Chinese passengers traveled to Iran last year. Experts say insignificant numbers of Chinese restaurants, Chinese-language guides or even inappropriate lodging facilities are among the main reasons behind.

With its winding lanes, forest of badgirs (wind catchers), mud-brick houses, atmospheric alleyways and centuries of history, Yazd is a delightful place to stay, referring as a 'don't miss' destination by almost all travel associates in the region.

Located in central Iran, Yazd is a UNESCO World Heritage. The oasis city is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains.



Photo depicts the skyline of Yazd, a UNESCO-registered historical city in central Iran

Shiraz historical gate getting back to its former glory



HERITAGE DESK TEHRAN — Restoration work of Darvazeh Quran, a historical gate which leads to the city of Shiraz, has been completed.

Darvazeh Quran (literally meaning Quran gate), is of great importance as a symbol of Shiraz. The gate is also home to a magnificent copy of the holy Quran, a phenomenon that makes it a blessed place in the minds of people, ISNA quoted a local official as saying on Tuesday.

The refurbished face of the monument will be unveiled on February 11 that also marks the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the official added.

Standing at an entrance to Shiraz,

the gate is believed to bless people who pass beneath it before they undertake journeys by means of a copy of the holy Quran being embedded at a small room atop.

The rectangular-based monument was initially built in the 18th century during Zand dynasty. However, it succumbed to several multiple quakes, which stroke the city during Qajar era (1785 to 1925). Over its history, the monument has underwent several restoration and renewal projects.

Shiraz is home to dozens of magnificent buildings, historical sites and scenic landscapes. It was literally the capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

Tehran tourism exhibit to host over 700 Iranian, intl. businesses



TOURISM DESK TEHRAN — A total of 660 Iranian tourism marketers and businesses along with 57 foreign ones will participate in the 12th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, which will be running from February 12 to 15.

The number of Iranian businesses shows a 61 percent growth year on year, CHTN quoted a senior tourism official as saying on Tuesday.

The foreign tourism marketers will be from 12 countries, Vali Teymouri added.

Iran hosted 6,074,580 foreign nationals during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, up by 56 percent year on year.

The Islamic Republic embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, puts Iran among countries with "insignificant risk", a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are placed in.

Iran's ultimate goal is to attract 20 million foreign tourists annually by 2025. However, with only eight years to go, according to some experts, the target seems to be somewhat unachievable.

Foreign arrivals in Iran's Chabahar sharply rise

TOURISM DESK TEHRAN — Chabahar, in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, hosted 3,200 foreigner nationals during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018).

The number shows a significant growth of 147 percent compared with the same period last year, according to Chabahar Free Trade Zone official website, Egtesad Online reported on Tuesday.

Having a number of natural and historical attractions, Chabahar could be named as one of the most underrated destinations in Iran. However, in recent years various measures have been taken to promote Iran's sole oceanic port as a safe and hospitable choice for both domestic and foreign visitors.



The High Council of Free Trade Zones has recently announced that it is ready to start construction of a new airport inside the free trade zone. Currently, air travelers to Chabahar need to use airport of Konarak city, near Chabahar.

"The construction of the new airport will considerably help the economic growth of the Chabahar Free Trade Zone."

The council is also about to start building a new passenger terminal at the Konarak International Airport, mainly to enhance the current conditions for visitors, the report added.

"The construction of the new terminal will start in the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21)."

Currently, there are 22 tourist resorts in Chabahar, including four hotels and eco-lodges.

Super-luxe airport lounges that may make you miss your flight

Airline lounges are hardly created equal. Many have bare-bones amenities, limited seating and far too many people. These extremely average lounges are often just a step up from the cramped gate area.

The more premium ones, however, are fine for killing an hour or two between flights. They offer tasty, if predictable, food, reliable Wifi, and comfortable chairs and work stations.

And then there's the other lounge, the kind that can be best described as the sublimely luxurious.

A handful of ultra-exclusive lounges, Instagram-worthy spaces with impressive settings that only a privileged few have access to, are attended by staff who act more like concierges at five-star hotels than airline employees. The food is on par with top-rated restaurants globally, and the variety of wine and spirits available is stellar.

Many of the lounges have spas, or, at the very least, full shower facilities so you can arrive at your destination ready to hit the ground running.

"These are the lounges that fliers die to get into," says Michael Holtz, the owner

of SmartFlyer, a global travel consultancy specializing in airports and airlines. "And, if you do have entry, you want a long layover just so you can spend time in them."

Access, Holtz explains, is usually limited to those who have the deep pockets to buy a ticket for a seat in the airline's highest class or for fliers who log loads of miles with the carrier each year.

Here, eight of the most crème de la crème airline lounges in the world. All on this list — with the exception of United, which has several impressive lounges around the country — are the given carrier's flagship lounge.

=== Who gets access: Passengers in first class — a round-trip ticket between Sydney and Los Angeles can run close to \$12,000.

Platinum-level frequent fliers also have lounge access and reach this status by earning 1,400 credits in a year-long period. That's the equivalent of six business class round-trip flights between Singapore and Sydney. Each person allowed in can bring in up to two guests.

■ **Size: Around 23,000 square feet** What makes it extravagant: Qantas'

flagship first class lounge was designed using Feng Shui principles and has no corners, except for the floor-to-ceiling windows. Upon arrival, guests are greeted by a spectacular vertical garden comprised of more than 8,500 plants like ferns and moss.

Other notable design features include white Carrera marble walls and floors (the marble comes from the same quarry in Italy that Michelangelo used centuries ago for his famous sculptures) and retro-inspired aviation touches such as flight screen boards and air vents modeled on a 1950s Lockheed Constellation plane.

Fliers can opt for a spa treatment such as a massage, facial or reflexology session, all of which are a part of the lounge experience and not an additional cost.

Another inviting option is the lounge's wood-paneled library, where a smattering of buttery-soft leather couches and a top-shelf bar with free-flowing Champagne from brands like Perrier-Jouet awaits.

There's also the lounge's world-class restaurant serving up dishes created by famed Australian chef Neil Perry. The breakfast menu of more than 20 items

includes yogurt, apricots and toasted almonds topped with honey from Qanatas' own beehives while the all-day menu has a lengthy list of choices such as organic beef brisket with miso in a wasabi butter sauce and salt and pepper squid with a green chili dipping sauce.

Amenities include a spacious quiet area with day beds, plush blankets and pillows, a cigar lounge, a children's section with video games, and a coffee bar.

Foodies will flock to the white tablecloth restaurant offering cuisine prepared by the airline's internationally trained culinary team. The menu changes regularly and is inspired by global flavors: An Indian dish such as paneer tikka masala may show up, for example, along with a Mediterranean-style sea bass dish.

But guests don't have to dine at the restaurant to enjoy these creations; they can order menu items while they're sitting anywhere in the lounge. Or, they can stretch their legs before a long flight and grab more casual fare from the several buffet stations in the space.

(Source: CNN)

A warming world increases air pollution, researchers suggest

The new study shows that the contrast in warming between the continents and sea, called the land-sea warming contrast, drives an increased concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere that cause air pollution.

Climate change is warming the ocean, but it's warming land faster and that's really bad news for air quality all over the world, says a new University of California, Riverside study.

The study, published February 4 in *Nature Climate Change*, shows that the contrast in warming between the continents and sea, called the land-sea warming contrast, drives an increased concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere that cause air pollution.

Aerosols are tiny solid particles or liquid droplets suspended in the atmosphere. They can come from natural sources, like dust or wildfires, or human-made sources such as vehicle and industrial emissions. Aerosols affect the climate system, including disturbances to the water cycle, as well as human health. They also cause smog and other kinds of air pollution that can lead to health problems for people, animals, and plants.

■ A robust response

A "Robust response to an increase in greenhouse gases is that the land is going to warm faster than the ocean. This enhanced land warming is also associated with increased continental aridity," explained first author Robert Allen, an associate professor of earth sciences at UC Riverside.

The increase in aridity leads to decreased



low cloud cover and less rain, which is the main way that aerosols are removed from the atmosphere.

To determine this, the researchers ran simulations of climate change under two scenarios. The first assumed a business-as-usual warming model, in which warming proceeds at a constant, upward rate. The second model

probed a scenario in which the land warmed less than expected.

In the business-as-usual scenario, enhanced land warming increased continental aridity and, subsequently, the concentration of aerosols that leads to more air pollution. However, the second model -- which is identical to the business-as-usual model except

the land warming is weakened -- leads to a muted increase in continental aridity and air pollution. Thus, the increase in air pollution is a direct consequence of enhanced land warming and continental drying.

The results show that the hotter Earth gets, the harder it's going to be to keep air pollution down to a certain level without strict control over the sources of aerosols.

■ Greenhouse gas

Because the researchers wanted to understand how greenhouse gas warming affects air pollution, they assumed no change to human-made, or anthropogenic, aerosol emissions.

"That's probably not going to be true because there's a strong desire to reduce air pollution, which involves reducing anthropogenic aerosol emissions," cautioned Allen. "So this result represents an upper bound."

But it also suggests that if the planet keeps warming, larger reductions in anthropogenic aerosol emissions will be required to improve air quality.

The "question is what level of air quality are going to accept," said Allen. "Even though California has some of the strictest environmental laws in the country we still have relatively poor air quality, and it's much worse in many countries."

Unless anthropogenic emission reductions occur, a warmer world will be associated with more aerosol pollution.

(Source: *sciencedaily.com*)

The researchers wanted to understand how greenhouse gas warming affects air pollution, they assumed no change to human-made, or anthropogenic, aerosol emissions.

The Milky Way is not a flat disk — it's actually 'twisted' and 'warped,' study finds

Our galaxy the Milky Way is often depicted as a vast disk of stars and gas that is relatively flat and stable in shape.

However, a study has challenged this view, suggesting that this disk becomes increasingly "warped" and "twisted" the farther away you move from the galactic center.

Researchers from Macquarie University, Australia, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences made their findings after creating a new 3-D map of the Milky Way — a spiral galaxy — which allowed them to better estimate its shape.

"We usually think of spiral galaxies as being quite flat, like Andromeda which you can easily see through a telescope," Richard de Grijs, a co-author of the paper from Macquarie, said in a statement.

However, trying to create a picture of the galaxy from inside it is very difficult. Imagine attempting to work out the shape of the entire United States while standing somewhere in Kansas, and you get the idea.

■ Large pulsating stars

To create their map, the team harnessed the unique characteristics of a class of large pulsating stars known as Classical Cepheids, which are 20 times as massive as our Sun and up to 100,000 times as bright.

"In a previous study, we had compiled a catalog of more than 50,000 variable stars observed with an infrared space observatory, WISE," de Grijs told *Newsweek*. "Among those 50,000-plus variables, we had included more than 1,300 young, massive stars known as Cepheid variables."

By calculating the length of their pulsation periods, the astronomers were able to accurately determine how far away they were. The distances of the stars were then used as markers to help map out the rest of the galaxy, even its distant outer regions.

"Cepheids show regular brightness variations because their outer layers pulsate in and out, and so it's quite straightforward to measure their pulsation periods," de Grijs said. "There are very well-established 'period-luminosity relations' for Cepheids, so once you know a star's pulsation period,



you know how bright it should be.

"You can then measure the actual brightness as observed, and, in principle, the difference between observed and expected brightness is a direct measure of the distance to the object," he said. The "resulting distances had uncertainties of less than 3-5 percent. That's pretty much as good as it gets in astronomy."

■ Stellar disk

The resulting resource — which de Grijs described as the "most accurate 3D map of our Milky Way" — enabled the team to conclude that the galaxy's stellar disk is warped like an "S-shape" and features a "progressively twisted" spiral pattern. "Warping of spiral galaxies is well known, but it is usually only seen in the gas layer (hydrogen atoms,) because this tends to extend much farther out than the stars," de Grijs said.

The team said their findings could have significant implications for our understanding of the Milky Way, especially when it comes to determining the origin of its disk and the motions of its stars, among other problems.

"By having a much better 3D representation of the Milky Way (MW) out to large radii, we can now set constraints on the gravitational forcing of the outer disk and possibly determine the distribution of all matter in the MW—not just the matter we can see (stars, gas, dust,) but also of the dark matter which is supposed to make up most of the mass of our galaxy," de Grijs said. (Source: *Newsweek*)

Atmospheric scientist shows how trees fare in big hurricanes

Trees bowed to 45-degree angles and flying leaves crisscrossed the sky as Hurricane Florence ravaged North Carolina's coast and inland regions in mid-September 2018. The storm, which peaked as a Category 4 hurricane before making landfall near Wilmington as a Category 1, deluged parts of the state with nearly three feet of rain. It stripped the leaves off black walnuts, crape myrtles, and their entwining wisterias, especially on the north and northeast sides of the trees, which bore the full brunt of the 100-plus-mile-per-hour wind gusts. An estimated 1.25 million acres of timber, valued at nearly \$70 million, suffered varying degrees of damage.

Whoppers like Florence are a reality that North Carolina — not to mention the rest of the Eastern seaboard and the Caribbean — may have to get used to in the near future. Historically, a given location might only see such destructive hurricanes every few decades. But with global temperatures on the rise, the risk that a fledgling storm system will grow to "major" status, defined as category 3 and above, is likely to climb. Warming oceans mean more water vapor in the air, and that vapor is what fuels the storms. "One of the signals that we expect from climate change is that the strongest hurricanes will get stronger," says Gary Lackmann, an atmospheric scientist at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

What does that mean for trees? The scene in the woods after Florence was one of seeming devastation. In every direction, trees, branches, and brush littered the ground. Yet just a few weeks after the storm, the stripped trees sprouted fresh leaves and flowers. It may have been autumn, but the trees already had leaf and flower buds in waiting for the upcoming spring, explains Jim Slye, assistant regional forester with the state forest service in Goldsboro. Re-leafing after storms helps keep the trees' circulation going, and flowering allows trees to drop seeds in case they end up succumbing to storm damage. The trees



won't necessarily die, though; tree ring studies make it clear that many survived past storms.

■ The bulk of the damage

During and after a hurricane, rains can cause landslides, but winds do the bulk of the damage. Trees, particularly tall ones, bear the brunt of a hurricane's force, says University of Cambridge plant ecologist Edmund Tanner. In fact, trees in hurricane-prone regions have evolved to weather the storms, and tend to grow to around the same height so none are exposed above the canopy.

Ecologists like Tanner, monitoring forests around the globe over the last several decades, have documented how trees stand strong and seen forests regrow following damage.

Processes set in motion by scientists' artificial hurricanes, created by ripping down branches and trees, also point to forests' resilience. The conclusion, says Skip Van Bloem, a forest ecologist at Clemson University in South Carolina: "When hurricanes hit natural forests, it's not a huge disaster."

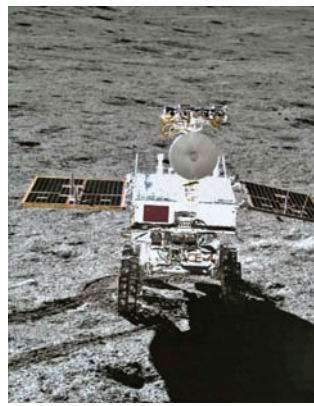
Whether such ecosystems can withstand the stronger storms that scientists predict will accompany climate change is an open question. Researchers in the field speculate that the makeup of the forests may change in response to more-intense storms, potentially influencing the animals and microbes that make the woods their home.

(Source: *scientificamerican.com*)

Lunar lander reports colder-than-expected temps, team says

China is in the middle of a multi-part mission to explore the moon with unmanned landers, the most recent of which is Chang'e-4. This intrepid little probe made history when it became the first object to make a soft landing on the far side of the moon. Now, it's busily taking measurements and sending them back to Earth.

While we often hear the far side of the moon referred to as the "dark side," that's an inaccurate description. This side faces away from Earth, but it gets plenty of sunlight as Earth and the moon (which is tidally locked) rotate. Landing on the far side is a significant challenge not because it's dark, but because there's no direct line of sight to Earth.



Shortly after landing on January 3rd, Chang'e-4 deployed the Yutu-2 rover. Following that, the CNSA put Chang'e-4 into sleep mode for two weeks during the lunar night. When the probe came back online, it reported to ground control the temperatures it experienced on the far side of the moon.

Before Chang'e-4, scientists generally considered -280 degrees Fahrenheit to be the low for the moon. However, those readings all came from the near side of the moon. As we already covered, the far side of the moon is not permanently shrouded in darkness, so what gives? The initial hypothesis from the Chang'e team is that the differing composition of lunar soil on the far side could be responsible for the colder temperatures.

Yutu-2 might be able to clear things up as its mission continues. The rover includes a Visible and Near-Infrared Imaging Spectrometer (VNIS) capable of identifying surface materials and trace atmospheric gases. The CNSA designed the rover to operate for at least three months and the lander for a year. The last Chang'e lander started to degrade right around of the primary mission, so don't expect this lander to produce new discoveries for years to come. (Source: *extremetech.com*)

Scientists defied chemistry basics by flipping 'left-handed' molecules with light

Using a beam of light, chemists have figured out how to turn an asymmetrical molecule into a mirror image of itself, with the asymmetry on the other side.

To back up into basic chemistry, a molecule is what we call a particle made up of two or more atoms. For example, water is a molecule consisting of two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom, carbon dioxide is two oxygen atoms and a carbon atom, and so on.

Many molecules are symmetrical, but not all. And some of these asymmetrical molecules are exact mirror images of each other that cannot be superimposed.

These chiral molecules can either be left-handed S-molecules (from 'sinister', the Latin word for 'left'), or right-handed R-molecules (from 'rectus', the Latin word for 'right').

"This means we wouldn't have to throw half of a chemical solution away when we only want the right-handed molecules," explained chemist Ken Hanson of the University of Florida.

Why would you have to throw half out? The thing is, chirality can be vitally important in pharmacology, as we found out to devastating effect in the late 1950s.

You may have heard of the thalidomide disaster. A new drug called thalidomide (C₁₃H₁₀N₂O₄) hit the market in 1957 as a safe sedative and morning sickness for pregnant women. It was sold around the world.

But when an increasing number of babies were born with birth defects following the introduction of this drug, in 1960 a pediatrician made the connection, and thalidomide was removed from pharmacy shelves. Around 120,000 pregnancies were affected - most ended in miscarriage - but 10,000 babies were born with deformities.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Magnetic teeth from mollusk could help advance nanotech used for energy generation

The mollusk chiton is one of the few creatures that can produce a valuable mineral called magnetite. In a study, researchers analyzed the teeth of gumboot chitons to figure out how they produce their magnetic teeth.

A team of the Okayama University in Japan and UC Riverside's Bourns College of Engineering studied the gumboot chiton (*Cryptochiton stelleri*), one of the few animals that produce magnetite — a mineral commonly found in the Earth's crust and used to develop nanoscale energy sources in electronics.

Understanding how the creature produces the mineral could help enable scientists to grow nanoscale materials for energy and water-based applications.

Magnetite, which is produced biologically, has been previously found in bacteria, homing pigeons, honeybees, and salmon. According to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, however, chitons have hundreds of teeth that contain so much magnetite, a magnet can pick them up.

The gumboot chiton survives in a diet mainly made up of algae. To feed itself, the mollusk scrapes off the algae, grinding down ocean rocks with its teeth.

The teeth of a gumboot chiton, which are made from the magnetic mineral magnetite, grow in rows. When a tooth wears down, it is replaced by a new one.

To understand the biomineralization process — how the living organism produces the valuable mineral — rather than searching for specific genes, the researchers turned to the transcriptome, a set of RNA molecules in the teeth. While the DNA contains the blueprints of life, the RNA is responsible for enforcing them.

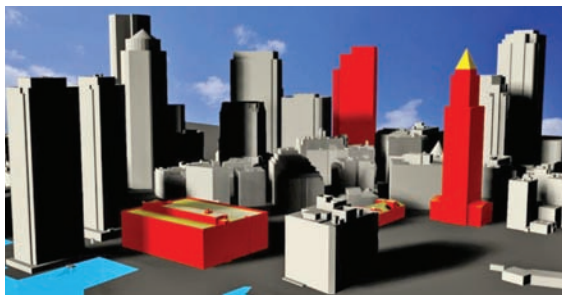
The team identified 20 of the most abundant RNA transcripts found in the new teeth, which are responsible for a protein that stores and releases iron as well as produce the energy that turns raw materials into magnetite. The researchers also found 22 proteins, including a new protein called "radular teeth matrix protein1," in the mineralized cusp of the teeth. The new protein, they believe, interact with the substances present on the teeth of the mollusk to produce iron oxide. (Source: *techtimes.com*)

A new approach for the fast estimation of the solar energy potential in urban environments

TU Delft researchers have developed a new approach for calculating fast and accurate the solar energy potential of surfaces in the urban environment. The new approach can significantly help architects and urban planners to incorporate photovoltaic (solar power) technology in their designs. The findings were presented on Monday 4 February in *Nature Energy*.

Buildings, trees and other structures in urban areas cause shading of solar modules, which strongly affects the performance of a PV system. Accurate assessment of this performance, and the related price/performance of PV systems, will facilitate their integration in the urban environment.

Several tools are available for simulating the energy yield of PV systems. These tools are based on mathematical models that determine the irradiance incident on solar modules. By repeating the calculation of the incident irradiance throughout the year, the tools deliver an annual irradiation received by the modules. However, it is not easy to determine accurately how much electricity a PV system generates in an urban environment. Current simulations become computationally highly demanding, as the dynamic shading of surrounding objects caused by the annual movement of the sun has to be taken into account.



A new approach simplifies the calculation and enables the user to carry out a quick assessment of the solar energy potential for large urban areas whilst keeping high accuracy. It is based on a correlation between a skyline profile and the annual irradiation received at a particular urban spot. This method is explained and validated in a study published in *Nature Energy* journal.

■ The solar irradiation

The study demonstrates that the total annual solar irradiation received by a selected surface in an urban environment can be quantified using two parameters that are

derived from the skyline profile: the sky view factor and the sun coverage factor.

While the first parameter is used to estimate the irradiation from the diffuse sunlight component, the second one is indicative for the irradiation from the direct sunlight component. These two parameters can be easily and quickly obtained from the skyline profile. The study shows that the use of these two parameters significantly reduces the computational complexity of the problem.

Andrés Calcabrini, Ph.D. student in the department of Electrical Sustainable Energy, developed the new approach under supervision of Dr. Olindo Isabella and Professor Miro Zeman. The Photovoltaic Materials and Devices (PVMD) group has already integrated the approach in a software toolbox that can accurately calculate the energy yield of PV systems at any location. Olindo Isabella, head of the PVMD group: "Our fast approach integrated in software tools for calculating the solar energy potential can significantly facilitate design and distribution of buildings with integrated PV systems in urban planning frameworks. It will also help investors to take decisions on integrating PV systems in buildings and other urban locations."

(Source: *eurekalert.org*)

Animals and birds under increasing threat from plastic waste

Wildlife and pets are under increasing threat from plastic waste and litter, according to new data from the RSPCA, which shows the number of incidents of animals hurt by plastic litter has risen sharply on previous years.

Plastic litter led to 579 cases of damage to wildlife or pets that were reported to the animal charity in England and Wales in 2018, up from 473 in 2015. That rise came against a background of falling damage to animals from other forms of litter, down from 4,968 reported incidents in 2015 to 4,579 last year.



Water birds and marine animals were particularly at risk, with 28 incidents involving seals hurt by plastic litter in 2018, compared with five in 2015. Among birds, swans were among the worst affected, followed by geese and gulls.

Plastic has become an increasing focus of concern, as it does not break down in the natural environment and can continue to cause problems in waterways for years. The government has increased charges on disposable plastic bags to discourage their overuse, and businesses from supermarkets to consumer goods companies are changing their practices to use less plastic packaging in response to public concerns.

But the biggest source of damage to wildlife from litter comes from angling, according to the RSPCA's findings, with discarded equipment such as lines, nets and hooks causing more than 3,200 of last year's reports.

"[Fishing] lines can wrap around necks, causing deep wounds in flesh and cutting off the blood supply," said a spokeswoman for the charity. "Hooks can pierce beaks or feet, become embedded in skin or get caught in the bird's throat, and weights can be swallowed causing internal injuries and blockages."

The RSPCA frequently sees cases where mammals and birds have died from infections caused by discarded fish hooks, from strangulation caused by fishing lines, or from wounds where plastic has cut into creatures' bodies.

The spokeswoman said: "We would strongly urge those who enjoy fishing to be extra cautious when packing up to make sure no litter is left behind. Most anglers are very responsible when disposing of their litter, but it only takes one careless person to endanger the life of an animal."

(Source: The Guardian)

LEARN ENGLISH

Capital Punishment

Professor: It's all for today's class. We will continue our lecture on crime and punishment tomorrow.

A: Do you think we should be tougher on crime?

B: Well, it depends on what you mean.

A: For example, we could bring back the **death penalty** for murder, give longer **prison sentences** for lesser offences and lock up **juvenile offenders**.

B: Those really sound like **Draconian** measures. Firstly, what do you do about **miscarriages of justice** if you've already put innocent people to death?

A: You'd only use **capital punishment** if you were absolutely sure that you'd convicted the right person.

B: But, there've been many cases of wrongful conviction where people have been imprisoned for many years. The authorities were sure at the time, but later it was shown that the evidence was unreliable. In some cases, it'd been **fabricated** by the police.

A: Well, no system of justice can be perfect, but surely there's a good case for longer prison sentences to deter serious crime.

B: I doubt whether they could act as an effective **deterrent** while the detection rate is so low. The best way to prevent crime is to convince people who commit it that they're going to be caught. It doesn't make sense to **divert** all your resources into the prison system.

A: But if you detect more crimes, you'll still need prisons. In my reckoning, if we could lock up more juvenile criminals, they'd learn that they couldn't get away with it. Soft sentences will merely encourage them to do it again.

B: Yes, but remember that prisons are often schools for criminals. To remove crime from society, you really have to tackle its causes.

A: Well, if I were president, I would impose tougher laws and punishment. I would have a peaceful society based on fear of punishment, not consciousness of doing the right thing.

B: You sound like a **dictator**!

A: Well if it works, why not?

■ **Key vocabulary**
death penalty: the punishment of death
prison sentence: the amount of time to keep criminals in jail
juvenile offender: underage criminals
Draconian: very strict and severe
miscarriage of justice: an unjust legal decision
capital punishment: punishment of death
fabricate: to make something up to trick people
deterrent: something that prevents people from doing something
divert: to move resources from one thing to another
dictator: someone who rules with absolute power

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
diversion: the act of changing the direction or use of something
authoritarian: expecting or requiring people to obey rules or laws
divisive topic: an issue that causes disagreement between people and causes them to separate into different groups
recidivist: a person who continues to commit crimes even after being caught and punished
rehabilitate: to teach (a criminal in prison) to live a normal and productive life

LEZ scheme cuts black carbon in Tehran air by 44%

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The low **d e s k** emission zone (LEZ) scheme, mandating vehicle inspection, to reduce emissions which went into effect in the capital three months ago, has led to a 44 percent decline in black carbon emission, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Black carbon is the sooty black material emitted from gas and diesel engines and other sources that burn fossil fuel. It accounts for a significant portion of particulate matter.

Black carbon is a global environmental challenge that has negative impacts both on human health and climate. Inhalation of black carbon is linked with health problems including respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer, and even birth defects. Black carbon also contributes to climate change by causing changes in patterns of rain and clouds.

According to a report published by Tehran Air Quality Control Company, assessing the implementation of the second phase of LEZ scheme, it was effective reducing traffic emissions and consequently curbing air pollution hitting the metropolis of Tehran.

LEZ is a defined area where access by certain polluting vehicles is restricted or deterred with the aim of improving the air quality. This may favor vehicles such as hybrid electric vehicles, or zero-emission vehicles such as all-electric vehicles.

To bring LEZ scheme into effect all the vehicles in Tehran are required to get inspection stickers indicating the level of emission they produce which are easy to track down by the traffic cameras thanks to the newly integrated vehicle inspection system.

The first phase of the scheme started in Tehran on September 5, 2016, aiming to mitigate air pollution in the metropolis, which was running from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day except for holidays, while the second phase is set up to run for 24 hours a day.

According to the traffic and transport affairs public relations of Tehran Municipality, since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018) until two days ago, Tehran's air quality index has been unhealthy for sensitive group for 56 days, while 93 days of unhealthy air for sensitive groups hit the capital during the same period last year.



This year, air quality has not reached unhealthy levels, however, T ehraners have experienced five days of unhealthy air last year due to the LEZ scheme implementation, the report added.

Black carbon emissions fell by 44 percent during autumn this year compared to the same period last year.

As Ahmad Taheri an official with Tehran Air Quality Control Company said on February 2018 that some 60 percent of PM 2.5 fine particles in the city of Tehran are comprised of black carbon produced from fuel combustion in diesel-powered engines.

Particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM 2.5), also have decreased by 21 percent during the aforementioned period.

The report comparing PM 2.5 concentration during past 8 years, indicates that since the Iranian calendar year 1389 (March 2010- March 2011), PM 2.5 have put Tehran's air in unhealthy conditions for almost all days, while this year it decreased less than the whole past eight years.

■ **Inspection effective in reducing traffic emissions**

Statistics published by the Tehran technical inspection organization, show that since the beginning of the LEZ scheme, some 3.5 million cars have undergone quality

inspection, out of which some 70 percent have been referring to the centers for the first time and the rest for the second time, so that the scheme have encouraged the car owners to eliminate the level of emission their cars are producing.

Also, it resulted in a 20 percent increase in the number of car owners referring to technical inspection centers compared to last year and a 50 percent increase compared to two years ago.

Less than 10 percent of the vehicle running in the capital are carbureted engine or clunker, which are 20 times more polluting than ordinary cars, and constitute 90 percent of the air pollution haunting the city.

Moreover, after the scheme being implemented, about 30 percent of the vehicles failed in quality inspection, refer to the inspection center after being repaired, while in the past only 7 percent of them have renovated their vehicles.

For the first time, inspection tests have been conducted for heavy vehicles on the roadsides, through which 2,500 diesel vehicles have been technically tested, regardless of having inspection stickers, 24 percent of the cars failed the tests despite having inspection license, so the scheme even identified the heavy duty vehicles which have not refer to inspection centers for long.

\$1b proposed for developing Tehran public transport fleet

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — A total budget of 45 trillion **d e s k** rials (nearly \$1 billion) on development of transportation fleet has been proposed in Tehran Municipality's budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2019), Sakineh Ashrafi, deputy mayor of Tehran for planning, urban development and council affairs has said.

Referring to the Municipality's next year budget of 189 trillion rials (nearly \$4.5 billion), she noted that nearly 30 percent of the budget will be allocated to the transportation development and traffic mitigation, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

"Some 45 trillion rials (nearly \$1 billion) budget allocated to transportation fleet, three-quarters of which will be spent on developing railway system amounting to 26 trillion rials (nearly \$620 million), and the rest on promoting road



transport system which accounts for 1.8 trillion rials (nearly \$43 million)," she explained.

In addition to the development of rail and road transport, satisfactory developments will be funded which includes facilitating traffic flow, promoting passages, organizing and modifying traffic signs, developing parking spaces, equipping passenger terminals, she concluded.

Tehran bus company's director general Peyman Sanandaji said in November 2018 that according to a five-year plan, Tehran must have 9,000 buses while there are only 6,000 buses operating in the capital's transport fleet, of which some 3,000 are clunker and age more than 10 years.

In January, Tehran mayor, Pirouz Hanachi, said that while currently some 1,350 railway cars are running in the capital's subway system, it is still facing lack of 2,000 cars.

Water level in Lake Urmia rises by 33cm

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The level **d e s k** of water in Lake Urmia, northwestern Iran, has increased by 33 centimeters compared to the same time last year, head of the provincial department for the Lake Urmia restoration program in West Azarbaijan province has said.

Currently, the volume of water of the lake is 1.920 billion cubic meters which experienced 250 million cubic meters in-

crease compared to last year which was recorded at 1.250 bcm. ISNA quoted Farhad Sarkhosh as saying on Wednesday.

On the other words, the Lake's water level reached 1,270.24 centimeters, which shows a 33cm increase year on year, he noted.

Referring to the first phase of water release from a damn in Salmas county in West Azarbaijan province which started on February 2, he stated that according

to a recent announcement by Iran Water Resources Management Company, water to a ceiling of 4 million cubic meters will be released into the lake.

Lake Urmia was once the largest permanent hypersaline lakes in the world. The volume of water at the lake in 1997 measured at 30 billion cubic meters which has dramatically decreased to 2.5 billion cubic meters in 2017.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

Charity creates 34,000 jobs for the underprivileged within 6 months

Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has generated over 34,000 job opportunities for the deprived individuals in the first six months of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 21- September 22), an official with the Foundation has said.

In the first half of the year, 28,700 business plans were implemented, which had opened 34,400 employment opportunities for the people under the foundation coverage, Tasnim quoted Hojatollah Abdolmaleki as saying on Sunday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-bound”

■ **Meaning:** restricted by or confined to
■ **For example:** The memory of the **fogbound** journey now as tangible as a dream.

PHRASAL VERB

Mooch around

■ **Meaning:** to move around slowly without any purpose and doing very little
■ **For example:** Beth was happy to mooch around for hours in her nightdress.

IDIOM

Copper-bottomed

■ **Explanation:** a plan, a contract or a financial arrangement which is completely safe or reliable
■ **For example:** He signed a copper-bottomed agreement with a distributor.

ایجاد بیش از ۳۴ هزار فرصت شغلی برای مددجویان کمیته امداد در ۶ ماهه امسال

معاون اشتغال و خودکفایی کمیته امداد امام خمینی (ره) گفت: در شش‌ماهه نخست امسال ۳۴ هزار و ۴۰۰ فرصت شغلی برای مددجویان تحت حمایت کمیته امداد ایجادشده است.

به گزارش خبرگزاری تسنیم، حجت‌الله عبدالملکی با اشاره به اینکه در شش‌ماهه نخست امسال ۲۸ هزار و ۷۰۰ طرح اشتغال برای مددجویان کمیته امداد اجراشده است گفت: با اجرای این طرح‌ها ۳۴ هزار و ۴۰۰ فرصت شغلی برای افراد تحت حمایت ایجادشده است.

U.S. Senate approves anti-BDS bill, slowdown of Syria withdrawal

The United States Senate has passed legislation defining United States security policy in the Middle East, introducing a measure that would allow state and local governments to sanction those who support boycotts, divesture and sanctions against Israel.

Tuesday's Senate vote, which was 77-23, sends the legislation to the House of Representatives where it will likely face renewed debate, politicians said.

The legislation authorizes \$3.3bn a year for 10 years in the U.S. military aid to Israel, reauthorizes the U.S.-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act and imposes financial sanctions on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad or companies and banks that do business with Damascus.

"Israel is without a doubt one of the best friends in the world," Senator Jim Risch, an Idaho Republican and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in remarks to the Senate. "Certainly, in that neighborhood they live in, which is a dangerous neighborhood, they need our help. We worked with them very closely in many, many respects."

The legislation, which consolidated four bills that did not make it to Congress last year, drew controversy in the Senate and opposition from a number of senators because of added language authorizing state and local governments to terminate contracts with the U.S. citizens who support the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.



The anti-BDS measure "is designed to see that the BDS activity is tamped down and that it is not appropriate to use against our friend, Israel", Risch said.

Critics decry the measure as contrary to the free speech rights of Americans under the First Amendment of the Constitution, which in the U.S. jurisprudence has provided protection for people participating in boycotts as a form of political protest.

"Our country was founded upon the concept and in the midst of a great boycott," Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, said in remarks to the Senate opposing the measure. "At the time, we were boycotting

British goods and most specifically, British tea. There is likely nothing more American than to protest, to dissent and to boycott."

"The sad thing today is that we will be debating whether or not to place limitations on the First Amendment right to boycott, and we will do it because the vast majority of this body disagrees with the concept of what the people are boycotting over," Paul said.

Twenty-six states have adopted anti-BDS measures, which is backed by the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee advocacy group. However, the U.S. judges in Kansas and Arizona struck down such laws in 2018.

In addition to supporting Israel, the legislation signals strong sentiment among politicians for continuing the limited U.S. military engagement in Syria. Senior Republican leaders and a number of key Democrats said they want a delay and reevaluation of Trump's order to withdraw the U.S. Special Forces from Syria.

On December 19, Trump announced he was pulling 2,000 U.S. forces out of Syria, claiming the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group had been "defeated". He later backtracked on the decision amid an outcry in Congress and no clear timetable has been set. The U.S. spy chiefs told a Senate hearing on January 29 that ISIL and al-Qaeda remained threats to the U.S. interests.

With this legislation, the Senate is calling on Trump to conduct a strategic policy review and consult the U.S. allies and partners in the region before drawing down the U.S. troops in Afghanistan by half from 14,000. Senators had voted 68-23 on procedural point to clear the amendment calling for the slowdown in Trump's withdrawal plans.

The bill's prospects in the House are unclear.

"It is unlikely the House of Representatives will address this bill in its current form," said Senator Gary Peters, a Michigan Democrat, who had attempted unsuccessfully to exempt small businesses and sole practitioners from the anti-BDS provisions.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

EU's Tusk rebuffs May, says Brexiteers deserve a place in hell

The European Union will make no new offer on Brexit and those who promoted Britain's exit without any understanding of how to deliver it deserve a 'special place in hell', Council President Donald Tusk said Wednesday.

Rebuffing Prime Minister Theresa May's bid to renegotiate just a day before she is due in Brussels, Tusk said he had abandoned hope that Brexit might be stopped and said his priority was now to avert a "fiasco" when the UK leaves.

"I've been wondering what that special place in hell looks like, for those who promoted Brexit, without even a sketch of a plan how to carry it out safely," Tusk said at a joint news conference with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar.

The remark angered Brexit supporters in Britain. Veteran Brexiteer Nigel Farage retorted: "After Brexit we will be free of unelected, arrogant bullies like you – sounds like heaven to me."

Pro-Brexit Conservative lawmaker Peter Bone said Tusk's comments were an outrageous insult to the British people.

While Tusk was clear the EU would not reopen the divorce deal, he also said he still believed that a common Brexit solution was possible.

Varadkar said the divorce deal, which was rejected by the UK Parliament, was "the best possible". He said Britain's political instability further proved the need for a "backstop" insurance policy – the main obstacle to a deal – to keep the border between Ireland and UK-ruled Northern Ireland open after Brexit.

In a stark indication of the stakes for the United Kingdom of a disorderly Brexit, Irish nationalists warned May to her face on Wednesday that if she allowed a no-deal Brexit then there would have to be a referendum on Irish unity.

"In the event of a crash ... she must as a democrat return to the Good Friday Agreement and she must begin preparation for a referendum on Irish unity," Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald said, referring to the peace accord signed in 1998 that ended three decades of sectarian violence in



Northern Ireland.

"Ireland will not be the collateral damage of the Tory Brexit," she added. Tory is another name for May's Conservative Party.

(Source: Daily Star)

Ivory Coast's ex-president Laurent Gbagbo released to Belgium

Former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo is now in Belgium under conditional release after being acquitted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) last month.

"Mr. Gbagbo is now released under conditions in Belgium," an ICC spokeswoman said on Tuesday without giving further details.

The conditions include that Gbagbo will return to court if required for a possible prosecution appeal against the acquittal and that the 73-year-old surrenders his passport

to Belgian authorities.

On Saturday, Belgium said it would in principle host Gbagbo pending a possible appeal after he was cleared of crimes against humanity on January 15. A spokesperson from Belgium's immigration service said that Gbagbo confirmed he had been given a visa.

"We have given instructions to grant him a visa [...] which allows him to stay for 90 days," Belgian immigration office spokeswoman Dominique Ernould told the AFP news agency.

The former leader and his aide Charles Ble Goude had been staying in an undisclosed location since their release from an official detention center late on Friday.

Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said on Saturday that there had been "a request from the court to host Mr. Gbagbo simply because he has family in Belgium: his second wife, a child in Brussels".

"We have concluded that it is alright for him to stay in Belgium while on condition-

al release," he said, adding: "There will be surveillance."

The delay in Gbagbo's release was because prosecutors said that he should be kept in detention pending a possible appeal against his acquittal, arguing that he would not return to the court if there was a retrial.

Appeals judges rejected the prosecution argument on Friday after Belgium said it was ready to host him.

(Source: agencies)

Macedonia signs accord to join NATO despite Russian misgivings

NATO members signed an accord with Macedonia on Wednesday allowing the tiny ex-Yugoslav republic to become the 30th member of the U.S.-led alliance after a deal with Greece ended a 27-year-old dispute over its name.

At a formal signing of the NATO accession protocol, which must now be ratified by allied governments, Macedonia's Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov hailed the moment as showing that the country "will never walk alone" once in the alliance.

"We stand beside these 29 allies... able and ready to assume the obligations arising from our full membership in NATO," Dimitrov told a news conference after NATO ambassadors signed the protocol.

The ratification process typically takes about a year, and the United States has said it expects Macedonia - now known officially as North Macedonia under the terms of its name deal with Greece - to formally join the alliance in 2020.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the admittance of a new member highlighted that all European nations who met the entrance criteria could join the regional alliance, a position Moscow rejects.

"It shows that NATO's door remains open for countries that meet NATO standards and that adhere to the NATO



values of democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty," Stoltenberg said.

Russia says that by taking in Balkan members, the alliance is undermining security in the region.

■ **"Making the world more peaceful"**

But Dimitrov said Macedonia's decision would improve regional stability, echoing the view of Western countries which see NATO and EU membership as the best way of preserving peace in the Balkans after the violent breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

"For us NATO is about making the world more peaceful, more stable," he said.

Three other ex-Yugoslav republics - Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro - have already joined NATO, as have other countries in the Balkan region including Albania, Bulgaria and Romania.

Both Greek and Macedonian parliaments have agreed to rename the country the Republic of North Macedonia, ending Athens' years-long veto of its neighbor's efforts to join NATO and the EU. Greece sees the use of "Macedonia" as implying territorial claims to a Greek province of the same name.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has also warned NATO against cultivating closer ties with Ukraine and Georgia, two ex-Soviet republics that also aspire to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which is headquartered in Brussels.

After the Macedonia signing protocol, Stoltenberg praised Georgia on Wednesday, saying: "We are very encouraged by what we see in Georgia, their commitment to reforms, their commitment to strengthening defense and security institutions, their commitment to transparency, judiciary reforms."

(Source: Reuters)

Pope admits sexual abuse of nuns by priests, bishops

Pope Francis has admitted to yet another scandal in the Roman Catholic Church by publicly confirming that nuns have been sexually abused by priests and bishops.

On board a flight back home from a historic trip to the Middle East, the Pope admitted that nuns were abused by priests and bishops, some of whom had used the women as sex slaves.

"It's true," he said. "There are priests and bishops who have done this. I think it is still going on because something does not stop just because you have become aware of it."

"We have been working on this for a long

time. We have suspended some priests because of this," he said.

The extent of the scandal first came to light just days ago when the Vatican's women's magazine, Women Church World, condemned the abuse of women in an article.

"The abuse of women results in procreation and so is at the origin of the scandal of imposed abortions and children not recognized by priests," the article read.

In a high-profile case in Chile, the Vatican launched an investigation late last year into reports that priests abused nuns. According to current and former nuns, the women had

been removed from the order after reporting the abuse.

The revelation about the abuse of nuns came just years after it was revealed that children, mostly boys, were being abused by clergymen in their congregations across the world and that senior clergy members had been covering up those crimes.

The Pope also came under fire last year for not responding decisively to the Church's sex-abuse crisis.

He has summoned key bishops from around the world to a summit later this month at the Vatican to discuss the issue

and find a solution to protect children from sexual abuse in the Church.

Asked if he has any similar plan to confront abuse of nuns, he said, "I want to move forward. We are working on it."

The pontiff, however, said last week that expectations for the upcoming Vatican summit should be "deflated," as the issue was unlikely to be resolved through it. His efforts to lower expectations have disappointed advocates for abuse victims as well as the church officials who have long pushed for the leaders to take abuse more seriously.

(Source: agencies)

'Iran's recent missile tests were not in material violation of UNSCR 2231'

➔ Mindful of this backdrop, and given that the IAEA has confirmed Iran's continued compliance with its obligations under the JCPOA, the U.S. appears to be focusing on finding instances of non-compliance to pursue such potential violations with the Agency. Indeed, in the greater scheme of things, the Trump administration as part of its "maximum pressure" policy is more broadly highlighting Iran's missile program and its regional policies as threats that need to be directly confronted – and perhaps more so, as threats that cannot be confronted as long as Europe does not join the U.S. in reimposing nuclear-related sanctions on Iran.



■ There are some obvious differences between satellite launching and long-range ballistic missile. Why some officials such as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu-when Iran launched Payam-e Amirkabir satellite- condemned Iran for the launching of the satellite?

A: There is a lot of controversy within the expert community regarding this issue. There are some areas of similarity in the technology and expertise between satellite launching and ICBMs. The differences are mainly the operational aspects. You can see a detailed technical discussion on this on our website by my colleague Michael Elleman.

<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/01/iran-satellite-launch>

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

A: I believe the launch of SPV is a great first step. The SPV is a mechanism and will not be sufficient to convince the businesses or governments to conduct business with Iran, specially those more sensitive to U.S. pressure. However, it does provide an incentive for those who do want to continue business with Iran. Moreover, the SPV provides a window of opportunity. In order for Iran to draw benefits from it, there needs to be continued and proactive negotiations with European governments and businesses to promote trade and investment. In other words, politically, SPV is a great achievement. But from an economic and business perspective, SPV is just a tool to help pave the way in along and rocky road ahead.

UAE funneling Western-supplied arms to notorious militants in Yemen

➔ The statement added that the militants were being armed despite their "atrocious human rights records," their being unaccountable to any government and the accusations of war crimes and other serious violations facing them.

The investigation "shows how the UAE has become a major conduit for armored vehicles, mortar systems, rifles, pistols, and machineguns - which are being diverted" to the militants. The Amnesty said the UAE also funded and trained the militants. It named some of the UAE-backed militant outfits as "Security Belt," "Shabwani Elite" forces, and "The Giants Brigades."

The first two outfits, it said, run "a shadowy network of secret prisons" in Yemen.

"Amnesty and others have documented these forces' role in disappearances and a range of human rights violations at these facilities - including detention at gunpoint, torture with electric shocks, waterboarding, hanging from the ceiling, sexual humiliation, prolonged solitary confinement, squalid conditions and inadequate food and water," the statement read.

Western countries have supplied the UAE with at least \$3.5 billion worth of arms since March 2015, when the House of Saud regime and the Emirates and a coalition of their other allies, invaded the impoverished country to reinstall its Riyadh-allied former government.

The warfare has killed thousands and forced Yemen close to the edge of countrywide famine.

The Amnesty said while knowing about the share of the violations attributed to the UAE, the United States, Britain, Germany, France, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey were still selling weapons to Abu Dhabi.

"Meanwhile, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and the Netherlands have announced suspensions in arms transfers to the UAE," it said.

On Monday, the CNN reported that Saudi Arabia and the UAE "have used the U.S.-manufactured weapons as a form of currency to buy the loyalties of militias or tribes, bolster chosen armed actors, and influence the complex political landscape."

The report, which was citing local commanders on the ground and analysts, also said Saudi Arabia was "transferring" American weapons to al-Qaeda terrorists and other militias in Yemen.

It questioned whether Riyadh was "responsible enough to be allowed to continue buying the sophisticated arms and fighting hardware," while the U.S. Department of Defense said the Saudi monarchy was breaking the terms of its arms deal with Washington.

(Source: Press TV)

Messi to renew Barca deal ‘when he decides’

Barcelona have promised Lionel Messi they will extend his contract whenever he feels the moment is right.

Messi, only signed a new deal at the end of 2017 but president Josep Maria Bartomeu said the club are already prepared to further prolong his stay at Camp Nou.

The forward's terms expire in 2021 and Barca would like his next deal to be similar to the lifetime contract signed by midfielder Andres Iniesta before he moved to Japan.

"Messi's contract is up in two years but, given how he's playing, we will have him for many more years," Bartomeu told Cadena Cope.

"Leo's intelligent, he knows how to measure things. If he feels good, he will tell us. When he decides, we will renew his deal."

Messi's next contract will be his 10th professional deal with Barca and potentially his last. He has spoken several times about his desire to play for boyhood club Newell's Old Boys before retiring.

At 31, Messi is in the latter stages of his career, although he remains vital to Barca's hopes of success in La Liga, the Champions League and the Copa del Rey this season.

Messi, who has suggested he would like to end his career at Barcelona, injured his thigh in that game but has been included in the squad for Wednesday's Copa semifinal first leg against Real Madrid.

Bartomeu also said that "there will be news soon" as the club work on a new contract for left-back Jordi Alba, whose deal expires in 2020.

However, the president said that midfielder Ivan Rakitic, who's publicly pleaded for new terms, will have to wait until it's financially possible to offer him a pay rise, "which is not the case right now."

(Source: Soccernet)

Qatar says committed to labour reform after Amnesty criticism

Qatar said Wednesday it is committed to labour reform following an Amnesty International report that the 2022 World Cup host is failing to stop widespread labour abuse.

Doha said it was on course to deliver "lasting" change after the London-based human rights group accused the energy-rich state of "running out of time" to implement reforms before the World Cup.

"Far from seeing time as running out, the government of the State of Qatar understands further change is needed and we remain committed to developing these changes as quickly as possible, while ensuring they are effective and appropriate for our labour market conditions," a government statement said.

"Practical, efficient and lasting change takes time and that is what we have committed to."

In its report published on Tuesday, Amnesty said that despite reforms brought in by Doha, conditions "for many migrant workers in Qatar remain harsh".

It called on Qatar to properly enforce current labour laws, increase the minimum wage and scrap the "kafala", or sponsorship, system.

This practice ties workers to their employers, restricts their ability to change jobs or leave the country and remains firmly in place, said Amnesty.

It also called for better protection for some 175,000 domestic workers. Qatar has introduced a series of labour reforms since its selection as World Cup host set in motion a huge construction programme under intense international scrutiny.

It has introduced a monthly minimum wage of 750 riyals (\$206) and has partially scrapped the exit visa system which required workers to obtain their employers' permission before leaving the country.

(Source: AFP)

Osaka pulls out of Qatar Open with injury

World number one Naomi Osaka has pulled out of next week's Qatar Open with an unspecified back injury, tournament organisers said on Tuesday.

Osaka, who was set play for the first time since her Australian Open triumph, has suffered with back problems in the past.

"I am sorry to have withdraw from Doha this year as I was looking forward to playing and seeing my fans there," the 21-year-old said in a statement.

"I wish everyone a great week and hope to see everyone next year."

Simona Halep, the Romanian who Osaka replaced as world number one, Karolina Pliskova and Angelique Kerber head up the field in Doha from Feb. 11.

(Source: Reuters)

Kvitova tells court of knife attack horror

Australian Open finalist Petra Kvitova has given a graphic testimony at the trial of the man accused of stabbing her in her home in the Czech Republic.

She suffered damage to ligaments and tendons in her playing left hand when fighting off an intruder in 2016.

The star had surgery and returned to tennis five months after the attack. "There was blood all over the place," she said via video-link to avoid being in the same room as the suspect, who denies the allegations. The suspect, 33-year-old Radim Zondra, faces 12 years in prison if convicted. He is currently serving another prison sentence for a separate offence.

His colleagues have said in court that at the time of the incident, in December 2016, he was at work.

She said the suspect rang the doorbell and she allowed him to enter as she was expecting a doping test. She said he claimed he had come to inspect the boiler.

While checking the hot water in the bathroom, Zondra allegedly grabbed Kvitova from behind before holding a knife to her throat. In a struggle to free herself, the knife badly injured her left hand.

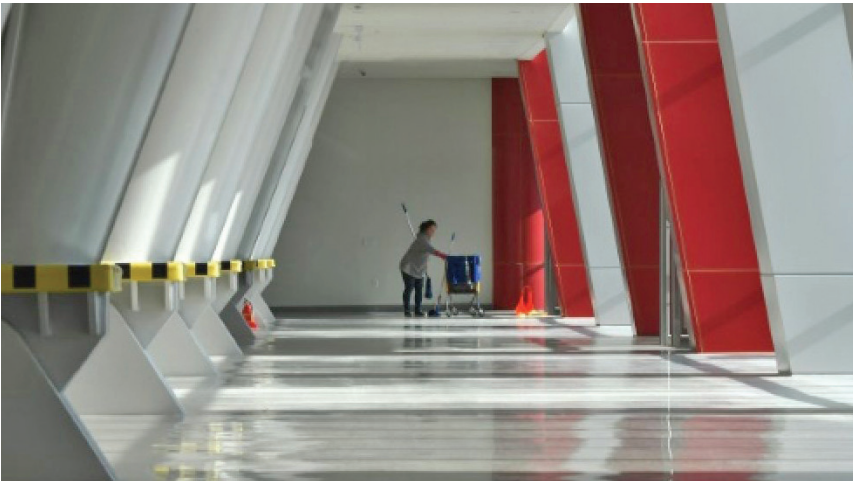
She said she offered Zondra money to leave, and he accepted some 10,000 Czech crowns (£341; \$440).

Her tendons, fingers and nerves were damaged, resulting in a four-hour surgery.

Kvitova made no public comments after the testimony but her spokesman said she was pleased to put it behind her, AP news agency reports.

(Source: BBC)

Silence echoes across Pyeongchang Olympic venues



Just one year after the world's best skiers and skaters gathered in South Korea to compete for Olympic gold, many of the venues stand empty, with arguments mounting over their future and upkeep costs.

The country built six sports centres and a ceremonial stadium from scratch for the 2018 Winter Olympics and renovated six existing facilities at a total cost of \$800 million.

But today only the occasional elderly stroller passes through the Olympic park in Gangneung, where the cavernous speed-skating arena stands dark and ice-less.

The sliding centre in Pyeongchang, where South Korea's Yun Sung-bin won Asia's first Olympic skeleton gold, is locked with barriers blocking road access.

And protesters are demanding that a downhill ski slope site be developed into a resort and not, as promised, returned to nature.

South Korea also spent more than \$10 billion on infrastructure before the Games, including a high-speed railway from Seoul to Gangneung, 200 kilometres (120 miles) east of the capital.

The construction bonanza was supposed to boost one of the poorest and least populated regions of Asia's fourth-largest economy.

But hopes of a tourism boom have gone unfulfilled in a nation where bobsleigh and luge were largely unheard-of before the Olympics and participation in winter sports remains limited.

The risk of white elephants is a perennial issue for the Winter Games and the International Olympic Committee has struggled to

find contenders willing to take on the burden.

There were only two candidates in the final round for the 2022 Games that ultimately went to Beijing, and after a series of withdrawals only two are bidding for 2026, Milan and Stockholm.

■ **Forest slump**

When South Korea won last year's Games, Mount Gariwang in Jeongseon was one of the few summits big enough to provide the 800-metre (2,600-foot) vertical drop required for a downhill skiing venue under International Ski Federation rules.

There was one problem: it is in a forest conservation area.

Organisers secured a temporary opt-out

from the forestry ministry -- enraging green campaigners -- with a promise to restore the site to woodland after the event.

But its future is in dispute as residents of Jeongseon, a former coal town whose last mine closed in 2004, demand that authorities go back on their word and keep the \$170-million facilities as a tourist attraction.

According to Choi Moon-soon, governor of eastern Gangwon province, reforestation would cost as much as building the slopes in the first place.

"I had expected the Olympic legacy would attract many visitors here and stimulate our local economy, which is stagnant," said local businessman Kim Chang-young, 52, who

regularly joins the protests.

He feels "betrayed" since the Games, he told AFP, with "hardly any visitors" coming to Jeongseon.

A hotel that opened there last year was offering rooms in January at an 83 percent discount.

And the area's biggest resort Yongpyong, where slalom events were held, has seen fewer visitors this December and January than two years ago.

■ **Frozen in time**

Visitors have been banned from the \$100-million Pyeongchang Olympic Sliding Centre since March after Gangwon authorities mothballed it to avoid estimated maintenance costs of 1.25 billion won (\$1.1 million) a year.

It is the only facility of its kind in the country, forcing South Korea's bobsleigh and skeleton national teams to train in Canada instead.

The Gangneung Oval, where the speed skating was held, is also unattended with no scheme identified for its future.

As planned, the pentagonal arena that hosted the opening and closing ceremonies has been dismantled, with an Olympic museum due to open in the main stand.

Some venues are in occasional use: the Gangneung Hockey Centre hosted a three-day national ice hockey tournament in December after lying idle for eight months, and it is holding two international competitions this week.

(Source: AFP)

Lakers' 42-point loss to Pacers worst of LeBron James' career



As the Indiana Pacers' lead ballooned into the 40s in the fourth quarter on Tuesday, so too did the distance between LeBron James and his next closest teammate on the bench.

The Los Angeles Lakers' eventual 136-94 drubbing at the hands of the Pacers ended up being the worst loss of James' 16-year NBA career. And the optics of seeing the four-time MVP parked in the final spot on the sideline with three empty seats between him and Brandon Ingram might have been even worse, illustrating how far away this team seems from the contenders James is accustomed to being a part of.

The Lakers already beat Indiana this season -- a 104-96 decision on Nov. 29 in L.A. -- when the Pacers were missing Victor Oladipo. But with Oladipo now out for the season -- and Indiana going just 1-4 since the All-Star guard's injury and playing on the second night of a back-to-back -- the Pacers got their revenge, and then some.

L.A. is now 7-13 in its past 20 games -- playing 18 of those without James as he dealt with a left groin strain -- free-falling from fourth place to 10th in the Western Conference standings since Christmas Day.

And with just two days left before Thursday's NBA trade deadline, the team's

cohesion stands at an even more tenuous position than its 27-27 record.

Following a loss at the Golden State Warriors over the weekend -- a game in which L.A. held a double-digit second-half lead before getting blown out -- Lakers coach Luke Walton and veterans JaVale McGee and Michael Beasley got into a verbal sparring match in the locker room, according to sources.

But that turned out to be better than Tuesday's performance, in which the Lakers didn't show any fight, trailing by as many as 46 points and never holding a lead.

Meanwhile, the Lakers' brass has been entrenched in serious trade talks with the New Orleans Pelicans surrounding their star center, Anthony Davis; and just about every player on the Lakers' roster has heard his name attached to a potential deal for Davis.

"The only players whose play hasn't been affected by the trade talks are James and Rajon Rondo," a team source told ESPN on Tuesday.

Walton tried to steer his team's focus away from the speculation before the Pacers game, saying, "This is a big game for us. Our guys are locked in. They know that this is the only thing that matters right now is the game we're getting ready to play."

(Source: ESPN)

Sala: Air investigators trying to recover a body from plane wreckage



UK Air investigators are attempting to recover a body from the wreckage of the plane found during the search for Cardiff City player Emiliano Sala.

A spokesman for the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) confirmed to CNN Wednesday that a body was trying to be recovered and, if successful, the AAIB would consider the feasibility of recovering the aircraft wreckage.

The AAIB revealed Monday that a body had been seen in the wreckage of the plane which was carrying the Argentine striker. There is yet no information as to whether the body is Sala's or David Ibbotson, the pilot of the Piper Malibu plane.

Sala, 28, and the 59-year-old Ibbotson were flying in the single-turbine aircraft from Nantes, in northern France, to Cardiff in Wales, when it disappeared from radar near the Channel Islands on January 21.

The Argentine striker had recently signed with English Premier League club Cardiff City for a reported £15 million (\$19.3 million) from French club Nantes and was heading to the Welsh capital after saying farewell to his former teammates in France.

Wreckage from the plane thought to be carrying the footballer was found Sunday by a privately funded search team working in close coordination with the AAIB.

On Sunday, the AAIB had also begun a three-day underwater search of an area four square nautical miles off the island of Guernsey. David Mearns, a marine scientist leading the private search team hired by Sala's family, said the wreckage of the plane had been located by sonar equipment at a depth of about 63 meters within the first couple of hours of starting Sunday's search.

Experts on the larger vessel -- Geo Ocean III -- used by the air investigators confirmed it was the missing Piper Malibu aircraft.

Speaking on BBC's Today show, Mearns said the wreckage was surprisingly intact and added that the family would "desperately" like the plane to be recovered.

The official search operation was called off on January 24 after Guernsey's harbor master, Captain David Barker, said "the chances of survival at this stage are extremely remote."

That decision prompted tearful pleas from Sala's family, who urged officials to "use all means possible" to find out what happened to the plane that had requested descent on passing Guernsey, but disappeared from radar at about 2,300 feet.

The private search mission was financed through a crowdfunding campaign, with French World Cup star Kylian Mbappe among the footballers donating to the initiative.

(Source: CNN)

Challenges lie ahead as UEFA president Ceferin set for re-election

Two and a half years after becoming UEFA president in the wake of the scandal that brought down Michel Platini, Aleksander Ceferin will win a new four-year term at the head of European football's governing body on Thursday.

The 51-year-old Slovenian lawyer -- who saw off the Dutchman Michael van Praag in 2016 -- is the only candidate this time in the election for the UEFA president, which will be take place at the organisation's Congress in Rome.

Previously the head of the Slovenian Football Federation, Ceferin's presidency so far has been marked by his discretion and a less charismatic approach than that of Platini.

The Frenchman is still suspended until October this year, when he will complete a four-year ban from all football-related activities following the corruption scandal that also brought down then-FIFA chief Sepp Blatter.

"The situation was ideal. The biggest scandal had tarnished football's image," Ceferin admitted during a recent speech to students in Ljubljana as he discussed the situation when he took over.

"I stood. I was underestimated and when (opponents) realised the situation, it was too late."

■ **Make his own mark**

Since then, Ceferin -- recently ranked just behind Melania

Trump among the most influential Slovenian citizens in the world by Slovenian magazine Reporter -- has imposed his own, more understated, style.

His most notable achievements have been introducing term limits for UEFA presidents -- to a maximum of three four-year stints -- and, according to one of those close to him, "maintaining unity in European football".

Having previously been largely charged with putting in place measures voted for under the previous regime of Platini and Gianni Infantino, Ceferin can now hope to really make his mark and implement his own changes.

"You can see with him a desire to give more of a place to the smaller clubs and nations with the creation of a third European club competition and the Nations League. But it is too soon to say if that will make a difference," says Didier Primault, director of The Centre of the Law and Economics of Sport in the French city of Limoges.

■ **Bone of contention**

The biggest bone of contention moving forward is the plan of Infantino -- now FIFA president -- to introduce a new, expanded Club World Cup and global Nations League. Determined to protect UEFA's own Champions League and recently-introduced Nations League, Ceferin is opposed to those ideas.

Reforms to the Champions League which mean the continent's leading four leagues -- Spain, England, Germany and Italy -- now all get four automatic qualifying spots in the group stage were initially proposed by Platini but brought in under Ceferin's presidency.

Nevertheless, the Slovenian has sought to champion the rights of clubs from smaller countries, and he must look for ways to restore competitive balance, something he recently said was his "greatest challenge" going forward.

Late last year UEFA confirmed plans to bring back a third European club competition from 2021/22, which would have 32 teams mainly from smaller member associations.

Meanwhile, Ceferin will also have to deal with the burning issue of Financial Fair Play (FFP) -- can he restore faith in what was one of Platini's flagship projects at a time when many feel clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City have pushed its credibility to the limits?

And in the background there is the question of whether he might one day seek to take the step from UEFA to FIFA.

"For the moment I am not interested in the FIFA presidency at all. But if you ask me if I will be in four, eight or 10 years, I can't say yes or no," he said recently.

(Source: France 24)

Persepolis go top op IPL with victory over Padideh

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team went top of the Iran Professional League (IPL) table after defeating Padideh 2-0 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Wednesday.

The Iranian giants moved two points clear of Sepahan at the top and Padideh sit third.

Ali Alipour gave the lead the hosts in the 24th minute from the penalty spot.

Eight minutes later, Siamak Nemati found the back of the net with a long-range shot.

"We expected a very tough game because Padideh are one of the best teams. I am happy with this win and I think we deserved

to win," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said in the post-match news conference.

"We want to make our fans happy, that's why we are here. I say once again, I am satisfied with my team's performance because Padideh are a modern team and frankly they are favorites to win the title," the Croat added.

Earlier on the day, Tractor Sazi defeated Naft Masjed Soleyman 3-0 in Tabriz thanks to second half goals from Ashkan Dejagah, Yukiya Sugita and Mohammad Hosseini who scored an own goal.

Esteghlal will play Paykan on Thursday in Shahr-e Qods Stadium.



Iranian-American basketballer Michael Rostampour invited to Team Melli



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Rising basketball player Mike Rostampour has been invited to Iran national basketball team.

The 6ft 8in (2.03m) Minnesota-born forward has never seen action for the Iran national squad before, but has significant international basketball experience.

Rostampour is currently playing for Slovakian club BC Prievidza, putting up around 4 points and 4 rebounds per game.

"I feel extremely proud to be an Iranian-American. I understand Iran is a great country and the people are very proud. I see it when I watch the Iranian soccer team compete in the World Cup, the wrestling team in the Olympics and the basketball

team in the FIBA World Cup. Win or lose, Iranian fans always show more love and support to their teams than any other country in the world," Rostampour said.

"I know that Iran are the best Asian team and one of the best in the world. They also have highly-respected players like Hamed Haddadi and Arsalan Kazemi, who had have a great career in the US. It is a dream come true to be a part of the team," he added.

Standing in Iran's way in the final window are Japan and Australia.

Team Melli face Japan on 21 February and then finish their Asian Qualifiers campaign against Australia on 24 February.

Both fixtures will be held at the Azadi Gym in Tehran.

Portuguese skiers laud Iranian hospitality



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Portugal ski members participating at the 2019 World Para Snowboard /Asian Cup said that the hospitality and respect they have received from Iranian people are amazing.

The international event was held in Dizin resort on Feb. 4 and 5 with participation of para skiers from Iran, Portugal, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Established in 1969, Dizin is the most important ski area not only in Iran but the Middle East, a region not noted for much snow except at higher elevations in winter.

Located some 120km north of Tehran, Dizin is equipped with three gondolas and 12 chairlifts.

"It's amazing. The Iran Sports Federation

for Disabled has organized the competition very well. The competition is far better than expected," Portugal coach Mancha said. "We are very pleased with Iranian hospitality. I hope we can participate in the competition next year."

Dizin reaches an altitude of 3,600 meters. The snow-capped highlands above Tehran are home to some of the world's top ski resorts which offer powder chasers refuge from the hustle and bustle of city life.

"First, I would like to thanks the Iranians for such a warm welcome to us. It was a great experience for me to participate in this competition. We have no good ski resort in our country and Dizin is one of the best resorts in the world," Pedro said.

British citizen arrested and detained in UAE for supporting Qatar!

A British football fan has been arrested and detained in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after he wore a Qatar national team jersey during the recently concluded AFC Asian Cup 2019.

According to reports, Ali Issa Ahmad, a 26-year-old resident of Wolverhampton, travelled to the UAE for a holiday in January. While he was in the UAE, he got the tickets for the Asian Cup Round of 16 match between Qatar and Iraq at the Al Nahyan Stadium on 22 January.

Ahmad wore a Qatar shirt to the match not knowing that doing so in the UAE is an offence punishable with a large fine and an extended period of imprisonment, the Guardian reported.

Having initially been released, the Arsenal fan is now being held again following an incident with security officials, the Sun reported.

The UAE embassy said it was investigating the circumstances of the arrest and the Foreign Office (FCO) said it was offering support.



Qatar had went on to win the Asian Cup defeating hosts UAE in the semifinal and Japan in the final despite their fans not being allowed to enter the UAE to support their national team during the tournament.

Qatar have been under a blockade from its neighboring nations led by the UAE and Saudi Arabia since May 2017

after Qatar were accused of undermining security and stability in the region by funding and hosting terror groups.

Amer Lokie, a friend of Ahmad whom he contacted over the phone, described Ahmad as a "kind and quiet guy" who "loves football so much."

"This is just unspeakable. He just went to watch a football match while he was on holiday in UAE and says he was arrested and beaten after being accused of wearing a football shirt which promoted Qatar. When he managed to call me, officials were sitting next to him so he couldn't say too much. He wasn't given very long to speak to me and I'm not exactly sure what happened," Lokie said.

"He loves football so much. He goes to watch lots of football matches in the UK. He's such a kind and quiet guy. He is the kind of person who always tries to help others. He didn't sound good when he spoke to me on the phone. He was speaking very slowly and he sounded very frightened," Lokie added.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Paralympics boost for Australian para athletes

Australia's Federal Government has delivered a major boost to the preparations of their Para athletes ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, with the announcement of AUD 12 million (EUR 7.5 million) in new funding.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said an AUD 8 million investment from his Government will help to effectively manage the planning, coordination and delivery of the Australian Paralympic Team aiming for success in Tokyo.

The Prime Minister made the announcement in Sydney at an event to launch the new Paralympics Australia brand, formerly known as the Australian Paralympic Committee.

Prime Minister Morrison said "This new investment from the Federal Government will assist with the significant costs associated with delivering an Australian team of this size and complexity to the world's premier event for athletes with a disability. It also recognizes the Australian Paralympic Team's unique and burgeoning place within Australian sport and the value it brings to the Australian people".



"I am proud that the Australian Government will be the key partner in ensuring the Australian Paralympic Team has the best possible chance to shine on the world stage in Tokyo. Our Paralympic hopefuls can now prepare with confidence, knowing the funds and support that they need and deserve to represent our country are secure."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Pim Verbeek announces retirement from Oman coach

Oman FA have announced that their national team's head coach Pim Verbeek has stepped down from his post and subsequently retired from management.

Verbeek's last assignment with the Oman team was the recently concluded AFC Asian Cup 2019 where he helped the side reach the knockouts. They eventually lost 2-0 to Iran in the round of 16.

The Oman FA has stated that assistant coach Muhanna Said will take up the space left by the Dutchman till they find a suitable candidate for the post.

Verbeek, in a 38-year long managerial career, managed 20 teams, both as an assistant and head coach. He had been with the Oman national team from 2016.

"Pim [Verbeek] resigned on personal reasons as he wanted to spend more time with his family back in Holland. The board agreed to accept his resignation and wished him good luck," Wahaibi told Muscat Daily.



"He had a successful tenure with the national team, having led our boys to the second Persian Gulf Cup title in Kuwait in January 2018. Even in the recent Asian Cup in UAE, he led the team to the knockout [last-16] stage for the first time in our history," he added.

(Source: Muscat Daily)

Iran futsal move up to third place in world ranking

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national futsal team moved up two spots to third in the latest ranking released by Futsal World Ranking on Wednesday. The Iranian team sit third with 1663 points.



Brazil and Spain are first and second with 1901 and 1781 points respectively.

Team Melli have recently defeated Serbia twice in two warm-up matches.

Iran national futsal team, headed by Mohammad Nazemalsharia, met the Serbian team in Belgrade as part of preparation for 2020 AFC Futsal Championship Qualifiers and also 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup.

Karim Ansarifard's future in doubt in Nottingham Forest

HITC — Karim Ansarifard has not started a Championship game for Nottingham Forest and now Martin O'Neill has brought in Leo Bonatini from Wolves.

It seemed to take forever for Nottingham Forest to conclude a deal for Karim Ansarifard in the autumn. But, after just a few months at the City Ground, the Iranian international is already starting to look surplus to requirements.

The 28-year-old striker arrived on a free transfer in November and, having scored 18 goals at Olympiakos last season, fans were hoping for big things for a player who also netted against Portugal at the World Cup.

But Ansarifard has made next to no impact yet at Forest, playing just 43 minutes of Championship football.

And, worryingly, the man who signed him has since left the club; Aitor Karanka being replaced by Martin O'Neill last month.

(Source: HITC)

Zob Ahan to play Kuwait SC in ACL Preliminary Stage Two

Zob Ahan football team from Iran will meet Kuwait SC from Kuwait in the 2019 AFC Champions League Preliminary Stage Two.

Kuwait SC staged a remarkable comeback to defeat Jordan's Al Wehdah SC 3-2 at the King Abdullah II Stadium on Tuesday.

The match has been scheduled for February 12 in Isfahan's Foolad Shahr Stadium.

The winner of the match will meet Al-Gharafa of Qatar one week later in play-off round.

Zob Ahan, headed by Alireza Mansourian, sit 14th in the Iran Professional League table.

(Source: the-afc)

Pakistan to participate in Iran's Int'l Wushu tournament

IRNA — Pakistan's 24-member wushu squad will feature in the 3rd Peace and Friendship International Wushu Championship (men and women) to be held at Zahedan, Iran, from March 1-4.

"The News" reported that Balochistan will have a major share in the squad as the tour will be sponsored by the Balochistan's government.

Pakistan Wushu Federation's (PWF) president Malik Iftikhar told media that the Balochistan government had given green signal to Balochistan Wushu Association about sponsoring the tour.

He said a 15-day training camp would be held in Quetta. The squad will proceed to Zahedan by road.

Malik also revealed that PWF also would hold a couple of international events in Lahore this year. "For the friendship events, efforts would be made to invite only those nations who share border with Pakistan," he said.

Raphael Messi joins Foolad Khuzestan

TASNIM — Iranian top-flight football club Foolad Khuzestan completed the signing of Cameroonian striker Raphael Eric Messi Bouli on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old forward has joined the Ahvaz-based football team for the remainder of the Iran Professional League (IPL) season.

Bouli started his career in Cameroon with FAP Yaoundé in 2013 and a year later, he signed for Canon Yaoundé.

Bouli, who has made six appearances for Cameroon national football team, has joined Foolad from Chinese club Yanbian Funde.

Foolad, headed by Afshin Ghotbi, sit seventh in IPL table.

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Each heart has a desire, a good and a bad fortune. So, one must seek it through desire and good fortune. For, if one accepts something unwillingly he is blind and follows a wrong path.

Imam Ali (AS)

FAJR FILMFEST MIRROR

“Watching This Movie Is a Crime” promotes national unity: director

A R T **TEHRAN** — Director Reza Zehtabchian has said that he has made his latest film “Watching This Movie Is a Crime” to promote national unity.



“Judging people by their appearance, their ideology, and generally by the stereotypes we have in mind can taint the national unity. That’s what I’ve tried to warn about in my film,” Zehtabchian said at a press conference held after a screening of the film during the 37th Fajr Film Festival on February 5, 2019. (Meh/ Maryam Kamyab)

The film is about Amir, a religious man, whose pregnant wife loses her baby after being beaten by a drunken English-Iranian man. He files a lawsuit against the man, but the perpetrator is released based on political convenience.

Readings of plays from French literature to be held in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — Four plays from French literature will be read in a joint Iranian-French project entitled “Create Space” in Tehran next week.

The reading performance will be held in Persian based on translations by Tinush Nazmju at the Tehran Independent Theater, Noreddin Heidari Maher, the manager of the project, announced in a press release on Wednesday.



“e-smuggler.com” by written in French by Turkish writer Sedef Ecer is one of the plays.

Haitian writer Jean-Rene Lemoine’s “Erzuli Dahomey, the Goddess of Love”, Belgian playwright Celine Delbecq’s “The Wild Child” and Algerian writer Mohamed Kacimi’s “I Love Death as You Love Life” are other plays selected for the project.

Directors Arash Absalan, Mehran Ranjbar, Iman Afsharian and Shiva Ordui will direct the performances,

which will be attended by the playwrights.

The performances will be held from February 12 to 19 as a part of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival, which will take place in Tehran from February 11 to 23.

NEWS IN BRIEF



“I Love You” to compete in Lebu festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Babak Habibifar’s short film “I Love You” will go on screen at the official section of the Lebu International Film Festival in Chile.

“I Love You” will compete with seven other films, including “Chicago” by Matias Bize from Chile, “Nirvana” by Ruben Llama from Spain and “Forgive Me” by Besim Uğzmajli from Kosovo.

The short film festival will be held in the Chilean city from February 15 to 21.

True story of young Iranian captives of Saddam screens at Fajr

A R T **TEHRAN** — An epic movie about 23 young Iranian volunteers who were captives during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war premiered at the 37th Fajr Film Festival on Tuesday.

“23 Individuals” is based on “Those 23 Individuals”, the memoirs of Ahmad Yusefzadeh, one of the 23 volunteers who were held captive for a long period of time in Iraq.

The book tells of the early months of the volunteers’ captivity and the events they confronted, and later their visit with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

At that time, Iraq tried to manipulate the volunteers in its propaganda campaign against Iran. However, all their attempts failed miserably, thwarted by magical tricks done by the volunteers.

“The scope of the book is so wide that I regret that I could not cover all its details in the movie,” director Mehdi Jafari said in a press conference at the festival.

“I hope that someone makes a film at some time to relate the story of the captives with all the details mentioned in the book,” he added.

The story of the 23 captives’ visit with Saddam is a highlight of the memoirs.

Amir Saharkhiz who has worked on the project as a visual effects engineer said that the remake of the visit was a very difficult task.

“I always had a nightmare about Saddam, and in this film, I had to make the picture of this person whom we did not like to be alive at that time,” he stated and added, “I hope the result is satisfactory.”

Yusefzadeh and number of the 23 cap-



A scene from Mehdi Jafari’s epic movie “23 Individuals”.

tives watched the movie along with the cast and crew.

“We were absolutely thrilled with this movie,” said Yusefzadeh. “By watching the film, we didn’t know whether to cry or to

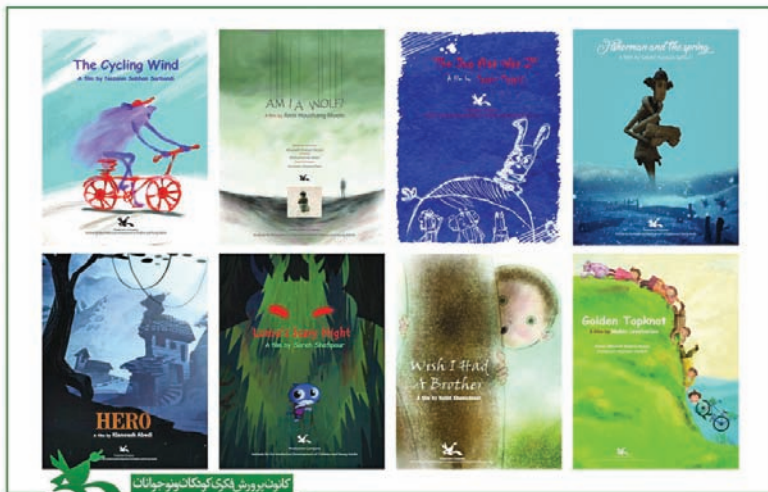
be happy, because everything was very real in the film.”

The project was financed by the Owj Arts and Media Organization, a Tehran-based institution producing revolutionary works

in art and cinema.

Earlier in last October, General Qassem Soleimani attended the launch of the movie and held a meeting with members of the cast and crew on location in Tehran.

IIDCYA offers 8 animations at Clermont-Ferrand festival market



This combination photo shows posters of the eight animations offered at the market of the 41st Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) offered a collection of eight animations at the market of the 41st Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

The collection includes “The Cycling Wind” by Nazanin Sobhan-Sarbandi, “Am I a Wolf” by Amir-Hushang Moeini, “The Dog That Was Ill” by Parvin Tajvid, and “Fisherman and the Spring” by Hassan Soltani, the IIDCYA announced in a press release published on Tuesday.

Also included are “Lomo’s Scary Night” by Sareh Shafiei, “I Wish I Had a Brother” by Nahid Shamsdoost,

“Golden Topknot” by Mahin Javaherian, and “Hero” by Kianush Abedi.

The market, which opened on February 4, will come to an end today.

In addition, Iranian director Soheil Amirsharifi’s “Fault Line” is an entry to the festival, which will run in the French city until February 9.

The film is about Nahal, a young girl who breaks her arm at school, but a man claims that she broke her arm while riding a motorcycle.

The Short Film Market in Clermont-Ferrand takes place every year during the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival, a key event in the world of short films.

Dutch festival picks Iranian animations



A scene from “Fox and Wild Goose” by Reyhaneh Kavosh.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Three animations from Iran will be competing in the FluXus Animation Film Festival, taking place in the Dutch city of Zaandam on February 16, the organizers have announced.

The animations are “Mr. Deer” by Mojtaba Masavi, “The Fox” by Sadeq Javadi and “Fox and Wild Goose” by Reyhaneh Kavosh.

The story of “Mr. Deer” is set in an unknown period of history in a ruined subway station that is similar to those found in modern European cities. People in this society have animal faces and have forgotten their humanity.

“Fox and Wild Goose” tells the story of a wild goose named White Feather. The

goose flies to tropical lands with the gaggle of geese. At night, when all are at sleep, White Feather is keeping guard. On the other side a cunning fox is doing some crazy things.

And “The Fox” tells the story of a young fox on the verge of experiencing the first love. Meanwhile, it gets trapped by a hunter. Thus begins the fox’s effort to survive and love, and seek revenge.

There will be multiple screenings for both children and adults, and the audience will vote for the best film at the one-day festival that will be organized by the FluXus art center in Zaandam.

Other animations are coming from different countries, including Belgium, Singapore, Russia, China, Turkey and Brazil.

Oscars show to go hostless for only second time

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — This year’s Oscar ceremony will go ahead without an official host for only the second time in its history, an ABC television executive said on Tuesday.

Speaking just three weeks before the highest honors in the movie industry are handed out, ABC entertainment president Karey Burke said the Feb. 24 event would forgo a host and “just have presenters host the Oscars.”

ABC, a unit of Walt Disney Co televisions the Oscars ceremony annually and is closely involved in planning the telecast.

Comedian Kevin Hart in December stepped down from hosting the Oscars after past homophobic tweets resurfaced. No replacement was announced but there had been no official statements on how the ceremony would proceed.

The Oscars ceremony has gone without a host only once before in its 91-year history, in 1989.

Burke said the decision was taken after what she called “the messiness” over the Hart withdrawal and an attempt to revive his chances.

“After that, it was pretty clear that we were going to stay the course and just have presenters host the Oscars. We all got on board with that idea pretty quickly,” Burke



Cast member Kevin Hart poses at the premiere for “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” in Los Angeles, California, U.S., December 11, 2017. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

told reporters at the Television Critics Association meeting in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena.

She said the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which organizes the Oscars, had promised ABC last year to keep the telecast to three hours - about 30 minutes shorter than in recent years.

“So the producers, I think, decided wisely to not have a host and to go back to having the presenters and the movies being the stars,” Burke said.

The Oscars host traditionally opens the ceremony with a comedic monologue focusing on celebrities, the state of the movie industry as well as cultural and political issues.

1970s-era musicians sue Sony, UMG to reclaim song rights

NEW YORK (Reuters) — David Johansen, John Waite and other prominent 1970s musicians filed lawsuits on Tuesday accusing Sony Music Entertainment Inc and UMG Recordings Inc of improperly refusing to let them reclaim rights to songs they had long ago signed away.

The proposed class actions filed in Manhattan federal court said U.S. copyright law gives songwriters who bargained away their works on unfavorable terms a “second chance” to reclaim their rights by filing termination notices after 35 years.

But they said Sony and UMG have “routinely and systematically” ignored hundreds of notices, mainly because they deemed the songs “works made for hire” under their recording contracts and therefore not subject to being reclaimed.

The named plaintiffs in the Sony case are Johansen, formerly of the New York Dolls and who as Buster Poindexter recorded “Hot Hot Hot,” John Lyon, who performs as Southside Johnny, and Paul Collins, known for the Paul Collins Beat.

Plaintiffs suing UMG, a unit of France’s Vivendi SA, include Waite, formerly of The Babys and later known for his 1984 hit “Missing You,” and Joe Ely, a guitarist who has performed with The Clash, Bruce Springsteen and others.



The Sony logo is seen on a building in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York, U.S., January 16, 2019. (Reuters/Carlo Allegri)

Sony and UMG did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The plaintiffs are represented by the law firm Blank Rome and by Evan Cohen, a Los Angeles lawyer.

“We represent well over 100 artists from the late ’70s and early ’80s who want to own their U.S. copyrights, but are being stonewalled by Sony and Universal after sending notices,” Cohen said in an interview. “In many cases, we are talking about artists who have never received royalties from the recordings.”

Both lawsuits cover recording artists who served termination notices effective Jan. 1, 2013 or later.

They seek injunctions requiring that the notices be honored, monetary damages and other remedies.