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# East Europe tour fails at once

AP



**ARTICLE**  
Heshmatollah Rahnama  
Latin American expert

Humanitarian aid, a sham for more attacks and pressure on Venezuela

**I**t is clear that self-declared President of Venezuela Juan Guaido is a written U.S. scenario for the Venezuelans to comfort their sufferings from the economic crisis. The root cause of the economic hardship, ironically, is the U.S. financial sanctions on Venezuela and its humanitarian aid is the key to solve the problems of Venezuela as Guaido Marques puts it.

Caritas Venezuela is a Catholic church charity and NGO which helps entry of negligible amount of medical supplies and food products. On the other hand, the Red Cross has warned that dispatch of charitable goods without the consent of Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro is dangerous for Venezuela. Moreover, this humanitarian aid is a "military-political tool."

The New York Times calls the aid, "An opposition effort to weaken President Maduro's support for food delivery." According to political scientist Dimitri Pantoulas, "Humanitarian assistance, with underlying agenda of 99 percent military purpose and one percent humanitarian aspect, seems to test the military's loyalty to Maduro, Are they with Maduro or not? Will they dismiss these contributions? If the answer is NO, Maduro's countdown starts. This is a challenge for the opposition who want to show that they can rule, but if they fail, Guaido will lose face forever."

The White House is notorious for its interventionist record. On the one hand, it puts on an act that the "humanitarian aid" will help eradicate its defamation, and on the other hand it "attacks" the country. In some cases, humanitarian aid serves as a cover for the U.S. next attack or occupation, as it was the case in Haiti and Somalia.

In fact, the humanitarian assistance to Venezuela, an attack tactic in reality, for the first time was raised by John Francis Kelly, a retired U.S. Marine Corps general who served as the White House Chief of Staff for President Donald Trump for less than two years. Kelly believed that the aid would be possible if an unrest took place in the country. [7](#)



See page 2

## #StandwithIlhan: Social media users defend Ilhan Omar after her forced apology over anti-Semitism

Social media users are flocking to #StandwithIlhan after Rep. Ilhan Omar was pressured to issue an apology for her tweets about the Israel lobby's influence over U.S. politicians, after she was accused of anti-Semitism.

Omar was seemingly forced to apologize by Democratic leadership after she tweeted about Israeli influence and named the powerful Israel lobbying group AIPAC as having a hold over U.S.

politicians.

Although her statements were backed up, Omar faced an onslaught of outrage from a wide range of commenters, from Chelsea Clinton to President Donald Trump, who said she should be "ashamed of herself." This despite the fact that Trump faced criticism for making anti-Semitic tropes about members of the Republican Jewish Coalition liking money and making deals when

he addressed them in 2015.

"I don't think her apology was adequate," he ironically said of Omar.

Omar "unequivocally" apologized for her remarks in a statement which also reaffirmed the problematic role of lobbyists in U.S. politics. This prompted many to accuse her of not apologizing enough, while her supporters expressed disappointment that she was apologizing at all. [3](#)

## Understanding Donald Trump and the White House: A few books

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Robert David Steele, a former Marine Corps infantry officer and CIA spy who was recommended for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, regularly answers questions for Tehran Times.

■ You have reviewed over 2,500 non-fiction books across 97 categories of non-fiction. At one point you were Amazon reviewer #25 and always

the top Amazon reviewer for non-fiction. How did this happen?

A: This was absolutely not planned. When Amazon first opened its book review feature over fifteen years ago, I had published two books, ON INTELLIGENCE: Spies and Secrecy in an Open World with a Foreword by Senator David Boren (D-OK), and THE NEW CRAFT OF INTELLIGENCE: Personal, Public, & Political with a Foreword by Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS), each

with an annotated bibliography for a total of 300 short reviews. I loaded these on a week-end and was instantly Amazon reviewer 1,500. After that I started doing longer summary reviews for my own memory reasons, reading roughly two books a week, and the collection, which is free online, has grown. I removed my reviews from Amazon when they started banning books, reviewers, and specific reviews that their Zionist controllers considered "politically incorrect." [7](#)

## E-government, a new opportunity that should be seized

By Setareh Behrooz

During recent months, Iran's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry promoted electronic government in the country. The first phase of e-government services project in Iran officially came on stream under the title of 'Mobile Government' in mid-May 2018.

The project aims to facilitate some govern-

ment services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

Iran's e-government is based on the National Information Network, an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure network in the country.

But what is e-government? Why is it important

to establish e-government and what differences that makes in the lives of citizens?

■ **Why e-government?**

Regarding the rise of internet penetration in different nations, the online services provided by the government inform citizens and facilitate their administrative procedures through e-services. [10](#)



## Hezbollah chief says multidimensional victories owing to Iran

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Lebanese Hezbollah leader has thanked Iran for its support, which "have led to victories in various fields."

Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah made the comments in a meeting with the visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday night, stressing Iran's role in Lebanon's ability to withstand the offensive approaches of the Israeli regime as well as that of terrorist groups.

He expressed hope that despite foreign pressure, Iran continues to support the Hezbollah resistance movement.

Zarif, for his part, underlined Iran's unchanging policy to support the Lebanese nation and government as well as the resistance movement. [2](#)

**Great opportunities for Japanese investment in Iran: Larijani**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani who was on tour of Tokyo proposed on Tuesday that there are great opportunities for Japan to invest in Iran.

"There are suitable opportunities for Japan's investment in Iran in various areas of industry, medicine, gas, oil and petrochemical industry," he said during

a meeting with Chuichi Date, speaker of Japan's House of Councilors.

Larijani said it is essential for the two countries to take more steps in line with strengthening relations.

Larijani, who visited Japan at the official invitation of his Japanese counterpart, also praised Japan's efforts to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal after the U.S. withdrawal.

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

Al-Wefaq, which has been dissolved and

banned from conducting any activity by the Al Khalifah rulers, said in a statement on Tuesday that Bahrainis have increasingly witnessed Manama's "corruption, tyranny and recklessness" over the years, Bahrain's Lulu TV reported.

Al-Wefaq described the country's deteriorating situation as "frightening," and warned of a bleak future. [13](#)



**ARTICLE**  
Martin Love  
Political analyst from North Carolina

Respect warranted for at least two bright Americans

**O**ne does not normally equate a person (who is retired now from decades in the CIA) as one with sound views and good instincts about the challenges to the world of a government that has been making – to put it simply – stupid moves and continues its errant ways under Donald Trump. But one such person is Philip Giraldi who writes articles outside the mainstream media about what he sees that is slowly destroying U.S. credibility worldwide.

In one article penned this month by Giraldi, he points out that the most disturbing aspect of the Trump gangsters is their presumption that decisions made by the government are binding on the rest of the world, as if the U.S. literally rules the world. For example, no other country has ever demanded that nations halt trading with each other outside of actual war, and sought to penalize them if they did trade.

Various rulings against Iran in the context of legislation have been particularly damaging, but any group or country that has been deemed a "state sponsor of terrorism", and that includes Syria of late, have been vilified. The notion that the U.S. ought to respect the sovereignty of other nations even when their internal policies disagree with the U.S., Giraldi says, has been abandoned. Nothing new here, sadly.

Giraldi is an American patriot in the very best sense of the word because he is not merely knowledgeable, but also quite simply an honest person at a time when, given the fact that most of the world's oil business is transacted in fiat dollars, the U.S. uses dollars, or their withdrawal, to interfere overseas and quite literally impoverish other countries that don't do the bidding of the U.S.

Iran is a case in point, but there are many others such as Maduro's Venezuela. But at the same time the U.S. is also, inadvertently, slowly destroying U.S. dollar hegemony, having weaponized it, to the point where across the world governments are trying desperately to figure out ways to do business without it. Someday, and no one knows when, the Petrodollar itself will in all likelihood be a relic of the past. [7](#)

## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**Rouhani to visit Sochi on Thursday**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to leave Tehran for Sochi, Russia, on Thursday to attend a trilateral meeting with Russian and Turkish leaders upon the official invitation by President Vladimir Putin.

Parviz Esmaeili, the presidential office's director for communications and information, said during the Sochi meeting, the three presidents will discuss the fight against terrorism, the Syrian crisis and the Astana talks which are aimed to resolve the Syrian conflict through diplomacy, ISNA reported.

The previous summit of the leaders of the three states was held in September last year in Tehran.



**Zarif lashes out at Trump's 40-years tweet**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a two-minute speech while listing the United States' failures over the past 40 years after U.S. President Donald Trump shared his perception of Iran's performance during the same period.

"40 Years of Failure to accept that Iranians will never return to submission. 40 Years of Failure to adjust US policy to reality. 40 Years of Failure to destabilize Iran through blood & treasure," Zarif tweeted on Tuesday.

"After 40 yrs of wrong choices, time for Donald Trump to rethink failed US policy," Zarif added.



**Trump after winning Iran back to his side: ex-officer**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — A former senior Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) commander has said President Donald Trump aims to win Iran back to Washington's side.

In an interview with the Etemad newspaper published on Tuesday, Hossein Alaei said Trump believes Iran must not oppose America's policies in the Middle East. He said Trump wants Iran to obey the U.S. like the Shah's time.

Trump is after negotiations with Iran from a position of power in order to impose his policies on the Islamic Republic and sign an agreement with Iran to get rid of Tehran's nuclear and missile programs for good, he commented.



**Tehran: Bolton suffering from chronic delusion about Iran**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Tehran says U.S. national security advisor John Bolton is suffering from a "chronic delusion" regarding Iran and Iranians.

Speaking with IRNA on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said Monday's celebrations of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution made Bolton realize that his desires and pipe dreams about Iran will never come true.

Bolton said earlier that "after 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has failed to fulfill its promises to uphold and safeguard the rights of its citizens. The 40th anniversary of the Iranian regime only serves to highlight four decades of failure and broken promises."



**Structural reform to be explored in weeks: MP**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — An Iranian lawmaker said on Monday structural reforms recommended by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will be put on the agenda of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination over the next couple of weeks.

Speaking on the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Mohammadreza Pourebrahimi said during the upcoming meeting of the council slated for next weeks, the heads of the three branches of the government will address the issue, Press TV reported.

He further stressed that the country is in urgent need of structural economic reforms.



**Photographer slams Trump's use of her photo in anti-Iran tweet**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Iranian photographer behind the photo from last year's protests in Tehran has given a statement denouncing U.S. President Donald Trump's use of her photo in his Monday tweet.

The photographer, Yalda Moayeri, in a post on her Instagram account on Tuesday said, "It would be a great honor for me if this image would be a symbol of freedom everywhere in the world."

"But having President Trump use it without my permission in a tweet in Persian even is a great shame for me and causes me deep sorrow," she added.

Moayeri criticized Trump's sanctions and travel ban against Iranians, saying her photo should not be "abused" by such men in Washington.

## POLITICS

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

# We seek war with no country, but defend ourselves solidly: Zarif

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says Iran does not seek war with any country, but that does not mean that Tehran will lose firmness in defending itself.

Zarif made the remarks in a meeting with foreign ambassadors and diplomats based in Tehran.

He also said foreign pressure has failed to bring the Iranian government to its knees, calling on the West to stop pursuing their pressure policy.

"No country has been subject to foreign plots as much as we have been," Zarif said.

In an open reference to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, Zarif said, "They said We will drag the war inside Iran", and they did so blatantly in their interviews. Then they sat for talks with our enemies and partook meetings with groups which they had had on their terror list barely two years earlier."

Elaborating on Iran's four decades of foreign policy, Zarif told the foreign diplomats: "Report to your countries that you can't tear apart the Iranians from their government through pressure."

"Believe this! You may be able to exert pressure... but this has a reverse effect on Iran."

Zarif boasted Iran's reliance on people to withstand foreign pressure, reminding the audience about Monday's huge turnout



**Zarif refutes claims that Iran only supports Shia nations, asking if Kuwait, Turkey or Qatar are Shia countries.**

in rallies marking the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

"You saw yesterday (Monday) that these

people are sticking to their revolution," Zarif said, according to IRNA.

"How many of you had written in your

## Pompeo's East Europe tour fails at once

European heavyweights criticize Warsaw conference

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's efforts to unify Eastern Europe against Russia, China and Iran failed at once when Budapest said it's fed up with lectures about its foreign policy.

Speaking in Hungary, the first stop in a five-nation European tour, Pompeo said, "We must not let [Russian President Vladimir] Putin drive a wedge between friends in NATO."

He claimed that the U.S. and its allies "know all too well from history" that "that Russia will never be a friend to the freedom and sovereignty of smaller nations," Russia Today reported.

He also warned his Hungarian counterpart about the dangers of working with China, saying, "Beijing's handshake comes with strings... that will leave Hungary indebted both economically and politically."

Szijjarto criticized the U.S. government, saying "the world is not going to be a better place if some countries spend their time intervening in the internal political affairs of other countries."

### ■ Enormous hypocrisy

He insisted that Budapest can have transparent relations with Moscow and Beijing and the West, and said it was an "enormous hypocrisy" that Hungary is singled out for its ties with Moscow.

Pompeo is also due to visit Slovakia and Poland, and is set to complete his journey with stops in Brussels and Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, on February 15.

In Warsaw, the U.S. and Poland are set to jointly host a conference on the Middle East that is expected to focus on



Iran. The conference runs from February 13 to 14.

On January 11, the U.S. secretary of state announced that Warsaw will host a conference that "includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence" in the region.

Late Tuesday, a Twitter storm was launched by users from Iran and resistant countries against the Warsaw conference, using the hashtag #wecondemndpolandsummit.

In yet another blow to Pompeo's anti-Iran agenda, it was confirmed on Monday that German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas will not attend the conference co-hosted by the U.S. and Poland in Warsaw.

"Foreign Minister Maas will not attend the Middle East conference in Warsaw," a German diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity told Anadolu Agency.

He said Deputy Foreign Minister Niels Annen will attend

the conference instead.

### ■ Chaotic decisions

Officials from three European countries of Germany, France and Britain have criticized the joint U.S.-Poland conference on the Middle East in Warsaw.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, one of them described it as "an unhelpful sideshow announced without any consultation or regard for America's traditional partners", The National reported on Tuesday.

"It's a series of chaotic decisions being made at random," said one European official based at the UN, referring to the Warsaw summit.

"The U.S. had one meeting with the Poles and decided that they'd hold a ministerial [gathering]. They didn't ask anyone else if they would come. It's a classic example of their lack of thinking things through."

Another European diplomat said, "We disagree about this conference. It's not how things should be done."

On January 13, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned Polish charge d'affaires to Tehran Wojciech Unolt to protest Poland's bid to co-host the anti-Iran conference.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has described the move as "shameful" in light of the fact that Iran saved Poles during World War II.

"Polish Govt can't wash the shame: while Iran saved Poles in WWII, it now hosts desperate anti-Iran circus," Zarif tweeted.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has said that she will not attend the Warsaw conference.

## Hezbollah chief says multidimensional victories owing to Iran

**1 →** On the same day, Zarif attended a joint press conference with Lebanese Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Minister Gebran Bassil in Beirut.

Zarif said all countries must facilitate the peace process in Syria and refrain from making decisions on its fate, stressing that foreign troops need to end their unauthorized presence in the country.

"All the forces entering Syria without the permission of the official leadership must exit," Zarif said.

He added that Iran is making efforts to help find a political solution to the crisis in Syria, emphasizing that any solution must protect the country's territorial integrity.

Elsewhere in the presser, Zarif expressed confidence that the new Lebanese government would resolve the political crisis in the country.

"We will always support the [Lebanese] people and extend a helping hand in every way possible, and we are ready to respond to the Lebanese government's request to cooperate with it in any vital area it deems appropriate," Iran's top diplomat said.

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

The new government, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, includes 30 ministers

from most Lebanese political factions, which have been in talks after the country held its first parliamentary elections in nine years in May 2018.

Speaking to reporters in the Lebanese capital on Sunday, shortly after his arrival for the two-day official visit, Zarif said Tehran is ready to cooperate with the new Lebanese government in all sectors.

"If the Lebanese government demands, Iran is ready to cooperate with this country in all fields," he said.

During Monday's presser, the Iranian foreign minister hailed the Lebanese government's stance on an anti-Iran conference due to be held by the U.S. in the Polish capital city of Warsaw on February 13-14.

The United States initially put much effort into making the Warsaw meeting an anti-Iran platform, but had to back away from many of its suppositions about the meeting, because it was snubbed by most world officials.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian foreign minister stressed the importance of developing economic ties with Lebanon, saying, "There is no international law that prevents Iran and Lebanon from cooperating. Even (the United Nations Security Council) Resolution 2231 requires all countries to normalize their economic relations with Iran."

Resolution 2231 enshrines the international nuclear agreement, officially known

as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), from which Washington withdrew in May under the pretext, among others, that it should have included Iran's missile program as well.

Under the deal, reached between Iran and six world powers -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany, Tehran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions.

**■ Safe return of Syrian refugees**

The Lebanese foreign minister, for his part, stressed the importance of finding a swift political solution to the Syria crisis and facilitating a safe return for Syrian refugees to their homeland.

"We support the formation of a Syrian constitution and all efforts aimed at facilitating a safe return of Syrian refugees to their homeland," Bassil said, highlighting Iran's support to help ensure their speedy and safe return.

"The Syrian state has a significant contribution that it can encourage the return of refugees through guarantees on individual property rights and military service," he added.

The top Lebanese diplomat also said that his country would not partake in the upcoming Warsaw conference due to Israel's presence.

"We explained why we will not be present at the Warsaw conference... Israel will be

present and because of the orientation the conference is expected to take," Bassil said.

He welcomed the establishment of economic ties between Tehran and Beirut "if there are frameworks that could protect Lebanon."

Earlier on Monday, Zarif met and conferred with the Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

During the meeting, Iran's foreign minister congratulated Lebanon's top parliamentarian on the formation of new government in the country, saying that Tehran is ready to expand its relations with Beirut in all fields.

He added that development of Tehran-Berri relations was in favor of both nations, emphasizing that Iran's relations with Lebanon were not aimed at harming any third country.

Zarif also highlighted economic and trade relations as major areas in which the two countries enjoyed enormous potential for cooperation.

For his part, the speaker of the Lebanese parliament congratulated Zarif on the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, expressing hope that relations between the two countries will expand in all areas.

Berri and Zarif also discussed the latest developments in Syria, noting that improvement in the country's security condition has been a very important and positive step.

## Politician: U.S. seeking to repeat Syrian scenario in Latin America

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, said on Tuesday that the U.S. is seeking to repeat the Syrian crisis in Latin America through interfering in Venezuela's affairs.

During a meeting with a number of political officials, parliamentarians and university professors from Latin American and Baltic states, Amir Abdollahian suggested that Venezuelans should hold dialogue and prevent foreign interference.

"Trump and the White House just care about their own interests and are not friend to any country. It has been for 40 years that Iran has said 'no' to the U.S. wrong policies and has stood on its own feet. Iran believes that all crises should be settled politically," he stated.

Elsewhere, he said despite the U.S. hostile behavior, Iran has been following the path of progress and set the policy of interaction with other countries, except for the Zionist regime, on its agenda.

The U.S. has recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido

as interim president of Venezuela.

In his meeting with the new Venezuelan Ambassador to Tehran Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones on February 2, President Hassan Rouhani said the unity between the Venezuelan government and people will foil the conspiracies organized by the U.S.

He reaffirmed Iran's support for the legitimate Venezuelan government, underlining that through unity the Venezuelan people should prove to Washington that they will not let the U.S. interfere in their country's internal affairs.

## #StandwithIlhan: Social media users defend Ilhan Omar after her forced apology over anti-Semitism

**1 →** Many voicing their support for Omar pointed to American values of freedom of speech and shared a petition urging the Democratic leadership to stand up against "bad faith attacks" targeting Omar even after her apology. Others said they had donated to her campaign.

Social media users also provided more information to back up Omar's initial tweets about Israel's influence, and pointed to disconnects between House Leader Nancy Pelosi's statement supporting Israel and denouncing "racism, prejudice and discrimination" in light of freedoms not offered to Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

A former Democratic campaign staffer created a Twitter thread outlining how an Ohio congressional candidate he was working for was approached by AIPAC, which promised a campaign donation in exchange for his candidate making two statements in line with Israel's interests.

(Source: RT)



## 70 civilians killed, injured as U.S.-led coalition warplanes pound Syrian town

Dozens of civilians, mostly women and children, have lost their lives and sustained injuries when the United States-led coalition purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfir terrorist group launched a fresh round of airstrikes against an area in Syria's troubled eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Local sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA on Tuesday that the aerial attacks targeted the outskirts of al-Baghuz town, leaving 70 people dead and injured as a result.

The sources added that the airstrikes hit a makeshift camp, which internally displaced people had set up in the area after fleeing fierce exchanges of gunfire between the U.S.-led coalition and the last remnants of the ISIL Takfir terrorist group.

They noted that the death toll is expected to rise as some of the injured are in critical condition, and they cannot be moved since the area is under heavy shelling.

On Saturday, the U.S.-led military aircraft bombarded al-Tayyaneh town in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr province, leaving three people dead and several others injured.

The aerial assaults damaged some private and public property in the targeted area as well.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes and operations against what are said to be ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus or a United Nations mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying ISIL.

Syria has on numerous occasions condemned airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition, asking the UN to force Washington and its allies to put an end to their military intervention in the country.

On January 19, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, in two separate letters addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the former rotating president of the Security Council, Francisco Antonio Correa, censured the U.S.-led coalition strikes conducted against al-Baghuz al-Tahtani village in Dayr al-Zawr a day earlier, saying the U.S.-led warplanes had targeted dozens of families fleeing from areas controlled by ISIL.

Local sources, requesting anonymity, told SANA that 20



people were killed in the raid when the U.S.-led warplanes bombarded residential buildings in al-Baghuz al-Tahtani.

"This new crime is in line with the criminal acts that the U.S.-led coalition is perpetrating systematically and on a daily basis against Syrian people, and in flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said the letters.

"The activities of this alliance are illegal as it has been formed outside the UN framework. Such acts have only contributed to the expansion of extremist terrorist organizations, especially Daesh. Cooperation and coordination between these terrorist groups and this alliance has been documented in numerous letters that [the] Syrian Arab Republic has sent to the Security Council," added the letters.

The ministry also called on the UN Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities regarding the establishment of international peace and security, and put an immediate halt to crimes against humanity that were being carried out by this "rogue" coalition against Syrian civilians and infrastructure.

It also demanded that the Council take necessary measures to set up an international mechanism to punish the perpetrators of such crimes.

### Russia, Turkey 'agree on need for decisive measures' in Syria's Idlib

Meantime, Russia and Turkey say they agree on the need to take "decisive measures" to stabilize the situation in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, ahead of a summit between the presidents of the three guarantor states of a negotiated Syrian ceasefire, namely Iran, Russia, and Turkey.

The agreement was outlined in a joint statement released following talks between Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar in the Turkish capital of Ankara on Monday.

The statement, which stressed "security in the Idlib demilitarized zone," however, did not specify what the measures would be or when they might be adopted.

"Despite provocations, we underlined the importance and need to continue partnerships between our two countries' intelligence and military forces to establish peace and to support stability in Idlib," it said.

Separately, Akar said that Ankara was in talks with Moscow "at all levels" in an attempt to "restore peace and stability in the region and protect interests of both countries." He also expressed hope that such cooperation would contribute to "world peace."

Shoigu, for his part, said that earlier this month, Russian and Turkish military experts had met in Moscow to discuss "the most important issues for the Syrian settlement regarding further stabilization in the Idlib zone and everything that concerns the eastern bank of the Euphrates."

Idlib Province remains largely unsettled because it remains a concentration point of armed groups. Over the past couple of years, armed groups that have been defeated in battles with the Syrian military have been based into Idlib under agreements with Damascus. While those groups have mostly had to leave their heavy weaponry behind under the deals, they have been allowed to take their small arms with them.

Iran, Russia, and Turkey, which have committed to guaranteeing negotiations in Syria, have been negotiating a settlement for Idlib. Ankara represents Syrian opposition interests, and Tehran and Moscow are Damascus allies.

The meeting between the Russian and Turkish defense ministers comes before a planned summit of the presidents of Iran, Russia, and Turkey on the peace process in Syria.

Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara have been mediating peace negotiations between representatives from Damascus and Syrian opposition groups in a series of rounds held in Astana and other places since January 2017. The talks are collectively referred to as the Astana peace process.

(Source: agencies)

## British PM May has no plans to resign this summer



Prime Minister Theresa May has no plans to resign this summer, her political spokesman said on Tuesday, denying reports that the British leader was ready to step aside after Brexit.

May said on Tuesday she wanted lawmakers from all parties to back the Brexit deal she is aiming to strike, citing the need to pass further legislation to prepare for Britain's exit from the European Union.

"It is actually, I think, in the interests of this parliament, and in the interests of taking legislation through, that we see a strong vote from across the whole house," May told parliament.

The Sun newspaper reported that May was preparing to resign in the summer to have influence over who succeeds her.

### UK Parliament will not vote on revised Brexit deal this week

British Prime Minister Theresa May told her top team of ministers Tuesday that parliament would not be asked to vote on a revised Brexit deal this week as she needed more time to negotiate with the European Union, her office said.

May is seeking changes to the deal she agreed with the bloc last year, after lawmakers rejected it largely due to concerns over an insurance policy aimed at avoiding the return of border controls on the island of Ireland.

"She said it is clear that these discussions with the EU will need a little more time to conclude and so we will not be bringing forward a meaningful vote this week," a spokeswoman

for May's office said in a statement following May's weekly meeting with her cabinet of ministers.

The United Kingdom is on course to leave the European Union on March 29 without a deal unless May can convince the bloc to amend the divorce deal she agreed in November and then sell it to sceptical British lawmakers.

"The talks are at a crucial stage," May will tell parliament's House of Commons Tuesday, according to remarks supplied by her Downing Street office. "We now all need to

hold our nerve to get the changes this House has required and deliver Brexit on time."

British lawmakers overwhelmingly rejected May's withdrawal deal last month, with the major sticking point being the Irish 'backstop' - an insurance policy to prevent the return of a hard border between the British province of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Critics say the policy could leave Britain subject to EU rules for years or even indefinitely after leaving the bloc.

The EU says the backstop is vital to avoiding

the return of border controls in Ireland and has refused to reopen the Brexit divorce deal, though May insists she can get legally binding changes to replace the most contentious parts of the backstop.

"By getting the changes we need to the backstop; by protecting and enhancing workers' rights and environmental protections; and by enhancing the role of parliament in the next phase of negotiations I believe we can reach a deal that this House can support," May will say.

European Union Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said Monday the bloc would agree to tweak the political declaration on EU-UK ties after Brexit that forms part of the package, to reflect a plan for a closer future relationship that could obviate the need for the contentious backstop.

"It's clear from our side that we are not going to reopen the withdrawal agreement but we will continue our discussion in the coming days," Barnier said.

The leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom, said lawmakers would back May's deal if there were assurances the backstop was time-limited or the United Kingdom was allowed to leave it unilaterally, suggesting the deal itself did not need to be renegotiated.

"The point is to ensure the UK cannot be held in a backstop permanently, how it's achieved is not something to be purist about," Leadsom told BBC radio.

(Source: agencies)

## EU will dissolve like Soviet Union unless Europeans 'wake up', George Soros warns

The "sleeping pro-Europe majority" must "wake up" before the EU goes the way of the Soviet Union, billionaire George Soros has warned, adding that Europe's political parties must give the bloc's interests first priority.

Pro-EU political parties must rally support ahead of crucial European Parliament elections in May, the Hungarian-American businessman and controversial influencer wrote in an op-ed published by Project Syndicate.

The bloc is "sleepwalking into oblivion" and could soon meet the same end as the Soviet Union, Soros prophesized. In order to avoid catastrophe, he argued, right-minded political parties must resist the lure of EU skepticism sweeping across the continent and "put Europe's interests ahead of their own." He chastised Germany's ruling coalition for not being adequately pro-EU out of fear of losing votes to the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD), while praising

the German Greens for being "the only consistently pro-European party in the country."

On the topic of Italy, Soros chided the EU for "strictly enforcing" an agreement "which unfairly burdens countries like Italy where migrants first enter the EU." As a result, the massive influx of migrants into Europe has transformed the once pro-EU Italy into a bastion of populism, Soros lamented.

(Source: RT)

## Acting Pentagon chief makes unannounced visit to Iraqi capital



Acting United States Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has arrived in Baghdad on an unannounced visit as anger grows in Iraq over Washington's continued military presence in Iraq despite the collapse of the Takfiri Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit there.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Shanahan said that his trip came at the invitation of the Iraqi government, adding, "Our interests are to build Iraqi security capability."

"I want to hear first-hand from them about concerns, the political dynamics that they are facing and then based on that we will obviously factor that into our planning," he pointed out.

The Pentagon chief is scheduled to sit down with Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and exchange views with the U.S. commanders about the Syria withdrawal plans.

Asked about the possibility of moving American forces in Syria to Iraq, Shanahan said that he would hold conversations on the issue during his visit.

Last December, the U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to withdraw all 2,000 American forces from Syria and withdraw up to half of the roughly 14,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, however, Trump said that he wanted to keep the U.S. troops in Iraq in order to keep a close eye on Iran.

"All I want to do is be able to watch. We have an unbelievable and expensive military base built in Iraq. It's perfectly situated for looking at all over different parts of the troubled Middle East rather than pulling up," he said.

The remarks sparked angry reactions from Iraqi officials.

Iraq's most senior Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said that his country was opposed to serving as a launching pad to harm other states.

Both Iraqi President Barham Salih and Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi hit back at Trump's comments.

Shanahan replaced Jim Mattis, who resigned last December over policy disagreements with Trump, including whether to pull the U.S. troops out of Syria.

Shanahan is the third U.S. official to visit Iraq in less than two months after earlier visits by President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The U.S. president in December 2018 prompted a wave of fury and condemnations in Iraq when he paid a surprise visit to the country and visited American troops in the western province of Anbar, with no stop in Baghdad.

The U.S., backed by Britain, invaded Iraq in 2003 claiming that the former regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

No such weapons, however, were ever found, and the invaders withdrew from Iraq, after nearly nine years of a military campaign that cost tens of thousands of Iraqi lives.

Leading a new coalition of its allies, the U.S. returned to Iraq in 2014, when the Takfiri ISIL terror group unleashed a campaign of destruction in the country.

Widespread reports, however, said the Washington-led operations largely spared the terrorists and led, instead, to civilian deaths and inflicted damage on Iraqi infrastructure.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. denies telling banks to stop working with Palestinians

The United States has denied accusations it is pressuring banks to stop dealing with the Palestinian government, whose relations with Washington have been plummeting.

Several Palestinian officials have accused the U.S. of trying to force banks not to deal with transactions linked to the Palestinian Authority, which has limited self-rule in the occupied West Bank.

"The United States has not requested that foreign donors restrict assistance to the Palestinians, nor has it requested that financial institutions cease transfers to Palestinian Authority bank accounts," a US official told AFP late Monday.

"We are aware of media reports suggesting this has occurred. Those reports are incorrect."

On Sunday, senior Palestinian official Hussein al-Sheikh charged that Washington was launching a "financial siege" on the PA.

"Major international financial institutions and parties have begun to accede to an American request to impose a tight financial siege on the Palestinian Authority," he told AFP.

"Washington has asked for financial aid given to the authority to be stopped, and it has also issued a circular to banks not to receive transfers for the authority's accounts."

Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki has said on local radio that the U.S. was using "all means to press Arab countries to stop financial support for our people."

Relations between the U.S. and the Palestinians have broken down since President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in late 2017.

The Palestinians consider the eastern part of the city their capital and have boycotted the Trump administration since.

In response the U.S. has cut more than \$500 million in annual aid to the Palestinians, mostly to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees.

The cuts have worsened longterm financial shortfalls for the PA, which is heavily reliant on international aid.

(source: AFP)

## STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	157973.3
IFX	1934.81

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

## CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,369 rials
GBP	54,028 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

## COMMODITIES

Brent	\$63.26/b
WTI	\$54.00/b
OPEC Basket	\$61.37/b
Gold	\$1,311.75 /oz
Silver	\$15.75/oz
Platinum	\$789.80 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

## NEWS IN BRIEF



## Aluminum ingot production rises 5% in 10 months on year

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Production of aluminum ingot by three major producers in Iran has risen five percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 – January 20, 2019) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As reported, the three major producers produced 267,000 tons of aluminum ingots during the nine-month period of this year, IRNA reported on Tuesday.



## Tehran hosting intl. exhibition of glass, related machinery

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran's Second International Exhibition of Glass, Related Equipment and Machinery kicked off at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Tuesday, IRIB reported.

As reported, 57 Iranian as well as foreign exhibitors are showcasing their latest products and services and also their new achievements in the glass industry during the four-day event.

This edition of the exhibit was inaugurated by Seifollah Amiri, the director general of Mineral Industries Office of the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.



## 20% of FKA Co. shares to be divested at IFB soon

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — "Some 20 percent of the shares of FKA Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Company is to be offered at Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB) soon" a deputy from Iran's Social Security Investment Company (SSIC) announced.

"FKA is a subsidiary of SSCI and the first round of divesting its shares at IFB will be done on the way to increase public participation in owing companies and making SSCI swift," Mehran Keramati was quoted as saying by the public relations department of the organization.

## Over 155 companies attending Iran's intl. exhibit of cement, bitumen

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Over 155 domestic and foreign companies are showcasing their latest achievements and products in the 10th International Exhibition of Cement, Concrete, Bitumen, Asphalt and Related Equipment and Machinery of Iran (CEMENTEX & BAIXE 2019).

The exhibit kicked off on Tuesday at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds and will wrap up on Friday, IRIB reported.



As reported, the number of exhibitors has increased by 40 percent compared to the last year's event.

The exhibition is mainly focused on bitumen and cement related products and technologies related to these industries.

Some trade delegations from neighboring countries as well as some CIS nations are also scheduled to visit the exhibition.

## Iran's exports to Russia increase 36% in 2018

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran's value of exports to Russia rose 36 percent in 2018, Iran's Commercial Attaché to Russia Farhad Parand announced.

Parand said Iran has exported \$533 million of goods to Russia in 2018 while the figure was \$392 million in 2017, Trade Promotion Organization (IPO) of Iran published on its website on Tuesday.

Iran's commercial attaché to Russia also announced that the value of Iran-Russia annual trade has increased two percent to \$1.74 billion in 2018.

He mentioned pistachio, raisin, date, apple, cucumber, potato, fish, shrimp, milk, cheese, tea, kiwi, cabbage, lettuce, copper, cement, plastic and chemical products as the main items exported from Iran to Russia in the past year.

He further referred to ditching dollar in bilateral trade transactions and using national



currencies of the two countries instead, and also removing customs problems as two major factors for improving trade between Iran and Russia.

In a recent interview with TASS, Russia's Ambassador to Iran Levan Dzhagaryan has said that 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.

"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.

## 3 state-run institutes pen pact on expansion of technological, industrial culture

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran's Industrial Management Institute, ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), and Tehran University's Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics inked a trilateral agreement to boost and ease regional cooperation on industrial and technological culture, the public relation department of Industrial Management Institute announced.

"The agreement is to improve cooperation on policy-making, programming, and holding joint international seminars to provide proper plans for expansion of industrial culture,"

Managing Director of Industrial Management Institute Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari said on the signing ceremony of the contract.

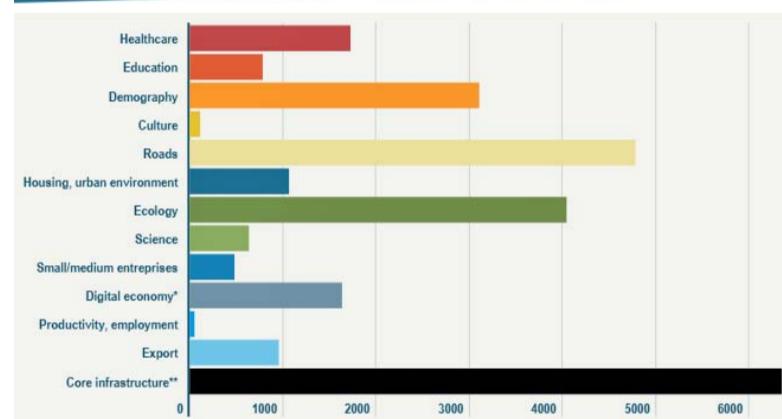
Underlining the significance of cultural issues in industrial and technological fields, the official voiced his institute's readiness for planning a pattern and awarding of ECO medal to individuals and organizations.

As reported, the agreement was signed in the presence of Kiani Bakhtiari and ECI Head Mohammad Mehdi Mazaheri and Head of Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics Ali Akbar Mousavi Movahedi.



## Russia unveils €390b plan to overhaul its economy

## RUSSIA'S 2024 NATIONAL PROJECTS INVESTMENTS, IN BILLION RUBLES



The Russian government unveiled on Monday a €390 billion plan to overhaul its economy by 2024, at the end of what should be President Vladimir Putin's last term in office.

The investment programme, which features 13 so-called National Projects, follows the "May Decrees" signed by Putin after his re-election last year, in which he pledged to cut poverty in half and significantly boost life expectancy.

## Where is the money going?

A quarter of the money (6.3 trillion rubles/€85.5 billion) has been earmarked to revamp the country's core infrastructure. Roads and car safety will be the second biggest expenditure (4.78 trillion rubles/€64.4 billion), with ecology rounding up the top three (4.04 trillion rubles/€54.5 billion).

## What are some of the goals?

Below are some of the biggest goals to be reached by 2024 outlined in the investment programme:

- Digital economy: Increase domestic spending in the sector to three times the 2017 level; ensure at least 90% of softwares used by government institutions and 70% by state-run companies is Russian-made.

- Education: Russia to break into the world's 10 leading countries for education.

- Demography: Increase the fertility rate to

1.7 per woman from an expected 1.63 in 2019.

- Ecology: Reduce the level of air pollution in large industrial centres, including a decrease of at least 20% of total pollutant emissions to the air in the most polluted cities.

- Science: Country to become one of the top five destinations for research and development; enhance Russia's attractiveness to "leading foreign scientists" and "young promising researchers."

- Exports: Increase export volume of non-energy goods to \$250 billion per year from an expected \$160 billion in 2019 which represents a 64% increase.

## How it will be financed?

Just over half of the money will come from the federal budget, according to the report. A further 5 trillion rubles will be paid by regions, while 7.5 trillion rubles will come from "extrabudgetary sources."

Last August, ahead of the expensive investment programme, Russia's government increased the country's value-added tax (VAT) by from 18% to 20% which came into effect on January 1.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev announced in December that interim results for the investment programme will be published annually.

(Source: Euronews)

## Hammond's Brexit 'dividend' claim rejected as UK economy stalls

Philip Hammond's claim that Britain can reap an economic dividend from Theresa May's Brexit deal has been flatly rejected by MPs, as official figures confirmed the UK has suffered its worst year for GDP growth since 2012.

In a highly critical report, the Treasury select committee warned that the chancellor's claims of a "deal dividend" if Britain avoided a no-deal exit lacked credibility.

The criticism came after data on Monday showed the economy grew by just 0.2% in the final three months of 2018, down from 0.6% in the third quarter. The fourth-quarter figures contained signs of an even sharper slowdown, with the economy posting a decline of 0.4% in December amid signs that Brexit uncertainty is taking hold.

For 2018 as a whole, GDP growth slipped to its lowest since 2012, at 1.4%, down from 1.8% in 2017.

Nicky Morgan MP, the Conservative chair of the committee, said Hammond's "dividend" claim, at the Conservative party conference last year, had already been undermined by the government's independent forecaster, the Office for Budget Responsibility. The OBR had told the committee the dividend was not an economic boost so much as "avoiding something really bad" in the form of a no-deal departure.

The OBR already assumes an orderly Brexit, so there won't be a 'deal dividend' beyond the forecast just by avoiding no-deal. Business confidence may improve with increased certainty, but it's not credible to describe this as a dividend," said Morgan.

The OBR has made a smooth departure from the EU a key part of its forecasts, which prompted the Treasury committee to state there is no evidence of an economic boost from supporting the deal over and above those central estimates.

Hammond has repeatedly suggested that, should parliament throw its weight behind Theresa May's Brexit plan, it would generate a dual economic boost for the country by lifting the fog of uncertainty blocking businesses investment, while also allowing him to spend public funds held in reserve for a no-deal scenario.

Reacting to Morgan's comments, Treasury

insiders dismissed the suggestion that Britain would not see a deal dividend from MPs supporting the prime minister's Brexit plan, as it would give firms more clarity about the future trading relationship between the UK and the EU.

"The chancellor has been clear that when we agree a good deal we will harvest a deal dividend. This is because businesses will have the certainty they need to invest, grow and create jobs which will improve the public finances," the source said.

Most economists believe that Britain agreeing a Brexit deal with Brussels would help to give firms clarity for the future, potentially unleashing projects that have been put on hold due to the uncertainty.

Amit Kara, the head of UK macroeconomics research at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, said: "It could be a dividend as all we're saying is we're moving from an acute phase of uncertainty to remaining within the EU for at least the next two years."

He added: "The dividend is just because of the mess at the moment."

The committee's intervention undermines one of Theresa May's key arguments to persuade MPs to back her withdrawal agreement with less than 50 days to go before Brexit. It also comes as the British economy shows increasing signs of stress as the deadline for the article 50 process looms ever closer, causing more business to put their plans to invest in Britain on hold.

Growth figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed that business investment in the final three months of 2018 declined sharply. Corporate spending tumbled for the fourth successive quarter – falling by 1.4% in the final quarter of 2018 alone – for the first time since the 2008 financial crisis.

Companies have intensified their contingency planning to cope with the possibility of a disruptive Brexit. Car manufacturers are stockpiling parts, banks have moved employees to Ireland and continental Europe and two Japanese electronics firms, Panasonic and Sony, have moved their EU headquarters to mainland Europe.

(Source: The Guardian)

## New Zealand's central bank could be the next to turn dovish

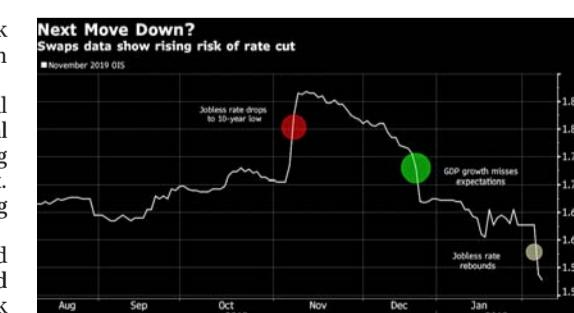
New Zealand's central bank may acknowledge the rising risk of an interest-rate cut when it delivers its first policy decision of the year.

While Governor Adrian Orr is expected to hold the official cash rate at a record-low 1.75 percent on Wednesday and signal no change for some time, he could concede there's an increasing possibility of looser policy as global growth concerns mount. Traders have ramped up bets on a rate cut and are now pricing in a 90 percent chance of one by November, swaps data show.

"The RBNZ will reaffirm a data-dependent 'watch and wait' stance, though the 'worry' element is growing," said Sharon Zollner, chief New Zealand economist at ANZ Bank in Auckland. "When global growth slows, the New Zealand economy inevitably feels the chill, and the data flow out of both China and Australia, who together take 40 percent of our goods exports, has turned rapidly south."

The RBNZ will publish its decision at the new time of 2 p.m. in Wellington as it prepares for the formal introduction of an enlarged policy committee later this year. Orr holds a press conference an hour later.

Globally, central banks are growing more wary of raising rates amid slower expansion and risks such as the U.S.-China trade dispute and Brexit. The U.S. Federal Reserve has paused its rate increases, while Australia's Reserve Bank this month



abandoned its tightening bias as a slumping property market damped the inflation outlook.

The RBNZ may follow suit after New Zealand's economy slowed in the second half of last year, jobs growth stuttered and the housing market cooled. The nation's benchmark 10-year bond yield dropped to a record low of 2.08 percent last week, leading an Asian bond rally as investors turn to less risky assets.

## Economists say...

While the RBNZ is unlikely to adopt an explicit easing bias, economists think it may move to a neutral stance by pushing its forecasts for higher rates further out into the future.

Westpac Banking Corp. chief New Zealand economist Dominick Stephens said he expects the RBNZ's new OCR forecast to be flat through mid-2021. In November, the central bank projected rates would start to rise from the third quarter of

# Venezuela's Maduro seeks OPEC help against U.S. sanctions: letter

Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro has sought OPEC support against U.S. sanctions imposed on his country's oil industry, citing their impact on oil prices and potential risks for other members of the producer group.

But a source familiar with the matter said the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, of which Venezuela is a founding member, had declined to make any formal statement. OPEC says it is concerned with oil policy, not politics.

More than 40 nations including the United States, European powers and most of Latin America have recognized Maduro's rival, Juan Guaido, as the country's rightful head of state, following disputed elections last year.

The request was made in a letter sent to OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo dated Jan. 29 and seen by Reuters, a day after the United States imposed sanctions on Venezuelan state oil firm PDVSA.

"Our country hopes to receive the solidarity and full support of the member countries of OPEC and its ministerial Conference, in the fight we are currently having against the illegal and arbitrary intrusion of the United States in the internal affairs of Venezuela," Maduro wrote.

I seek "your firm support and collaboration to jointly denounce and face this shameless



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro (R) and OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo, shake hands during their meeting at Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela February 5, 2018. Miraflores Palace/Handout via REUTERS

dispossession of ... important assets of one of the members of OPEC", the letter said.

He wrote that OPEC should help to determine

potential solutions based on "the impact that this action has on the global energy market, and the risk it represents for the other countries ...

of this organization".

The sanctions on Venezuela have boosted global oil prices, which were trading at around \$62 a barrel on Monday. The move has disrupted shipments as more than 20 tankers loaded with Venezuelan oil have been anchored off the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Still, analysts say there is ample spare capacity in other oil producers such as Saudi Arabia plus strategic reserves in consuming nations to compensate for a loss of Venezuela's exports.

OPEC tends to avoid political disputes involving individual members. Last year, it declined a request from Iran for a discussion of U.S. sanctions against Tehran at a policy-setting meeting.

Venezuela was once a top-three OPEC oil producer but production has been in decline for years following the collapse of the country's economy.

Energy research and consulting firm Rystad sees Venezuelan production plummeting to 680,000 barrels per day (bpd) next year, from 1.34 million bpd at the end of 2018. Venezuela pumped 3 million bpd at the turn of the century.

Together with Libya and Iran, Venezuela is exempt from the latest OPEC-led supply cut due to the involuntary decline in production.

(Source: Reuters)

## Libya's Haftar takes control of country's largest oil field



Forces loyal to Libya's eastern leader Khalifa Haftar have taken control of the country's largest oil field and pledged to hand it over to the National Oil Corporation once it's fully secured.

Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army had fanned out in Sharara, people with knowledge of the matter confirmed, as speculation mounted that a deal was reached with guards and armed protesters who closed down the 300,000 barrel-per-day field in December, demanding more money and investment in the remote southwestern region.

In a telephone interview, LNA spokesman Ahmed al-Mismari said forces had entered the main oil-producing area of Sharara without a fight, days after arriving at substation unit NC-186, about 30 kilometers (19 miles) away. The LNA was still working to secure the field against long-range weapons and there was no plan to enter the nearby El Feel field for now, he said.

"We need to secure the field completely then we will hand it over to the National Oil Corporation like we handed over Ras Lanuf," he said. "We want to assure the oil market that Sharara will return to production soon."

"It was a non-violent operation with no weapons used. All the oil installations are sound and undamaged."

There was no immediate comment from the NOC. It was not immediately possible to verify to the specific locations of various forces.

The developments follow days of conflicting reports about the situation in the southwest and whether the United Nations-backed authorities in Tripoli had dispatched forces to confront Haftar. The LNA clashed some days ago with fighters loyal to Ali Kana, a

(Source: Bloomberg)

supporter of the Tripoli government in the west, raising concern that a new war was brewing close to some of the country's most valuable energy installations.

The LNA, Libya's largest and best-organized military force, already controls the so-called oil crescent, a coastal area containing the major exporting terminals. Its push southward toward Sharara has stoked fears among Haftar's foes and increased concern in the oil market about stability of supply in the nation with Africa's largest proven crude reserves.

The LNA has called on the NOC to lift the force majeure in place at Sharara, a joint venture between the NOC, Repsol SA, Total SA, OMV AG and Equinor ASA. Force majeure is a legal status protecting a party from liability if it can't fulfill a contract for reasons beyond its control. However, the NOC hasn't yet issued instructions to restart production at the field.

The lack of clarity about what's happening in the south had cast doubt on Libya's plan to boost output to 2.1 million barrels a day by the end of 2021. The nation's internal turmoil led the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in December to exempt Libya from participating in global production cuts.

(Source: Bloomberg)

The agreements that GE and Siemens signed last year with the previous administration were intended to add 14 and 11 gigawatts to Iraq's grid respectively.

However, Khatteeb pointed out that both companies' plans are still under review, and "certainly it's going to be quite challenging to blindly accept such proposals". He added that while the agreements are a "step forward" they are non-binding.

Khatteeb says he is relying on volunteer experts to help "read in between the lines of these sophisticated legal contractual documents", to avoid mistakes that would burden future generations. "It's a respon-

sibility. It's not about 'let's sign this deal blindly and move on,'" he said.

GE said it was still working on developing energy supplies in Iraq. The company said in a statement: "Our presence in Iraq is based on a partnership that spans over 50 years. We continue to partner with the government of Iraq to deliver reliable and efficient energy to the Iraqi people."

Siemens declined to comment.

The prospect of turning their agreements with Iraq into firm contracts is particularly important for both companies because it comes at a time when the world market for fossil fuel power generation equipment has been in steep decline. Orders for GE's power division dropped by 23 percent last year.

Iraq's electricity sector absorbed at least \$5.4bn worth of U.S. reconstruction funding from the 2003 invasion up to 2012. But despite Iraq having some of the world's richest natural energy resources, decades of damage in conflicts compounded by alleged corruption and mismanagement has left the country producing around half the power needed to keep the lights on.

Meanwhile, demand is rocketing as Iraq's 40m population grows by about 1m a year.

(Source: Financial Times)

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Meanwhile, demand is rocketing as Iraq's 40m population grows by about 1m a year.

(Source: Financial Times)

## The biggest threat to oil market stability



The oil market should be mostly balanced this year, although "policy risk" will be a much larger driver for oil prices than the underlying fundamentals, according to a new report from Standard Chartered.

Brent crude started the year off repairing the damage from the epic meltdown in the fourth quarter, but over the last few weeks oil prices have rebounded. Standard Chartered sees Brent rising much farther, averaging as high as \$74 per barrel this year, before averaging as high as \$83 per barrel in 2020.

However, this forecast hinges on a variety of key policy decisions. First, OPEC+ must keep its production cuts in place, and indeed the group needs to cap output at January levels. If they can manage that, then global crude inventories would only rise by a minor 0.1 million barrels per day (mb/d), according to Standard Chartered.

That would set the stage for a better situation for OPEC+ next year. "With non-OPEC growth expected to be limited outside North America, and U.S. oil supply expected to slow markedly, we think OPEC will be able to raise output by 0.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) in 2020 without unbalancing the market," Emily Ashford and Paul Horsnell wrote in a Standard Chartered report.

Although the supply/demand fundamentals appear to be "benign" in the face of OPEC+ market management, additional "policy risk" could have an outsized impact on prices.

Standard Chartered singled out the U.S. government as a major source of volatility. "If the balances were the sole driver of OPEC output policy, the stage would have been set for a relatively quiet year," the investment bank wrote. "However, there is a disruptive factor in the market which is likely to complicate policy choices; U.S. policy has become harder to predict."

After a quiet first year from President Trump, 2018 was markedly different. "13 market-moving tweets on oil expressing a strong desire for lower prices, significant developments in policy towards Iran and Venezuela, and a sense

issuing no new waivers for sanctions, with the stated goal of getting Iran's oil exports to zero. At around 1 mb/d currently, achieving that goal would amount to a major loss of supply.

The problem is that Trump's goal of regime change in Venezuela conflicts with its Iran policy. Simply put, it is going to be tough to shut in output in both countries without sending crude oil prices significantly higher. If anything is certain when it comes to Trump's whims and desires, it is that he wants low gasoline prices. It's not clear how he achieves that while simultaneously encircling and shutting down the oil industries in both Venezuela and Iran.

Beyond Venezuela and Iran, another source of great uncertainty is the global economy. The U.S.-China trade war may be on hold, but the deadline for a deal is only a few weeks away. A ratcheting up of tensions could kneecap the global economy – and it's a decision that is entirely up to Trump.

It isn't just Trump, however. Another layer of uncertainty will come from the implementation of regulations on marine fuels by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The sulfur concentration in marine fuels will have to drop from 3.5 percent to just 0.5 percent by January 2020, which could cause some upheaval in refined fuel markets. Indeed, the margins for gasoline and diesel have already diverged significantly.

This is a rather long list of major policy decisions and endeavors that complicate any pricing forecast, and in fact, they question the very utility of trying to predict oil prices in this environment.

As Standard Chartered noted, if we simply extrapolate forward OPEC+ cuts we can come to the conclusion that inventories would be mostly balanced, resulting in "a quiet year" for oil.

However, even as OPEC+ commands enormous influence over crude prices, the oil market is at the mercy of a handful of policy decisions, many of which will be made by the U.S. government.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Oil up 1% on Saudi and OPEC cuts but outlook picture clouded

Oil prices gained about 1 percent on Tuesday, supported by OPEC-led production cuts and U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela, though remain wary of surging U.S. output and the outcome of U.S.-China trade talks.

Brent crude futures were up 61 cents at \$62.12 a barrel and U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures rose 54 cents to \$52.95 a barrel by 0950 GMT.

The continuing closure of parts of the Keystone pipeline that brings Canadian oil into the United States also helped to prop up WTI, traders said, after a partial shutdown at a Phillips 66 crude distillation unit led to initial sell-offs on Monday.

Analysts said markets are tightening because of voluntary production cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia, as well as U.S. sanctions on OPEC members Venezuela and Iran.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top exporter and de facto leader of OPEC, said on Tuesday that it would reduce oil production to nearly 9.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in March, about half a million bpd more than it originally pledged.

Also at the radar are hopes expressed by U.S. and Chinese officials that a new round of talks, which began in Beijing on Monday, would bring them closer to easing their months-long trade war.

Beijing and Washington are trying to hammer out a deal before a March 1 deadline, without which U.S. tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports are scheduled to increase to 25 percent from 10 percent.

However, climbing U.S. oil production, fighting near Libya's main oilfield, sanctions on Venezuela and suspense over whether the U.S. will grant more waivers to import Iranian oil leave markets unsure about the broader supply picture.

"We believe that oil is not pricing in supply-side risks lately as markets are currently focused on U.S.-China trade talks", JP Morgan said in a weekly note.

Should U.S.-China talks succeed, the U.S. bank said that oil markets would "switch attention from macro concerns impacting future demand growth to physical tightness and geopolitical risks impacting immediate supply".

Bank of America also warned of a "significant slowing" in global growth, adding that it expects Brent and WTI to average \$70 and \$59 a barrel respectively in 2019 and \$65 and \$60 in 2020.

(Source: Reuters)

## Kremlin: no talks are underway to create new Russia-OPEC alliance

The Kremlin said on Tuesday there were no substantial talks currently taking place to establish an alliance between Russia and OPEC.

Energy Minister Alexander Novak said in December it was highly unlikely OPEC and other oil producers would set up a joint structure due to the additional red tape it would create, as well as the risk of U.S. sanctions against monopolies.

Reuters reported on Monday that the Organization for the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had drafted a document for setting up a new alliance but had carefully avoided any mention of sensitive issues such as oil prices.

(Source: Reuters)

## Exchange giants take their rivalry to Texas as shale oil booms

The world's two biggest energy exchanges have taken their fierce rivalry to Houston, Texas in pursuit of business linked to the millions of barrels of shale oil arriving in the city every day.

Last year, exchange operators CME Group and Intercontinental Exchange introduced duelling futures contracts that track the price of West Texas Intermediate crude as delivered at the coastal city.

The battle between the contracts – dubbed WTI Houston and Permian WTI – is a reflection of Houston's growing status as an energy trading hotspot, as U.S. oil production breaks records, Texas refineries add capacity and exports of crude soar.

At the moment, oil markets in the Gulf coast region lack widely traded derivatives contracts, which is a potential problem for companies trying to hedge risks. Contracts culminating in physical delivery at Houston would be a purpose-built tool which reflect the city's emergence as a gateway between domestic and international markets, exchange executives say.

At stake is the chance to own the next major oil contract that some believe could be a major money-spinner for the two exchanges. CME of Chicago and ICE of Atlanta have earned billions of dollars in revenues since establishing the world's two main oil benchmarks – WTI and North Sea Brent, respectively – three decades ago.

U.S. barrels are going to become more and more relevant to global oil flows.

"This is not our average contract launch," says Jeff Barbuto, global head of oil marketing at ICE. "U.S. barrels are going to become more and more relevant to global oil flows."

Exchanges owned by ICE and CME have competed in crude oil futures since the 1980s. ICE's Brent crude benchmark is based on North Sea supply. CME's light, sweet WTI benchmark is delivered to the storage hub of Cushing, Oklahoma – a small town about 500 miles north of Houston.

At times, the price of oil at Houston disconnects from prices in the North Sea, Cushing or both, suggesting the new contracts could be useful to companies selling oil there. Volumes have picked up in recent weeks.

"We are following the lead of the commercial customers that are telling us both with their investments and with their marketing where they need risk management," says Peter Keavey, CME's global head of energy.

The contracts present somewhat different opportunities for each exchange group. At CME, Houston trading complements its flagship oil contract. "The key benchmark is still WTI-Cushing," Mr Keavey says.

For ICE, Houston is a potential beachhead in the U.S. crude oil market, where its main contract is a "lookalike" that tracks the price of CME's WTI. "ICE would love this to be a giant contract," says Campbell Faulkner, chief data analyst at OTC Global Holdings, a Houston-based energy broker.

(Source: Financial Times)

## Sudan's protests may have slowed, but they have undoubtedly changed attitudes



By Khalil Charles

Signs that the pace of the protests in Sudan is slowing down became apparent last week when a call for mass demonstrations on Monday went virtually unheeded. This has prompted Sudan's security forces to lower the threat level from code red to code blue, a move which reduces the number of officers deployed to counter-demonstrations. This also signals a collective sigh of relief for supporters of President Omar Al-Bashir's government.

In truth, the Sudanese resistance is not ready to disappear, but last week the focus shifted to the death in custody of teacher and political activist Ahmed Al-Khair. His muddled body was delivered to his family with his trousers around his knees. According to relatives there were visible signs of torture all over his body. In a video circulating on social media, the dead man's cousin, Abdul-Rahim Hasan Ahmed, raised his right hand and swore that the security forces had prevented him from taking pictures of the corpse. He testified that he had seen injuries to the head, stomach, back and anus where, according to unsubstantiated but written claims by protesters, Al-Khair is said to have been impaled by a blunt object.

The outrage at his death prompted a largely unheeded call for a national general strike in schools. Nevertheless, primary education in the town of Khashim Al-Qirba where Al-Khair taught was suspended completely while photographs of friends and colleagues demonstrating with makeshift banners that "killing a teacher is tantamount to killing a nation" were posted on social media.

Amnesty International has expressed outrage over Al-Khair's killing and called for an immediate independent investigation. This coincides with an investigation by Sudan's prosecutor general in the eastern town of Kassala where the killing took place; witnesses have been called upon to give their testimony.

During the recent protests, teachers and doctors representing the Sudan Professionals' Association appear to have been targeted disproportionately by the security forces. The high-profile death of Dr Babiker Abdelhamid, for example, also provoked outrage, particularly because confirmed reports say that he was shot twice in the chest after identifying himself as a doctor treating a wounded patient. Eyewitness alleged that a security officer shot him in cold blood leaving 14 shotgun pellet wounds in his body. The incident prompted Al-Bashir to claim, without supporting evidence, that the weapon used was not available in Sudan or in the possession of police and security forces.

Throughout the 46 days of protests, the President has continued to be defiant. In front of crowds in Kassala last week he made international headlines when he said that changes of government happen through the ballot box not social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. This was a clear swipe at the Arab Spring protests that used social media as a catalyst to stage demonstrations.

However, days later, Prime Minister Motazz Moussa softened the government's position by acknowledging that the protesters' economic demands are legitimate. "There are problems and we are working on solving them," he told reporters, referring to Sudan's economic difficulties and lack of essential services. "There is a voice that must be heard and must be respected, despite the presence of political parties. There are legitimate demands and demands that must be expressed."

His message was echoed by Defense Secretary Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf who, like the Prime Minister, recognized the validity of the protests and said that the situation in the country showed a divide between young and old. "This requires intergenerational communication and fair solutions to youth problems and realization of their reasonable ambition," he explained at a briefing of army officers. "Recent events show the need to reshape political entities, parties and armed movements of the political scene with a different mindset than before."

The two men appear to be capturing a new mood in government which has driven some parliamentarians to propose scrapping the law that allows Al-Bashir to stand for another term. In tabling the motion, the 2020 election coalition group point to the political crisis. The amendment is an indicator that Sudan is a different country since the start of the protests on 19 December, and that attitudes are changing. The motion, although unlikely to be passed, will be a test of the internal desire for change and the willingness of lawmakers to listen to the genuine grievances of those who have taken to the streets asking for Sudan's President to step down.

Nevertheless, there were clear signs this week of electioneering by President Omar Al-Bashir. Statements promising the regeneration of rural areas appear to be an effort to court favor outside the big cities where he has clearly lost support. Rallies in Niyala, South Kordofan and Kassala in the east were well attended, suggesting that the cultivation of a base in rural areas may be his only chance to hold on to power if he is allowed to run again in 2020.

Whatever the outcome of the attempt to prevent this, the demonstrations in Sudan have brought clear changes in attitudes and dispelled the prevailing notion among politicians that the Sudanese people are inherently patient. It remains to be seen how long the protests will continue but, clearly, attitudes have changed in government with an awareness that such patience can no longer be taken for granted.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

# Now France wants hypersonic missiles by 2021

By Michael Peck

France is joining the hypersonic weapons club. Project V-MaX (Experimental Maneuvering Vehicle) aims to create a hypersonic glider with a speed of more than 3,700 miles per hour, or Mach 5, by 2021.

"Many countries are acquiring them (hypersonic weapons) and we have the know-how to develop them," announced Defense Minister Florence Parly. "We could no longer afford to wait."

A few nations have fielded or are developing hypersonic weapons, notably the U.S., Russia and China. Russia's Avangard nuclear-armed glider, boosted atop an ICBM high into the upper atmosphere, reportedly zooms down on its target at Mach 27, leading Russian President Vladimir Putin to declare it "unstoppable" by U.S. missile defenses. America's DARPA defense research agency has tested gliders that have reached speeds of more than Mach 20, while the U.S. military is working on a joint boost-glide vehicle.

But France could be the first European nation to develop its own hypersonic weapons. The effort appears to be aimed at developing a strategic nuclear weapon, with Paris recently awarding a contract to modify a proposed air-launched supersonic cruise missile. "Under the V-MaX project, being led by ArianeGroup - a joint venture between Airbus and France's Safran - the air-to-surface ASN4G missile, which will replace the medium-range ASMP, could possibly be configured to travel at hypersonic speeds," said French news agency Agence France-Presse.

The ASMP, or Air-Sol Moyenne Portée, has an estimated speed of Mach 3 and a range



## It's no surprise that France wants skin in a hypersonic game that will likely have a profound influence on 21 st Century warfare.

of 300 miles. Assuming V-MaX is faster and perhaps has a longer range, the new weapon seems closer to Russia's Kh-47M2 Khinzel ("Dagger"), a Mach 5 to Mach 10 weapon – based on the ground-based Iskander ballistic missile – that is lofted into the air by T-22M3 bombers and even MiG-31 jet fighters. Russia also has deployed the Zircon, a Mach 5 anti-ship missile that Western navies fear may be too fast for their shipboard anti-missile defenses to stop.

It's no surprise that France wants skin in a hypersonic game that will likely have a profound influence on 21 st Century warfare. The high speed of hypersonic missiles give them an edge over anti-missile sensors and interceptors designed against older and slower missiles. And unlike ICBMs, whose warheads reenter from space at Mach 23, but on predictable and interceptable paths, hypersonic gliders can maneuver in the atmosphere like ultra-fast airplanes.

"The goal is high-speed maneuverability," explained a report by France's DGA defense procurement agency. "That's how it differs from a ballistic trajectory. Once the initial speed is reached, we can play with speed and altitude to move up and down, to the left and to the right, creating a trajectory that is more difficult to intercept."

France can bring considerable knowhow to hypersonic development, including an advanced aerospace industry that has produced legendary weapons such as the Mirage fighter, the Exocet anti-ship missile and a Rafale fighter that is a competitor with advanced jets such as the F-35. It has already conducted studies of hypersonic propulsion as part of a modernization of the nation's nuclear arsenal.

Yet what is surprising is that Parly promised the first test flight would take place by the end of 2021. That means a first flight within less than three years, a short time to develop weapons that can push the boundaries of aerodynamics and material science.

"For France, developing and deploying a device that can withstand hypersonic speeds poses an enormous challenge," noted Agence France-Presse. "The DGA, the French defense agency, admitted that it had 'relatively little experience' in the area."

"The first test will probably not be for several years, and will be limited in terms of payload, flight time and precision," warned the Secretariat for National Defense and Security.

Nonetheless, as Europe ponders tending to its own defenses as the Trump administration seems to be disengaging European security, cutting-edge arms will be key. Europe can't afford to be left out of the hypersonic game.

(Source: The National Interest)

## While female activists remain locked up in Saudi Arabia, there can be no return to business as usual

Saudi Arabia's campaign to restore its international reputation kicked into high gear this last week. On Sunday, it released one of the most prominent businessmen it had been holding illegally since the end of 2017; on Monday, it staged an investment conference in which it sought \$426 billion in private investment for new ventures in mining, logistics and manufacturing. On Thursday, the government announced the end of its brutal crackdown on its own elite, during which hundreds were detained, some were tortured and all were subjected to what amounted to a shakedown, in which they were forced to hand over assets in exchange for rights such as driving – remain imprisoned.

Meanwhile, Mariah Carey performed a concert, and top pro golfers played in a tournament, beginning what is billed as a "year of entertainment" that authorities claim will bring a host of international stars to the kingdom.

The objective here is clear: to resume normal commerce between Saudi Arabia and the democratic world, and attract desperately needed investment, without meaningful change in the regime controlled by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. It's in the interest of the United States and its allies, as well as Saudi Arabia itself, that this strategy fail.

The 33-year-old crown prince has suppressed real and perceived opponents with a brutality that is unprecedented in Saudi history, culminating in the murder and dismemberment of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul last October.

He has refused to accept responsibility or alter his methods. A top aide who oversaw the Khashoggi murder and the torture of female activists, Saud al-Qahtani, remains active. Though a number of big businessmen have been freed, at least nine of the female activists – whose offense was to press for rights such as driving – remain imprisoned.

The regime promised accountability for the Khashoggi killing, but in practice continues to stonewall. Eleven unidentified people – out of 21 the kingdom once said were responsible – are said to be on trial, but principal figures, including the forensic scientist who dismantled Khashoggi's body with a bonesaw, are reportedly immune.

A United Nations investigator who launched her own probe, special rapporteur Agnes Callamard, this last week was denied access to the crime scene at the Saudi Consulate when she visited Istanbul. Khalid bin Salman, the crown prince's brother, has resumed his duties as ambassador in

Washington, apparently calculating that his alleged role in luring Khashoggi to the Istanbul consulate and his false statements for days afterward will be forgotten.

The Trump administration appears content to accept all this. But success by Mohammed bin Salman in resuming normal relations will have bad long-term consequences. He will be encouraged to continue his reckless international adventures, which have ranged from kidnapping the Lebanese prime minister to the deliberate bombing of civilian targets in Yemen. He will continue to imprison and torture the best and brightest Saudis, who seek peaceful reforms in a hidebound political and social system.

Mohammed bin Salman's apologists frequently speak of the need to preserve "stability" in the kingdom. But it is unstable now, and becoming more so. The best way to foster genuine equilibrium is for Western governments, investors and entertainers to shun the regime until it puts on more than a show of change.

We'll know that's beginning to happen when Loujain al-Hathloul, Hatoon al-Fassi, Samar Badawi and other imprisoned women are free.

(Source: The Washington Post)

## As a former UN special rapporteur, the coup in Venezuela reminds me of the rush to war in Iraq

By Alfred de Zayas

There is nothing more undemocratic and corrosive to the rule of law than a coup d'état. Members of the United Nations are bound by the Charter, articles one and two of which affirm the right of all peoples to determine themselves, the sovereign equality of states, the prohibition of the use of force and of economic or political interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Yet these fundamental principles of international order are being grossly violated in the case of Venezuela.

The international community witnessed a revolt against the UN Charter when in 2003 the United States together with the "coalition of the willing" decided to invade Iraq, a war which the late secretary general Kofi Annan described as illegal. This massive act of aggression was probably the most serious violation of the Nuremberg Principles since the Second World War. What shocks the conscience is not that the United States would place itself above international law, but that it dragged 42 countries into this destructive looting campaign. The war was preceded by an ocean of fake news and disinformation, intended to make the aggression more palatable to world public opinion. War crimes and crimes against humanity were committed for which no political leader has been held accountable. One may ask, is the International Criminal Court credible, when it has thus far only focused on African politicians, and has failed to investigate or indict leaders of powerful countries, who have hitherto enjoyed total impunity?

In 2011 another oil rich state was devastated, Libya, with the aggression similarly preceded by systematic governmental and media disinformation. Today's crisis in



## Oil rich states such as Iraq and Libya were devastated after concerted campaigns of misinformation. U.S. attempts to provoke conflict in the Latin American country have marked similarities.

Venezuela has much in common with the prior aggressions against the two other oil-producing countries.

One would think that the human rights community is committed to advancing the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of all without discrimination. Their silence in the face of the enormous suffering inflicted on the Venezuelan people by the United States is nothing less than appalling.

The economic war against Venezuela, carried out not only by the United States, but also by the Grupo de Lima in clear

violation of Chapter 4, Article 19 of the OAS Charter, the financial blockade and the sanctions have demonstrably caused hundreds of deaths directly related to the scarcity of food and medicines resulting from the blockade.

It is all too obvious that the intention of the sanctions has been to asphyxiate the Venezuelan economy in the expectation that the Venezuelan people or the Venezuelan military will topple the Maduro government. This kind of interference in the internal affairs of Venezuela is not only contrary to fundamental

principles of international law, but it also gives rise to personal criminal liability. To the extent that the number of victims of the artificial "humanitarian crisis" continues to grow, this is a matter for the International Criminal Court pursuant to article 7 of the Rome Statute, which defines "crimes against humanity".

The report of my UN mission to Venezuela was presented to the Human Rights Council on 10 September 2018. Among the many constructive recommendations formulated in my report was the revival of the dialogue between the opposition and the government.

After two years a reasonable compromise document was agreed upon, and on the day of signature, 6 February 2018, Julio Borges, the representative of the opposition refused to sign. This can only be qualified as a grave manifestation of bad faith.

Of course, we know that the Venezuelan people are polarized, but this does not mean that we should allow this situation to degenerate into civil war. The opposition should remember that, whatever happens in the next few weeks, there are at least 7 million Venezuelans who are committed Chavistas and who are not likely to roll over after a coup d'état. Any democratic government in Venezuela must keep in mind that it must represent all Venezuelans, not only the 1 per cent and the privileged classes. The bottom line is this: international mediation is necessary, and all countries of goodwill should support the initiative of Mexico and Uruguay to hold an international mediation in Montevideo, beginning today. This initiative should also be endorsed by the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and by the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet.

(Source: Independent)

# Understanding Donald Trump and the White House: A few books

**1 →** Many people in the Middle East consider Donald Trump to be totally subservient to Benjamin Netanyahu and the Zionists. You were an early supporter of Donald Trump, and are the author of the Trump Revolution Series. What books have you drawn on to evaluate President Donald Trump and the current White House?

A. I tend to read books in threes – since no one including me has a complete grasp of anything, this allows me to compare and contrast views and arrive at a blended perspective. I have always understood that despite his minor flaws, Trump is the anti-Empire President. He is a nationalist not a globalist, and that means that he is on the side of people who work with their hands, not people who steal money with computers (bankers). When Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury*: Inside the Trump White House came out, I bought it but also bought Cory Lewandowsky and David Bossie's *Let Trump Be Trump: The Inside Story of His Rise to the Presidency*, and Newt Gingrich's *Understanding Trump*. My essay reviewing all three is free online.

**■** What were your general conclusions from *Fire & Fury* and what did you draw from the other two books, *Let Trump Be Trump* and *Understanding Trump*?

A. *Fire and Fury* was deliberate character assassination drawing heavily on leaks from people that President Trump trusted, such as Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway as well as Reince Priebus. Most people do not realize that the Republican Party considers Trump its enemy. The book is a long series of legally actionable defamatory statements with no supporting references (no endnotes). The primary purpose of the book was to assert that President Trump is mentally unstable and therefore should be removed from office under the 25th Amendment. The book also seeks to show that everyone around the President views him with disdain (partially true), that the White House is dysfunctional at the staff level (totally true), and that the President was not ready to govern (totally true but this is Zionist Jared Kushner's fault, he destroyed the Presidential Transition Team's twelve volumes of advance work).

Let *Trump Be Trump*, by his second campaign manager (Roger Stone, my colleague, was his first), is a deeply authentic account of the campaign that makes it clear the President is attentive, dedicated, and a fast learner. This is the book that does the best job of documenting how our President is enthusiastically engaged with the people's business, attentive to "extensive detail," obsessive about details, and a fast learner. Trump is shown to be a versatile communicator with a gift for arriving at a simple message about a complex topic that the public will grasp immediately. Trump is, in brief, both authentic and a genius.

Understanding Trump, by former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (one of the few people in Washington who reads as many books as I do) is important for its documentation of how Trump learns very fast, knows how to find experts who can brief him in an instant over the telephone, and is gifted as visualization and extemporaneous engagement.



lin Scandal: A Story of Powerbrokers, Child Abuse & Betrayal.

The book that destroys Pence is by Michael D'Antonio and Peter Eisner, *The Shadow President: The Truth About Mike Pence*. The book, while also attacking Trump, documents Pence as being ignorant, lazy, delusional, and ambitious beyond his abilities. He manifests false humility, lives in an alternative reality in which God wants him to be President, and is a Zionist. George Will is said to have called him "America's most repulsive public figure," and with what I know now, I do not think Will was referring to Pence's lack of social skills. Pence is heavily indebted to drug and health care industry donors, is extreme in his opposition to science, is not intellectually curious, was a failure as a governor, and has been positively cruel on more than one occasion. My longer review of this book is free online.

One source close to the President has told me that Pence has been caught telling major donors to the Trump campaign that

single most powerful respected voice across black, female, and Independent/small party lines – the Democratic "Sandernistas" would no doubt find her – along with the right policy initiatives – a compelling reason to #WalkAway from the two-party tyranny and vote for the President as well as Independents and small party candidates for Congress such that neither of the two parties ever again controls Congress.

McKinney would be violently opposed by the Republican "Establishment" which is precisely the point. She is a co-founder of #UNRIG – Election Integrity Act, and would work best as Vice President if Trump first embraced our twelve-point act as his own, which he needs to do because Speaker Nancy Pelosi's HR 1 For the People is a scam, a fraud – it purports to offer election reform solutions while privatizing the drawing of Congressional District boundaries and setting the stage for non-citizens to vote. If Trump forces Congress to pass #UNRIG – Election Integrity Act in 2019, selects McKinney as

**Understanding Trump, by former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (one of the few people in Washington who reads as many books as I do) is important for its documentation of how Trump learns very fast, knows how to find experts who can brief him in an instant over the telephone, and is gifted as visualization and extemporaneous engagement.**

he is "ready to replace the President" and Trump is fully aware of Pence's limitations, ambitions, and disloyalty.

**■** Who do you think would make a good Vice Presidential candidate if or when Trump runs in 2020?

A. The Deep State is rolling out Kamala Harris. She is the intended winner of the Democratic primaries despite her many flaws. The Deep State is using Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand, both proven liars and opportunists – with Gillibrand also being a Zionist tool – and Tulsi Gabbard, a naive young woman who really believes that 9/11 was done by "ragheads armed with box cutters" instead of – as I have amply documented in my Memoranda for the President: 9/11 Truth -- the Zionists enabled by Dick Cheney with cover-up services provided by Robert Mueller. I do not think Joe Biden will run, there are too many videos alleging his fondness for pedophilia out there, and he is too old – Trump would destroy him. So the "standard" that Trump has to meet is a woman and ideally a woman of color.

While there are a tiny handful of black women and only a couple of Latina women in the Republican Party who might be viable on the national stage, none of them, in my view, combine the needed ingredients of authenticity, inclusiveness, and truthfulness that the President needs. Condoleezza Rice is a Zionist tool and consigliere to the Bush Crime Family – it is bad enough that Bush has an Attorney General now from the Bush Crime Family, a Vice President as well would be the end of him. Angela McGlowan is most interesting and meets Trump's top criteria, she is beautiful (while also being politically astute). Alveda Celeste King is a niece of Martin Luther King Jr. but she is not from "central casting" and is unlikely to carry blacks or women across the country.

**■** You are on record as considering the Vice President, Mike Pence, to be disloyal, lazy, and in need of replacement. Is there a book that you have reviewed making that case?

A. Yes, but let me also say that in my capacity as Commissioner and Chief Counsel for the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Human Trafficking and Child Sex Abuse, there exists witness testimony that causes me grave concern. While uncorroborated – I must of course stress that point – sources appear to place then Governor Pence in relation to pedophilia cover-ups and abuses as bad as those documented in The Frank-

his Vice President, and creates the integrated two-way Trump Channel as I suggest in my memorandum Trump Triumph, he will go from 27% (those that voted for him in 2016) to 70%, and absolutely be the greatest President ever.

**■** Coming back to books – you have reviewed *Fear* by Bob Woodward, *Let Me Finish* by Chris Christie, and *Team of Vipers* by Cliff Sims, whom the White House is taking to court for violating his confidentiality agreement. What did you draw from each of these books?

**A** FEAR: Trump in the White House was a media hit job based largely on lies from Steve Bannon, among others, and represents a very low standard in journalism – people do not seem to realize that Bob Woodward is a pimp for the Deep State, he is given his stories, he is not a real journalist such as SY Hersh. In my longer review free online I itemize ten lies that Woodward tells in this book on behalf of the Deep State. He has one extraordinary statement in the entire book:

QUOTE (298): The populist movement had shown that it didn't have the force to break through the permanent political class. Trump has been the armor-piercing shell that could pierce the Clinton part, but not the rest.

The second major insight in Woodward's book is that Trump is a master of leverage. For those that were deceived by globalist Gary Cohn's stealing a letter from the President's desk that was suspending the US – Korean Free Trade Agreement, I would point out that the last sentence of the letter says:

"During this period, the United States is prepared to negotiate with the Republic of Korea on economic issues of concern to both countries."

What Woodward refuses to acknowledge is that this was Trump's way of creating leverage. Sheer genius undermined by all the globalist saboteurs surrounding Trump.

The greatest value of the book for me, despite its heavy reliance on Bannon, a somewhat unstable source, is its focus on how Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump are a cancer in the White House – loose cannons, family second guessers constantly undermining the staffing process. I agree. Trump clearly has a blind spot for First Daughter, and has made a huge mistake in allowing her husband, a man who both CIA and MI-6 consider sexually and financially compromised by the Zionists,

into the White House. To her credit, First Daughter is unfailingly polite and a wonderful surrogate for her father, but she should not be allowed to treat the US Government as her playpen.

Let Me Finish -Trump, the Kushners, Bannon, New Jersey, and the Power of In-Your-Face Politics is an extremely important book because it may be the shocking expose the President needs to understand that Jared Kushner is destroying his presidency. The book exudes integrity. The transition team under Christie's leadership put together twelve binders and had roughly four vetted candidates for each job of consequence. This was thrown in the trash by Kushner, which not only cost Trump his first six months, but set the stage for the Office of Presidential Personnel (OPP) to be hijacked by the Republican Party establishment – Trump may not realize it, but he is being stabbed in the back daily by OPP and the establishment folk that OPP has placed while slow-rolling (not filling) most of the jobs. I cannot articulate the depth of my scorn and disdain for Kushner – completely apart from his being an agent of a foreign power he appears to be a willful child who severely handicapped the President in his first year, and continues to sabotage the President today. I for one would like to see those twelve volumes published as a book in the traditional "Mandate for Change" series. There are many other valuable insights in the book, I list some of them in my longer review free online.

Team of Vipers – My 500 Extraordinary Days in the Trump White House by Cliff Sims is one of the most extraordinary "insider" accounts about the White House I have ever read. While the President is upset about this book because it violates a confidentiality agreement signed by the author, I am quite certain the President not read the book and is being lied to by everyone in the White House about the author. This book honors the President and his gifts throughout, while naming, with very explicit credible details, everyone in the White House that is betraying the President, which is to say, everyone except Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, and Hope Hicks (at the time). Steve Bannon is described as a psycho, underhanded, undisciplined, too Attention-Deficit-Disorder (ADD) to manage anything. Kellyanne Conway is dramatically exposed as the "leaker-in-chief" constantly bad-mouthing the President to reporters, while Omarosa Manigault, Trump's "black wench," is described as a world-class bitch despised by the black people she was supposed to cultivate on behalf of the President. My longer review, free online, itemizes what the book says about another twenty-five or so top aides in the White House, all negative with a few exceptions, generally campaign loyalists who have been marginalized by the Republican and Bush "establishment" figures seeking to "control" the President.

Three quotes stand out, the first two explain why the White House does not work and the other explains why our President is potentially the greatest president ever:

QUOTE (134): "we far too often focused on devouring one another. Cuthroat doesn't even begin to describe it."

QUOTE (279): "The Trump White House staff was famously factionalized—RNC vs. campaign loyalists, establishment vs. MAGA, globalists vs. nationalists, free traders vs. protectionists."

QUOTE (Jack Welch on Donald Trump, 132): "They can say what they want about him, but I don't know if any president has been more prepared to sit in that room and talk business. It was like talking to a peer, not a politician. Hell of a meeting."

My bottom line from these three books is that the President needs to clean out the White House – there are too many traitors undermining him. I earnestly believe he has no alternative but to remove Jared Kushner from the White House, remove the press from the White House, reconcile with Chris Christie and Chris Sims, and begin to think deeply about dumping Pence and sponsoring #UNRIG – Election Integrity Act. In my view, while President Trump has over 200 major successes that are not reported in the controlled Mainstream Media (MSM), he has been one third as effective as he could have been because of betrayal by Jared Kushner, Reince Priebus, and what Chris Christie correctly describes as "riff-raff" on the White House staff. There is every reason to invite Chris Christie to be the new Chief of Staff, a job Christie turned down when he knew Jared Kushner would be enthroned as the "shadow president." Kushner and Pence out, Christie and McKinney in, and Trump will be the greatest president ever.

The truth at any cost lowers all others costs." That is my motto. I estimate that today President Trump, despite his extraordinary talents and global reach, is working on the basis of 80% lies and at best 20% truth. He is all alone. He has the best of intentions. I ask that everyone read these books carefully, and give our President the benefit of the doubt. Access all of Robert Steele's book reviews free online.

## Humanitarian aid, a sham for more attacks and pressure on Venezuela

**1 →** A few months ago Former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela William Brownfield also said that the best way to topple the government is to create turbulence in the country by freezing Venezuela's assets.

Obviously, these days Guaido is a cover for humanitarian aid to defeat the army and nation's integrity. The main goal is to put pressure on the incumbent government by recognizing a parallel government in Venezuela, to deny the current ruling system, impose sanctions on the country, and eventually provide humanitarian assistance.

And most importantly, to repeat military intervention threat and civil war known as National Security Doctrine which says, "All U.S. military, commercial, and media and diplomatic resources should be used to create big and believable threats to the invaded country and have her compromise at the negotiating table."

The other huge threat is "humanitarian aid" carried out not by volunteers and civilians but by military personnel. In fact, it is done by U.S. military through the so called "international alliance" like Columbia and Brazil army, because no foreign military has the right to enter another country without the consent of its authorities.

This could be a provocation against the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, which undoubtedly can end up promoting Guaido in the next round of publicity.

Bolivian President Evo Morales condemned both the U.S. humanitarian assistance to and its economic sanctions on Venezuela, calling it a double standard. He said, "the U.S. eliminates the principle of international law of humanitarian assistance through coup measures."

Venezuelan President Maduro has said at several conferences that humanitarian assistance from the United States to Venezuela is a trick to justify intervention in the country. "Imperialism does not help anyone in the world. Tell me, where has the humanitarian aid been given in the world? They are just putting on an act; what they are doing is dropping bombs to destroy countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria."

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez warned that the idea of sending humanitarian aid to Venezuela is an excuse for a military strike against the South American country.

Benjamin Denison, an international security expert at the Dick Center, believes in most cases, the regime change as it is being pursued by the United States in Venezuela, will be defeated in the medium term. Benjamin's theory turned out to be right in western Asia.

## Respect warranted for at least two bright Americans



**1 →** Will, for example, Saudi Arabia begin to sell oil for other currencies, and what would be the ramifications of that? A U.S. takeover in some fashion of Saudi resources, as the U.S. blatantly has said it wants to more or less take over Venezuela's vast oil reserves? That won't fly. The U.S. would fast lose its only firm ally, besides Israel, in the Middle East.

But besides right-thinking commentators like Giraldi, and he is just one of several worth noting, there are others who are emerging and one definitely worth attention is U.S. Congressional Democrat representative from Hawaii, Tulsi Gabbard. She recently announced her 2020 candidacy (in what is going to be a very crowded field) for President.

Gabbard, 37, a Hindu, still serving major in the U.S. Army National Guard had two regular Army tours of duty in Iraq and independently went to Syria a couple years ago and met with Assad to try to figure out on her own initiative what the Syrian war has been about given the misinformation spewed by the mainstream U.S. media. She has been under attack because of her views by the "establishment".

Gabbard's primary campaign initiative has so far been to condemn U.S. interference, sanctions and wars of choice by the U.S. on other countries for "regime change", and not because she "sides", say, with Assad's Syria, but because countries like Syria or Iran or Venezuela do not, she claims, literally threaten the U.S. In fact, she points out correctly that U.S. warmongering actually damages the U.S. widely and deflects attention from pressing and growing problems inside the U.S.

In one recent interview on national television on a morning talk show where the interviewers tried desperately – and embarrassingly – to corner Gabbard and force her into a missstep and destroy her candidacy, she acquitted herself brilliantly, soundly deflecting the attacks to the point where she has likely made herself, if any female could be, the most viable female candidate for President ever.

This is because, to cite just one reason, a majority of Americans – outside Trump's base of ignorant faux "Christian" evangelicals and Zionists and Neocons, seem to be realizing that U.S. militancy and regime change wars are quite simply wrong, unhealthy and counterproductive.

Meanwhile, Trump just this week delivered a delayed annual "State of the Union" address to Congress to the usual obligatory and absurd applause. It was delivered by the Prince of Lies, Trump, and was full of lies about the real state of the "union" under his Presidency. And on top of that the Senate passed legislation that effectively would undercut the cherished 1st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (that in part guarantees "free speech") by making it a crime to support the BDS movement to halt Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Hard to know whether the rest of Congress will agree with the Senate vote, but if it does make it to law, it's bound to reach the U.S. Supreme Court for review. If the court did not strike it down, you can kiss U.S. democracy goodbye forever and the U.S. government will be further reviled and damaged in world opinion by its obsession with supporting Zionist apartheid.

And for sheer lunacy, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, grubbing for any reason to send U.S. soldiers on a rampage in Venezuela, is claiming that Hezbollah has installed active "cells" in Caracas and throughout South America. Hmmm. One wonders where that assertion originated. Can you spell Zionistanland?

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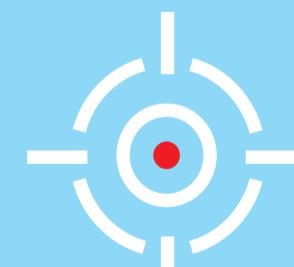
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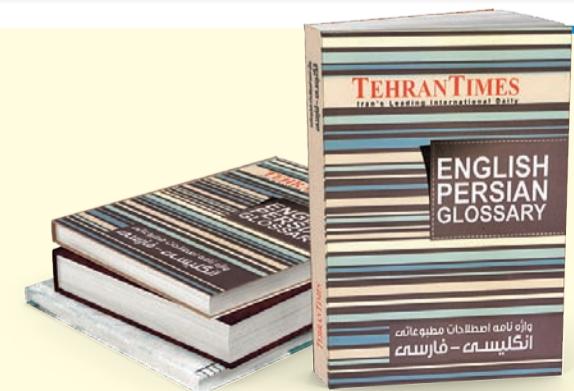
The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

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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# Support packages underway for SMA patients

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — Support packages have been planned for SMA patients, said the head of the Transplantation and Treatment of Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health.

Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) is a rare neuromuscular disorder characterized by loss of lower motor neurons and progressive muscle wasting, often leading to early death. According to Mahdi Shadnoosh, the packages contain periodic visits with specialists, doing electromyography, taking genetic tests with the method of MLPA (Multiplex ligation-dependent probe amplification) for prenatal screening and examining the patients suspected with SMA, doing physiotherapies, hospitalization of the patients with pulmonary infection, giving dietary supplements such as zinc, calcium and vitamin D as well as the flu and Pneumococcal vaccines.

"Furthermore, some patients need mechanical ventilation such as Positive airway pressure (PAP) for treatment of sleep apnea, liquid ventilation and maximizers of oxygen delivery," said Shadnoosh ISNA reported last Tuesday.

It is estimated that preparing the support packages will cost as much as 230 billion rials (around \$5.5 millions) and providing home care ventilators (HCV) for 40% of the SMA patients will cost around 400 billion



**The prevalence of the disease is 10 in every 100,000 people and it is approximated that there are 2,000 SMA patients in the country.**

rials (around \$95 million), Shadnoosh further noted.

The prevalence of the disease is 10 in every 100,000 people and it is approximated that there are 2,000 SMA patients in the country,

added Shadnoosh.

## Spinraza, the SMA medication

Spinraza, the medication used in treating SMA, is quite expensive so it is not covered by insurance, said Shadnoosh, adding that the

drug is not included in insurance coverage in many other countries as well.

Shadnoosh further explained that Spinraza is mostly used for treatment of SMA type 1 and 2 in case no brain injuries are occurred. For type 3, it is only effective if the patient is under the age of 30.

"Anyway, the drugs' implications are not yet completely known and it is not scientifically approved that it could be effective in treating the disease," he said.

"Before taking any measures to finance this medicine, we should know that screening for SMA, its early diagnosis, timely treatment and rehabilitation of the patients are more necessary when it comes to addressing the disease," he added.

According to Shadnoosh, there has been no complete surveys in the country yet, but it is guesstimated that around 30 percent of the SMA patients need to take Spinraza.

In December 2016, The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Spinraza as the first drug to treat children and adults with SMA. According to the New York Times, Spinraza list price is US\$125,000 per injection which puts the treatment cost at US\$750,000 in the first year and US\$375,000 annually after that. According to the New York Times, this places Spinraza "among the most expensive drugs in the world."

## New lines of Granulosa cells production to improve fertility studies

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — Researchers at Iranian Biological Resource Center successfully produced two lines of Immortalized Human Granulosa Cells (HGL5) from Normal and polycystic ovaries, announced the organization's director of Human and Animal Cells bank.

Granulosa cells are a clump of cells that surround an egg in a developing follicle and ensure that there is an optimum balance of sex hormones in the body to maintain fertility and a potential pregnancy. Following the release of an egg, granulosa cells become the lutein cells of the corpus luteum and start producing progesterone in addition to estrogen.

According to Dr. Parvaneh Farzaneh, the faulty function of granulosa cells is among the leading reasons of infertility, IRNA reported on Sunday.

"In most studies about the mechanism of releasing eggs

in female reproductive system, the IVF granulosa-luteal cells are prepared for culture by removal of erythrocytes," said Farzaneh adding that the method has many disadvantages including the few number of originated cells, their low survival rate and chance of multiplication.

"The former granulosa cells lines were not capable of expressing the Follicle-stimulating Hormone Receptor (FSH) or were originated from resources that had chromosome disorders, but the newly produced lines don't have these problems and can be used in studies about treatment of infertility." She further explained.

According to WebMD infertility in men and woman can be treated with assisted reproductive technology (ART). There are several types of ART including IUI (intrauterine insemination), IVF (in vitro fertilization) and GIFT (gamete intrafallopian



transfer) and ZIFT (zygote intrafallopian transfer).

In December, Deputy Health Minister Qasem Babajani said the prevalence of infertility among Iranian couples nationwide is about 15 percent.

## Southeastern Iran opens its first pharmaceutical factory

**HEALTH** TEHRAN — First pharmaceutical factory of southeastern Iran was inaugurated in Rafsanjan, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Rafsanjan is a city and capital of Rafsanjan County in Kerman Province, placed in southeast of Iran.

Over the inauguration ceremony, the Director General of Iran Food and Drugs Administration said the factory employs around 100 people directly and 300 indirectly.

Mahdi Pirsalehi added that there are currently 150 pharmaceutical factories and companies in the country and they can provide for the local market under any circumstances.

"The inauguration of new pharmaceutical factories all around the country reveals that the sanctions had not inhibited our progress," Pirsalehi added.

Earlier this month, an official with Science and Technology Vice-Presidency said development of biotechnology can save \$200-300 million annually in coming years.

In July, the organization had announced that Iran has developed 13 methods of pharmaceutical technology in less than one year.

## Could this chemical help explain anxiety?

A recent study on anxiety examined the role of glutamate, which is a neurotransmitter. The findings could help scientists develop more effective interventions.

Over time, evolution honed anxiety as a survival mechanism;

it forms part of our "fight-or-flight" response.

The heart pumps a little faster, and there might be a sensation of nausea as the body prepares for action.

Although anxiety is a natural response, it can spiral out of control for some people.

Rather than being a protective force that helps us navigate everyday life, it becomes a burden that impacts well-being. Also, being more prone to anxiety increases the risk of developing an anxiety disorder and depression.

Beyond mental health, anxiety might also have physical effects; the authors of the new study write that sustained high levels of anxiety "may increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease."

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America say that anxiety disorders impact almost 1 in 5 adults in the United States each year.

Anxiety disorders are as common as depression, but until relatively recently, they received much less attention.

Because of its growing prevalence, the neurological mechanisms that are involved are receiving increased attention. The latest study, which now appears in The Journal of Neuroscience, investigates the role of glutamate in the hippocampus.

(Source: medical news today)

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## Iranian startups, knowledge-based companies to provide commodities impeded by sanctions: VP

**TECHNOLOGY** TEHRAN — Iran's science and technology vice presidency plan to supply commodities, which are impeded by Iran's sanctions, with the productions of Iranian startups and knowledge-based companies, the VP Sourena Sattari announced, Tasnim reported on Thursday.



"We plan to encourage startups to provide strategic products and services for the country, specially the commodities affected by sanctions," he explained.

The existence of 6,000 startups and 4,000 knowledge-based companies provide a great potential to meet the national demands, he said.

The knowledge economy should be improved and this is possible through providing entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem, Sattari explained.

He said that the startups and knowledge-based companies create wealth for the society, which has a great impact on Iran's economy as well.

Fortunately now the society is aware of the value of knowledge economy and its national benefits, he concluded.

In late January, Sattari announced that the knowledge-based companies meet about 97 percent of the domestic market's need to medicine which saves \$550 million for the country.

He said that Iran boasts over 4,000 startups with about 600 trillion rials (about \$14.3 billion) income.

## Report on satellite crop monitoring in northern Iran released

**TECHNOLOGY** TEHRAN — The Iranian Space Agency (ISA) released a report for satellite crop monitoring of subtropical gardens in Northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, Mehr reported on Sunday.

The monitoring is based on the imagery received from remote sensing satellites, which have a great influence on agricultural management.

The detailed report is provided for provincial managers in order to improve macro management of agriculture nationwide.

The maps of gardens in Gilan and Mazandaran provinces are based on satellite data processing received during the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018) and provided to the Ministry of Agriculture.

According to the report, the subtropical gardens in Mazandaran Province, which include fruits like citrus, kiwi and pomegranate, are mostly located in Sari, Qaemshahr and Tonekabon.

The ISA does not reveal any further detail in the press release.

According to medium.com, satellite imagery is revolutionizing agriculture and can help farmers and public authorities take land monitoring to a new level. The imagery infrastructure takes care of all the complexity of handling a satellite imagery archive and makes it available for end-users via easy-to-integrate web services.

Monitoring of crop conditions, soil properties and mapping tillage activities, help to assess land use, predict harvests, monitor seasonal changes and assist in implementing policy for sustainable development.

## The new Picasso? Meet AI-Da the robot artist

Can robots be creative? British gallery owner Aidan Meller hopes to go some way towards answering that question with AI-Da, who her makers say will be able to draw people from sight with a pencil in her bionic hand.

Meller is overseeing the final stages of her construction by engineers at Cornwall-based Engineered Arts.

He calls AI-Da - named after British mathematician and computer pioneer Ada Lovelace - the world's first "AI ultra-realistic robot artist", and his ambition is for her to perform like her human equivalents.

"She's going to actually be drawing and we're hoping to then build technology for her to paint," Meller said after seeing AI-Da's prosthetic head being carefully brought to life by specialists individually attaching hairs to form her eyebrows.

"But also as a performance artist she'll be able to engage with audiences and actually get messages across; asking those questions about technology today."

Her skeletal robotic head may stand disembodied on a workbench, but her movements are very much alive.

Cameras in each of her eyeballs recognize human features - she will make eye contact and follow you around the room, opening and closing her mouth as you do. Get too close and she'll back away, blinking, as if in shock.

AI-Da's makers say she will have a "RoboThespian" body with expressive movements and she will talk and answer questions.

"There's AI (artificial intelligence) running in the computer vision that allows the robot to track faces to recognize facial features and to mimic your expression," said Marcus Hold, Design & Production Engineer at Engineered Arts.

Ai-Da's makers are using "Mesmer" life-like robot technology for her head, and once finished she will have a mixed race appearance with long dark hair, silicone skin and 3D printed teeth and gums.

"(Mesmer) brings together the development of software mechanics and electronics to produce a lifelike face with lifelike gestures in a small human sized package," Hold said.

Ai-Da will present her inaugural exhibition "Unsecured Futures" in May at the University of Oxford, and her sketches will go on display in London in November.

(Source: reuters.com)

# E-government, a new opportunity that should be seized

Actually the e-government encompasses digital interactions between governments and their citizens as well as between different governments and in businesses, between the employees.

Regulatory services as well as some transactions like filing of online tax returns and applications for services and grants provide facility for active online involvement of citizens.

The online government can also be beneficial for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, providing information for them including immigrants or the elderly.

One of the most important aspects of the e-government is the government transparency that is provided. Through government transparency, the public is informed about activities of the government and the policies, which are implemented.

### E-government in world

Here you can find some interesting facts and a snapshot of trends in the development of e-government in countries across the globe provided by the United Nations E-Government Survey 2018.

The European countries lead e-government development globally; the Americas and Asia share almost equal standing in high and middle e-government index levels, and many African countries continue to struggle to improve their e-government standing.

Eight of the 11 new countries that joined the very-high performing group in 2018 are from Europe (Belarus, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Poland, Portugal and the Russian Federation) and two are from Asia (Cyprus and Kazakhstan).

The progress in e-government development in the Americas and Asia is albeit slow, but noticeable. Two thirds of countries in Asia (31 out of 47) and almost half of countries in Americas (15 out of 35) have above the world average E-Government Development Index (EGDI) score of 0.55.



Only four countries out of 54 in Africa score higher than the world average EGDI of 0.55, whereas 14 countries have very low EGDI scores below 0.25. These countries are also low-income and likely to face constraints in allocating necessary resources for e-government development.

Twenty-two upper middle-income and 39 lower-middle income countries have EGDI scores below the global EGDI average and 10 countries in the lower middle-income group have scores above the global EGDI average. The lower income countries, on the other hand, continue to lag behind due to relatively low level of development of all Index's components.

For the first time in 2018 the main contributor of EDGI scores improvement in all income groups is development of online services, suggesting that globally, there was a steady progress in improving e-government and public services provision online.

Increasingly, more countries provide online services targeted to the most vulner-

able groups. From the regional perspective, Europe continues to lead in online service delivery for all vulnerable groups reaching almost universal coverage across the region or over 80 per cent of all European countries.

### E-government in Iran

Iran's ranking in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI 2018), which was released in late July 2018, was promising.

Iran moves 20 notches up to rank 86 among 193 countries in the EGDI 2018 in comparison with EGDI 2017.

Issued by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, EGDI evaluates the scope and quality of online services, status of telecommunication infrastructure and existing human capacity.

As it is mentioned on UN website, the EDGI value can be between 0 (lowest) and 1 (highest), as it is a weighted average of normalized scores on the three most important dimensions of e-government. Iran's EGDI value was 0.6083 this year.

## Iranian universities to turn knowledge into wealth and technology: minister



**TECHNOLOGY** TEHRAN — Iran aims to turn knowledge into wealth and technology in universities, the Science, Research and Technology Minister, Mansour Gholami announced, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Iran is proud of several scientific achievements in the field of technology worldwide, which cannot be tolerated by the global arrogance, he explained.

There are 192 incubators and 43 science and technology parks in Iran, which create over 42,000 jobs and is

developing with high speed, he added.

In early September, the ministry announced that over five thousand knowledge-based companies are active in Iran's science and technology parks.

There are 192 incubators at the universities, which are active in different fields of science and technology, he said.

In an interview with the Tehran Times in early July, he said that Iran is promoting the third-generation universities, meaning entrepreneurship centers which transform science into technology and wealth.

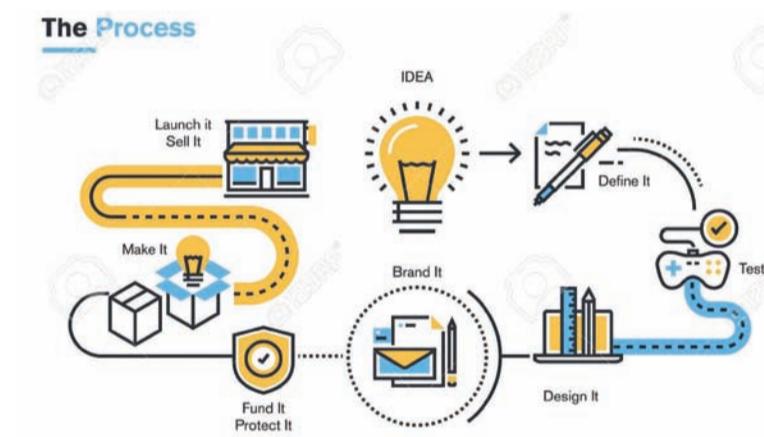
Despite their concerns, Grand View Research says "the global human resource management sector is projected to reach \$30 billion by 2025." The help of technology is a key contributor to the expansion of the HR sector. Traditionally, HR held an administrative role burying them in paperwork with limited employee interaction. As the face of the company, their lack of presence negatively impacted the candidate and employee experience causing companies to lose and miss out on top talent.

Today's talent requires more personable interaction and relationship building. HR has since redefined their role shifting from an administrative to a strategic focus with a commitment to nurturing candidate and employee relationships as their top priority. To be successful, HR professionals realize they must partner with technology to automate and streamline systems so they can devote their time to building and fostering long-term connections.

### Create inclusive and diverse cultures by eliminating recruiting biases

Most HR departments have an applicant tracking system (ATS) in place to house resumes and job descriptions. An applicant tracking system is a built-in compliance mechanism that helps eliminate bias when screening resumes, measuring diversity and attracting candidates. Many female candidates are dissuaded from applying to positions because job descriptions are unintentionally littered with aggressive

## Isfahan University to host an entrepreneurship event



**TECHNOLOGY** TEHRAN — Isfahan's Sheikh Bahai University will host an event for entrepreneurs entitled "From Idea to Product" from February 13 to 15, ISNA news agency reported on Sunday.

The event is based on education and sharing experience through which, the participants improve their entrepreneurship, the executive secretary of the event Erfan Baqai said.

He said that several workshops on business and marketing will be held on the sidelines of the event.

to free up time of hiring managers and HR giving them more time to devote to enriching their current employee experiences and improving candidate journeys.

Todd Horton said it best "employees don't want affirmations from a robot. They want to hear authentic messages from people." The goal of technology is automating, streamlining and simplifying processes so more time is spent nurturing relationships and developing employees.

The initial recruiting process is an ideal place to start as recruiting is one of the most time-consuming tasks and key responsibilities for human resources. On average, recruiters spend 60% of their time sourcing candidates. Implementing and integrating technology can take on the repetitive and manual labor such as filtering resumes, scheduling interviews and simplifying the onboarding process without losing the personal touch candidates need for them to stay engaged in the process.

### Automate training and development initiatives

Artificial Intelligence is used in most other business functions, yet most underutilized when it comes to corporate training initiatives. Training is a time-intensive activity that requires the attention of employees and those training them. If training programs lack the ability to capture employees' attention giving them takeaways to help them perform their job better or become better employees, the training will negatively impact the morale of the recipient.

Automating training with AI effectively engages employees while increasing productivity and developing their skill sets. As AI continues to evolve, it improves the way employees learn. It gauges employee knowledge throughout by distributing quizzes and tests to measure what they've learned. The advantage AI has over a physical human is its ability to adapt to the learning styles of each individual by focusing on their problem areas helping employees learn at their own pace.

(Source: forbes.com)

# Scientists say many Arctic lakes give off less carbon than expected

The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. One consequence of that trend is the thawing of permafrost, a layer of earth that has remained frozen for thousands of years in some areas. This frozen soil and vegetation currently holds more than twice the carbon found in the atmosphere.

As permafrost across northern Alaska, Canada, Siberia and other high-latitude regions thaws, microbes in the soil consume organic materials, releasing carbon dioxide or methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas, into lakes and the atmosphere.

But a warmer, wetter climate may also cause more carbon from plants on land to move into lakes. Greater flow of carbon from plants and soils into Arctic lakes stimulates greater greenhouse gas emissions from bodies of water. And in a largely unstudied region with millions of lakes, it's still a mystery as to how much carbon moves from the land into lakes, and ultimately into the atmosphere.

## Entire arctic region

New research by the University of Washington and U.S. Geological Survey suggests many lakes pose little threat to global carbon levels, at least for now. In the Arctic's flat, arid regions dotted with thousands of lakes -- a landscape that makes up about a quarter of the entire Arctic region -- many lakes are functioning like self-contained units, not releasing much carbon dioxide.

"We found that not all high-latitude lakes are big chimneys of carbon to the atmosphere, and that lakes in the region are not actively processing much permafrost or plant carbon from land," said lead author Matthew Bogard,



a postdoctoral researcher in the UW School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. "Documenting the heterogeneous nature of northern lakes, as we have done here, will better define the role of Arctic lakes in the

global carbon cycle."

The researchers visited 20 lakes several times over the course of a year in the Yukon Flats region of northeast Alaska: a vast, dry landscape speckled with thousands of lakes

**As permafrost across northern Alaska, Canada, Siberia and other high-latitude regions thaws, microbes in the soil consume organic materials, releasing carbon dioxide or methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas, into lakes and the atmosphere.**

## Researchers have created a fabric that dynamically regulates heat passing through it

Researchers have engineered a new fabric from synthetic yarn with a carbon nanotube coating that is activated by temperature and humidity, releasing heat in warm humid conditions and trapping heat when conditions are cool and dry.

Despite decades of innovation in fabrics with high-tech thermal properties that keep marathon runners cool or alpine hikers warm, there has never been a material that changes its insulating properties in response to the environment.

University of Maryland researchers have created a fabric that can automatically regulate the amount of heat that passes through it. When conditions are warm and moist, such as those near a sweating body, the fabric allows infrared radiation (heat) to pass through. When conditions become cooler and drier, the fabric reduces the heat that escapes. The development was reported in the February 8, 2019 issue of the journal *Science*.

### Activating the coating

The researchers created the fabric from specially engineered yarn coated with a conductive metal. Under hot, humid conditions, the strands of yarn compact and activate the coating, which changes the way the fabric interacts with infrared radiation.

"This is the first technology that allows us to dynamically gate infrared radiation," said Yu-Huang Wang, a professor of chemistry and biochemistry at UMD and one of the paper's corresponding authors who directed the studies.

The base yarn for this new textile is created with fibers made of two different synthetic materials -- one absorbs water and the other repels it. The strands are coated with carbon nanotubes, a special class of lightweight, carbon-based, conductive metal. Because materials in the fibers both resist and absorb water, the fibers warp when exposed to humidity such as that surrounding a sweating body. That distortion brings the strands of yarn closer together, which does two things. First, it



opens the pores in the fabric. This has a small cooling effect because it allows heat to escape. Second, and most importantly, it modifies the electromagnetic coupling between the carbon nanotubes in the coating.

### Radio antenna

"You can think of this coupling effect like the bending of a radio antenna to change the wavelength or frequency it resonates with," Wang said. "It's a very simplified way to think of it, but imagine bringing two antennae close together to regulate the kind of electromagnetic wave they pick up. When the fibers are brought closer together, the radiation they interact with changes."

Depending on the tuning, the fabric either blocks infrared radiation or allows it to pass through. The reaction is almost instant, so before people realize they're getting hot, the garment could already be cooling them down. On the flip side, as a body cools down, the dynamic gating mechanism works in reverse to trap in heat.

The "human body is a perfect radiator. It gives off heat quickly," said Min Ouyang, a professor of physics at UMD and the paper's other corresponding author. "For all of history, the only way to regulate the radiator has been to take clothes off or put clothes on. But this fabric is a true bidirectional regulator."

According to the *Science* paper, this is the first textile shown to be able to regulate heat exchange with the environment.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

## Scientists now show why some people have musical skill



the idea that some people are born with perfect pitch. The team was surprised to find that several of the participants with absolute pitch developed their abilities later in life.

A "widely accepted view is that absolute pitch could only develop in predisposed people if they received musical training before a certain critical age, say 7-years-old," said Schneider.

The study doesn't, however, confirm whether a larger auditory cortex is the cause or an effect of having absolute pitch, acknowledged Schneider.

### Larger auditory cortex

It remains unclear whether those with a larger auditory cortex that receive the appropriate musical training are more likely to develop absolute pitch, or if developing absolute pitch causes the auditory cortex to expand.

Schneider hopes the work will inspire future research projects on other populations, for instance those with amusia that struggle with musical perception.

This is not the first time scientists have investigated perfect pitch. One study published in the journal *Cognition* in 2015 also indicated perfect pitch can be learned.

Howard Nusbaum, professor of psychology at the University of Chicago and co-author of the study, commented at the time: "This is the first significant demonstration that the ability to identify notes by hearing them may well be something that individuals can be trained to do."

(Source: Newsweek)

The study also goes towards debunking

## Researchers come up with way to build space stations inside asteroids

Asteroid 10199 Chariklo. Researchers proposed that a space station inside an asteroid could enable humans to mine resources from the countless space rocks within the Solar System. In recent years, there have been interests from governments and companies to drill in space.

There is currently interest to mine asteroids for valuable resources, but drilling in microgravity is going to be a major challenge.

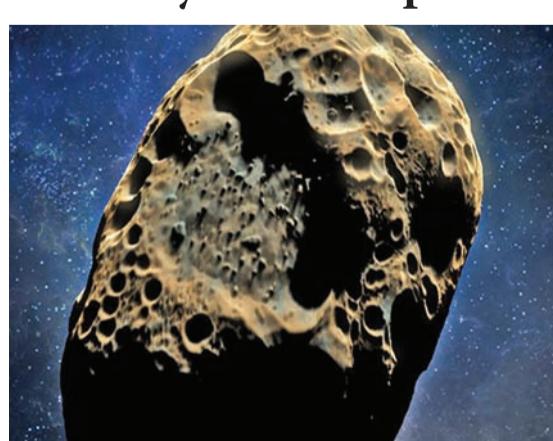
Exerting force on the asteroid will push an expensive drilling machine away and into the darkness of space. To address the issue, researchers from the University of Vienna has figured out a plan that will enable asteroid mining.

In the paper that appears in *Research Gate*, a team proposed a plan to build a space station into an asteroid that will mine it from the inside out.

### Space station

The space station has to be built inside a solid rock that rotates several times per minute to provide the centrifugal force that will enable miners to drill from the center of the asteroid outward. Future miners do not even have to build inside the asteroids, the researchers said.

"If we find an asteroid that's stable enough, we might not need these aluminum walls or anything, you might



just be able to use the entire asteroid as a space station," stated Thomas Maendl, the lead author of the study, to *New Scientist*.

Finding an asteroid that fits their criteria is crucial for the mission to succeed. According to calculations, the asteroid should spin one to three times a minute to create 38 percent

of gravity of Earth, similar to the gravity on Mars.

There are also questions about whether the idea would be possible.

### Ripping the rocky worlds

Digging a tunnel and building a space station inside an asteroid could rip the rocky worlds apart. Activity within the asteroid could also stop it from spinning altogether, dooming the project from the start.

Maindl added that right now, it might not be possible to see their ideas applied in real life.

The "border between science and science fiction here is sort of blurry," he stated. "My gut feeling is that it will be at least 20 years before any asteroid mining happens, let alone something like this."

There has been serious interest in mining in space for resources to be used on Earth or to support space stations and long voyages into deep space. The United States Geological Survey, last year, was tasked to map out and characterize valuable resources in space.

A few companies, such as Planetary Resources (an asteroid mining company) have also expressed plans to exploit space for materials.

(Source: techtimes.com)

## 5 times people thought a science idea was crackpot, and were proven spectacularly wrong

Science has the power to change the world, but it's not always an easy path to enlightenment. At many junctures throughout history, proponents of revolutionary ideas have come up against criticism and pushback from the establishment.

On 6 January 1912, 32-year-old German geophysicist and meteorologist Alfred Wegener proposed an extraordinary idea. Based on his observations, Earth's continents had once been a single landmass that had drifted apart.

He noticed that the continents could be more or less fit together, like a puzzle; and that there were fossil plants and animals that spanned multiple continents. Besides, there were geological features that matched when the continents were put together, such as mountain ranges in America and Scotland, and rock strata in South Africa and Brazil.

Oh, how the world howled! He was accused of having contracted "moving crust disease and wandering pole plague," his work dismissed as "delirious ravings," according to the Smithsonian. The idea was roundly scorned as geologists clung to the notion that the continents had been connected by land bridges, and the mountains created by a shrinking Earth.

It wasn't until the 1960s, when a new generation of scientists found evidence of seafloor spreading and tectonic plate movement. Wegener didn't live to see it, having died tragically in 1930 - but now his basic idea is the accepted science, and we call his massive early continent Pangaea.

When biologist Charles Darwin released his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the world exploded into an uproar. Darwin's proposal seemed preposterous - that life had common ancestors, and that evolution was a process of slow change due to the passing down of heritable traits that adapted the species for survival.

Darwin had done his homework - literally decades of careful observation and research - and his science was solid. Where he found most resistance was within the religious community, which had a hard time accepting that humans had an evolutionary origin, and were not simply plopped on Earth by a god.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## Mars One is dead, but it was doomed from the start, says space team

We haven't heard much lately from Mars One, the company that promised to send people to colonize Mars as part of a reality TV show. It's looking like we won't hear from it again, either. An eagle-eyed space enthusiast has spotted a bankruptcy filing from a Swiss court confirming Mars One is no more.

Mars One started making waves in the early 2010s with its plan to ship a few dozen humans off to Mars on a one-way trip. Mars One founder Bas Lansdorp envisioned a funding scheme based entirely on licensing and TV programs. To make that happen, Lansdorp set Mars One up as two entities: the non-profit Mars One Foundation and the Swiss-based Mars One Ventures for-profit. The for-profit company was supposed to handle all the licensing and funding for the foundation, and now it's officially bankrupt.

Problems appeared soon after Mars One began promoting its plans. People from around the world were invited to apply for the mission, but its claims that 200,000 people applied for a one-way trip to Mars have been disputed. The real number, according to a former candidate, was less than 3,000. The company also used merchandise purchases and donations as a deciding factor for who moved forward in the selection process.

At every turn, it became increasingly clear that Mars One didn't have the technology or personnel to make it to Mars in the 2020s. Even Elon Musk's most ambitious plans aren't that unbelievable, and he actually has rockets under design that are theoretically capable of getting to the planet. Mars One never announced any partnerships with aerospace companies to design its theoretical habitats or transport supplies to the surface for its colonists.

Even when Mars One did offer some minor details, experts quickly tore them apart. For example, Lansdorp's claim that colonists could grow crops on Mars to produce oxygen in their living spaces would have caused them to either suffocate or explode. The habitats themselves also lacked the necessary shielding to protect colonists from the high radiation levels on the red planet. It's not even clear humans could survive long-term on the surface — underground habitats may be necessary.

(Source: extremetech.com)



## Earth's earliest mobile organisms lived 2.1 billion years ago: new research

Scientists have discovered in 2.1-billion-year-old black shale from a quarry in Gabon the earliest evidence of a revolutionary development in the history of life on Earth, the ability of organisms to move from one place to another on their own.

The researchers on Monday described exquisitely preserved fossils of small tubular structures created when unknown organisms moved through soft mud in search of food in a calm and shallow marine ecosystem. The fossils dated back to a time when Earth was oxygen-rich and boasted conditions conducive to simple cellular life evolving more complexity, they said.

Life emerged in Earth's seas as single-celled bacterial organisms perhaps 4 billion years ago, but the earliest life forms lacked the ability to move independently, called motility. The Gabon fossils are roughly 1.5 billion years older than the previous earliest evidence of motility, and appearance of animal life.

"What matters here is their astonishing complexity and diversity in shape and size, and likely in terms of metabolic, developmental and behavioral patterns, including the just-discovered earliest evidence of motility, at least for certain among them," said paleobiogeochemist and sedimentologist Abderrazak El Albani of the University of Poitiers in France.

The identity of these pioneering mobile organisms remains mysterious. The fossils did not include the organisms themselves.

The tubular structures, up to 6.7 inches (170 mm long), originally were made of organic matter, perhaps mucus strands left by organisms moving through mud. The researchers said the structures may have been created by a multicellular organism or an aggregation of single-celled organisms akin to the slug-like organism formed when certain amoebas cluster together in lean times to move collectively to find a more hospitable environment.

(Source: Reuters)



# Britain committee on arms sales ignores Saudi arms deals, Yemen war in key inquiry

A British parliamentary panel tasked with scrutinizing the country's weapons sales in 2017 has come under fire for turning a blind eye on London's extensive arms deals with the House of Saud regime and their effects on the people of Yemen.

The Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) launched its inquiry into Prime Minister Theresa May's government's latest 2017 Strategic Export Controls Annual Report in late 2018 and held its first evidence session by inviting a number of officials and sales experts to the House of Commons last week.

However, the committee's agenda seems to be void of any reference to London's dealings with Riyadh, which has become the largest purchaser of Britain-made weapons since 2015, the year it launched a deadly military aggression against its impoverished southern neighbor, Yemen.

The inquiry covers both the technicalities of the policy, such as the different types of arms export licenses issued by the government and its political aspect to answer questions such as the consequences of a no-deal Brexit on the country's weapons sales.

The exclusion of the conflict in Yemen has raised questions among activists and campaign groups, specially since the panel's previous work on the government's 2016 policy had raised concerns about the nature of arms deals with Saudi Arabia.

In fact, the previous report was so damaging that many lawmakers asked the government to end the weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. The growing divide over the issue eventually led to the dissolution of the CAEC.

The controversy continued after the current lineup of lawmakers took over the panel in October 2017 and made it clear that they were not going to remain neutral over the matter.

Graham Jones, a Labour MP (Member of Parliament) and chair of the CAEC, said last week that neither the West nor Saudi Arabia were to blame for the war in Yemen, which has killed over 57,000 people since its onset in March 2015.

He went as far as calling "dishonest" campaign groups that bring attention to Saudi Arabia's atrocities in Yemen.

The comments came days after the CAEC received a highly critical report that spotted



extensive flaws in the British government's arms sales strategy.

Put together by Control Arms UK, a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), urged May's government to reduce or altogether halt weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and other countries that violate human rights.

Britain has licensed over £4.7 billion worth of arms exports, including missiles and fighter jets, to Riyadh since the deadly conflict began.

Britain has also been providing combat intelligence and target data to Saudi Arabia over the course of the war, which has killed thousands of Yemeni civilians and put millions more on the verge of famine.

The war is being led by the House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the kingdom's de facto ruler, who wishes to reinstate Yemen's fugitive former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and destroy the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement.

The Saudi-led war has created a cholera epidemic as well as leading the country to the brink of an entirely preventable famine.

## Yemeni retaliatory attack leaves 8 Saudi soldiers dead in Jizan

Meantime, at least eight Saudi regime troopers have been killed when Yemeni army soldiers, backed by fighters from allied Popular Committees, launched a surprise attack against them in response to Riyadh's war

on their conflict-stricken country.

A Yemeni military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language Al-Masirah television network that Yemeni soldiers and their allies targeted the Saudi forces in the Madinah area of the kingdom's southern border region of Jizan, situated 966 kilometers south of the capital Riyadh, on Monday evening.

Earlier in the day, Saudi regime troops had launched a salvo of artillery rounds and mortar shells against residential neighborhoods in the Munabbih district of Yemen's northwestern province of Sa'adah.

There were no immediate reports about possible casualties or the extent of damage caused.

Separately, Saudi-led military aircraft struck Sirwah district in the central Yemeni province of Ma'rib. No reports of fatalities were immediately available though.

Elsewhere in the Dawran Ans district of the southeastern province of Dhamar, Saudi-led warplanes launched four aerial assaults, though no reports of casualties were quickly available.

Battle tanks belonging to Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi also shelled al-Monqim village in the al-Durayhimi district of the western Yemeni province of Hudaydah. No casualties have so far been reported.

## UN urges access to grain stocks in Yemen's Hudaydah

Elsewhere, the United Nations (UN) has warned that there is an urgent need for making grain warehouses accessible in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah and that the sustenance stored there is "at risk of rotting."

In a joint statement on Monday, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and UN aid chief Mark Lowcock highlighted the urgency of obtaining access to the UN stores at the Red Sea Mills, which are believed to contain enough grain to feed several million people for a month.

"The World Food Program (WFP) grain stored in the mills - enough to feed 3.7 million people for a month - has been inaccessible for over five months and is at risk of rotting," the statement by the UN officials read.

The UN is pushing for the implementation of a ceasefire in Hudaydah, the main entry point for most of Yemen's imports, agreed in December last year in Sweden. The breakthrough deal also calls for the withdrawal of both Saudi-led forces and the Yemeni defense units from the city, and the deployment of UN observers there.

The warring sides disagree over who should control Hudaydah once combat forces withdraw. The Yemeni Ansarullah movement, which has been running Yemen, says the other side has repeatedly violated the truce agreement.

A UN-appointed committee tasked with monitoring the agreed ceasefire in Hudaydah started a new meeting in early February.

In their Monday statement, Griffiths and Lowcock said they appreciated earlier efforts by the Ansarullah "to re-open the road leading to the mills which have been carried out under difficult and dangerous circumstances."

But they stopped short of saying specifically who they wanted to cooperate with the UN to access the mills now. They only said they "emphasize that ensuring access to the mills is a shared responsibility among the parties to the conflict in Yemen."

Accessing over 50,000 tons of UN wheat and milling equipment is a key aim of the ongoing peace talks for Yemen.

(Source: Press TV)

# Grisly killing of child bares brutal nature of Wahhabism

The killing of a six-year-old boy in broad daylight in Saudi Arabia has generated a wave of shock and revulsion and drawn attention to the brutal nature of Wahhabi school of thought which governs the kingdom.

The child, identified as Zakariya Bader al-Jabir, was brutally murdered last week by a man - described in some reports as a taxi driver - in front of his screaming mother in the holy city of Medina.

The killer repeatedly stabbed Zakariya in the neck with a piece of broken glass until he was beheaded, witness accounts of the gruesome killing said.

The child and his mother were reportedly attacked by the apparently lone assailant while they were on their way to visit the shrine of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him).

Shia Rights Watch, a Washington-based advocacy group, said on Saturday the incident was "a result of ongoing violations against and lack of protection of the Shia population by Saudi authorities."

"Saudi Shias have been under military crackdown by their government and many Shias are in prisons and on death row," it said.

According to reports, Saudi officials were quick to state that the killer suffered from psychological problems.

Ahmad Abul Ali, executive director of Child Development Center in the Eastern Province which is populated mostly by Shia Muslims, called for protec-

tion for all children in the kingdom, online newspaper Hasanews reported.

Ademrights, an Iraq-based rights group, also denounced the killing and held Saudi authorities responsible for fueling violence against the Shia minority in the Wahhabi-dominated kingdom.

The murder of the Saudi child, it said, is more dangerous than the crimes committed by Daesh terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

Takfirism is the trademark of many terror outfits operating in the two countries. The concept is largely influenced by Wahhabism, the radical ideology dominating Saudi Arabia and freely preached by Saudi clerics.

Riyadh is widely believed to be a key sponsor of Takfiri terrorist groups.

The regime has also adopted a zero-tolerance approach toward dissent, the latest example of which is the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

In an interview with Press TV, political commentator Alexander Azadgan said all journalists and human rights activists should shed light on Zakariya's murder and not let it become "the victim of media news cycles."

"This story needs to be repeated until there is some kind of resolution, until there is some kind of reaction from all sides for us to know whether the global community - the so-called global community - even cares about the plight of minorities in some of these



Wahhabi-oriented countries," he added.

So far, the mainstream media in the West have largely kept silent on the grisly killing and except for a few British newspapers, no sections of the press have covered it.

Azadgan touched on heavy-handed tactics used by Saudi Arabia and its allies to silence opponents and instill fear, citing Bahrain which has been rocked by protests since 2011.

"Let's not forget what they are doing to Shia clerics in Bahrain, Sheikh [Isa] Qassim for example. This is part of much bigger hatred, prejudice and bias against the Shias," he said.

(Source: Press TV)

# Bahrainis determined to continue peaceful struggle for change: Al-Wefaq

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rights activists have lashed out at Manama for the rampant torture and sexual abuse of



political prisoners as well as numerous death sentences, lengthy jail terms, revocation of citizenships, enforced deportations and hefty financial penalties against political activists and Shia scholars in the country.

Critics argue that defendants in the mass trials, all Shia Muslims, are victims of torture and denied access to any legal representation during the investigation period.

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

dissent in the sheikhdom.

## Sheikh Qassim's words 'road map for future'

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

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

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

words that contained a "map, a strategy, foundations...and a signal."

They also called on the people of Bahrain to be fully prepared to mark the anniversary of the uprising. Bahraini authorities stripped the cleric of his citizenship on June 20, 2016. They later dissolved the Islamic Enlightenment Institution founded by Sheikh Qassim as well as the opposition al-Risala Islamic Association.

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

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

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

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

(Source: agencies)

# Turkey orders 1,112 arrested over links to cleric Gulen

Turkey launched on Tuesday one of its largest operations against alleged supporters of the U.S.-based Muslim cleric accused of leading an attempted coup in 2016, ordering the arrest of 1,112 people, state media reported.

The operation, related to alleged cheating in police examinations, showed authorities were not letting up on their crackdown two-and-a-half years after rogue soldiers used warplanes, helicopters and tanks in a bid to seize power.

More than 250 people were killed in the failed putsch, in which preacher Fethullah Gulen, a former ally of President Tayyip Erdogan, has denied involvement. Gulen has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999.

Tuesday's operation related to a police examination in 2010 for those seeking to become deputy inspectors, and allegations that some of those taking part had received the questions in advance, state-owned Anadolu news agency reported.

So far 124 suspects have been detained in the operation launched by the Ankara chief prosecutor's office and extending across 76 provinces, Anadolu said. It was not clear how many, if any, of the suspects were serving police officers.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said on Sunday a "big operation" was looming against Gulen supporters. "Devils would not perpetrate deceptions like they have," he said. "We will finish them off."

The government says his network over decades infiltrated state institutions including the security forces, judiciary and ministries, often helped by cheating in exams, to create a "parallel state".

## Purge of suspects

Since the coup attempt, the government has carried out a deep and lasting purge of state institutions while prosecutors have launched a steady stream of investigations against those suspected of links to Gulen.

Turkey's Western allies have criticized the crackdown, which was pursued mainly under a state of emergency that was declared after the coup and remained in effect until July last year.

Erdogan's critics accuse him of using the failed putsch as a pretext to quash dissent. Turkish authorities say the measures are necessary to combat threats to national security.

More than 77,000 people have been jailed pending trial since the putsch and widespread arrests are still routine. Authorities have suspended or sacked 150,000 civil servants and military personnel.

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, the former chief of staff, has said more than 15,000 military personnel had been dismissed since the coup, including 150 generals and admirals.

(Source: TRT)

# Success in AI in Persian leopards may raise hopes for rare big cats

**12 →** For example, Iran's Department of Environment is now considering the technique for the much rarer Asiatic cheetah. The Department of Environment has announced that the cheetah population has decreased despite massive conservation investment, with a very tiny population now alive. Although it is globally announced that some 50 cheetahs are left in Iran, but many local conservationists cast a doubt over this number and consider it ambitiously overestimated. Therefore, captive breeding has been agreed by Iranian conservation agencies to be placed on the table, besides the on-going conservation actions in the wild.

Natural mating has been already tried for Asiatic cheetahs kept in captivity, which sadly failed. Now, artificial insemination is considered to be the major option for conceiving an adult female Asiatic cheetah, named Delbar. Nonetheless, the chance of pregnancy and survival of the cubs is extremely low. Any achievement of using artificial insemination to breed Persian leopards would raise hopes for Asiatic cheetahs.

What measures have been taken to deal with canine distemper, which is pervasive among Persian leopards living in habitats, where the dogs are suffering from the disease?

In contrary to general rumors about the prevalence of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) among Persian leopards in Iran, there is no evidence of CDV occurrence in any leopard, nor in Iran neither in west Asia. We have found high prevalence of the CDV among local dog populations around some key leopard areas, but blood tests from leopards captured near these injected dog populations did not show any evidence of CDV in leopards. Surprisingly, these dogs are widely killed by leopards, while no sign of the CDV was seen in leopards.

Leopard is widely popular species in the Iranian community, even losing an individual could cause a backlash in the media. Therefore, as long as proper evidence of CDV prevalence in leopards is not available, calling it as a serious threat to Persian leopard might trigger the community's emotions to react and to create expectation from conservation agencies to deal with the problem, when there is no evidence that the problem exists.

What measures has the government taken to deal with cases related to attack of the Persian leopard on domestic livestock and people, regarding the insurance, for instance?

Raiding domestic animals, including dog, sheep, cattle, horse and even camels, are a major problem, both for people living alongside leopard areas, as well as conservation agencies in charge of protecting the leopards. As a result, affected people occasionally commit retaliatory killing of leopards, despite extremely high monetary fine of over \$6000.

Thus, Iran's Department of Environment established an innovative insurance scheme for leopards a few years ago, aiming at compensating all verified cases of people losses to leopards. Hundreds of animals were compensated. I am not aware if

## Arsenal's Ramsey signs Juventus deal worth £400k a week

Arsenal midfielder Aaron Ramsey has signed a pre-contract agreement to join Juventus in the summer in a deal that will earn him over £400,000 a week.

The 28-year-old has agreed a four-year contract that will see him join the Italian champions as a free agent, ending his 11-year spell with Arsenal. Ramsey passed a two-part medical in January, having picked Juve following talks with a host of European clubs.

He will be the highest-earning British player ever based on basic salary. The Wales international's Arsenal contract expires on 30 June and the Gunners will receive no fee when he leaves.

In confirming the deal, Juventus said the club would incur costs of 3.7m euros (£3.2m) but did not specify what the fee was for.

Arsenal said Ramsey had made a "fantastic contribution" during his time at the club and will "have a special place in the hearts and memories" of fans.

On his Instagram page, Ramsey thanked Arsenal's fans and said he will "continue to give the team 100%".

He wrote: "You welcomed me as a teenager and have been there through all the highs and lows I've encountered during my time at the club. It is with a heavy heart that I leave after 11 incredible years. Thank you."

The Juventus website welcomed Ramsey by stating he will become the third Welshman to represent the club, following the John Charles and Ian Rush.

(Source: BBC)

## Dortmund's Reus ruled out of Champions League clash with Tottenham

Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus has been ruled out of the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie at Tottenham Hotspur on Wednesday due to a thigh injury, the club has said.

Reus, who has 17 goals for Dortmund in all competitions and is the club's leading scorer, injured his thigh during their German Cup defeat by Werder Bremen last week and missed their draw with Hoffenheim in the league at the weekend.

"We would, of course, have liked to have him in London, because his presence is a bit intimidating for the opponent," Dortmund official Sebastian Kehl told reporters. "But we'll compensate for his absence."

Jadon Sancho, the 18-year-old English winger who has eight goals and 10 assists in all competitions, is expected to take Reus' place in the starting lineup.

It is unclear whether Reus will be fit for the return leg on March 5.

(Source: Reuters)

## Bottom side Nuremberg fire sports director and coach

Bundesliga bottom side Nuremberg took the drastic step on Tuesday of sacking both sports director Andreas Bornemann and head coach Michael Koellner.

With the club winless in their last 15 league games, the decision was taken in Monday night's crisis meeting.

Ex-Slovakia international Marek Mintal, 41, who made more than 200 appearances for Nuremberg, and assistant coach Boris Schommers have been put in temporary charge for next Monday's visit of Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund.

Last Saturday's 2-0 defeat in the basement battle at Hanover 96 - who are 17th, just one place above Nuremberg - was the final straw for Bornemann and Koellner.

"We couldn't just say, 'we'll keep going,'" said board spokesman Thomas Grethlein.

"We had to create a new impulse." Bornemann sealed his fate as he stood by Koellner, which expired the board's patience, "he bound his fate with that of the coach," admitted Grethlein. The chances of Nuremberg avoiding relegation are slight as they sit six points from safety with 13 games left. Koellner is the fourth Bundesliga coach relieved of his duties this season after Tayfun Korkut was sacked by Stuttgart last October, Heiko Herrlich left Leverkusen in December and Hanover 96 dismissed Andre Breitenreiter last month.

(Source: AFP)

## Westbrook breaks 51-year-old NBA record



Oklahoma City Thunder's Russell Westbrook broke a 51-year-old NBA record when he achieved a triple-double in 10 consecutive games.

He tied Wilt Chamberlain's run of nine triple-doubles in a row, set in 1968, on Sunday against Houston Rockets.

The 30-year-old point guard broke the record in Thunders' 120-111 win over Portland Trail Blazers with 21 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists.

Thunder team-mate Paul George top scored in the match with 47 points.

A triple-double is achieved when a player records a double-digit total in three of the following categories: points, total rebounds, assists, steals, and blocks.

(Source: BBC)

# England's World Cup-winning keeper Banks dead at 81

Gordon Banks, the goalkeeper in England's 1966 World Cup-winning team, has died at the age of 81, his former club Stoke City said on Tuesday.

Banks won 73 caps for England between 1963 and 1972 and made nearly 200 appearances for Stoke before his playing career was brought to an end due to a car crash that cost him the sight in one eye.

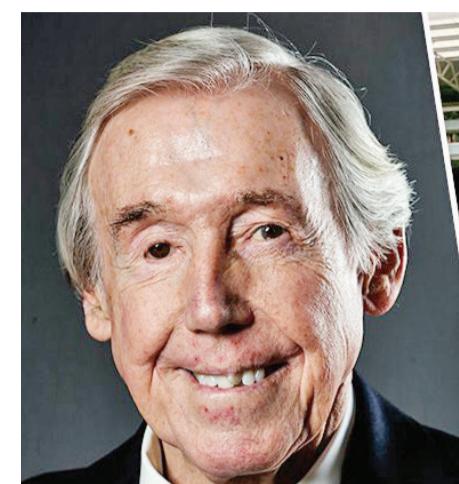
He was widely regarded as one of the greatest goalkeepers to have played the game and will be best remembered for the diving stop he made to deny Brazil's Pele at the 1970 World Cup, which later became known as the "save of the century".

"It is with great sadness that we announce that Gordon passed away peacefully overnight," Banks' family said in a statement posted on Stoke's official website.

"We are devastated to lose him but we have so many happy memories and could not have been more proud of him."

Banks played every game in the 1966 World Cup including the 4-2 victory over West Germany in the final at Wembley – the only time England has won the world title.

Four years later though, in Mexico, he



produced one of the most outstanding saves in the history of the tournament in a group game between England and Brazil, which Brazil won 1-0.

Pele rose to head a cross from the byline by right-winger Jairzinho, thundering the header down towards Banks' right hand post.

The ball appeared to be past Banks but his agility and strength saw him get down and palm it high and wide to safety.

Pele travelled to Stoke 38 years later to unveil a statue to Banks and recalled the save.

"From the moment I headed it, I was sure it had gone in," he said.

"After I headed the ball, I had already begun to jump to celebrate the goal. Then I looked back and I couldn't believe it hadn't gone in. I have scored more than a thousand goals in my life and the thing people always talk to me about is the one I didn't score," he said.

Banks recalled the moment modestly as a piece of good fortune.

"As soon as I got my hand to it, I thought it was going in the top corner," he said.

"But after I'd landed on the hard floor, I looked up and saw the ball bounce behind the net and that's when I said: Banksy, you lucky prat."

The Sheffield-born Banks began his career at Chesterfield in 1958 and moved to Leicester City the following year. He won his first England cap in 1963, four years before he joined Stoke.

Banks retired in 1973 following the car crash, aged only 33, but four years later he returned to play in the North American Soccer League with Fort Lauderdale Strikers.

The German Football Association (DFB) paid tribute to Banks on, saying on Twitter: "A fierce opponent and a good man."

(Source: Reuters)

## Japan's Olympic poster girl Ikei diagnosed with leukaemia



Japanese swim queen Rikako Ikee, the poster girl for next year's Tokyo Olympics, has been diagnosed with leukaemia, the 18-year-old tweeted on Tuesday.

In a shock announcement, Ikee said: "After feeling unwell I returned in haste from Australia and following tests I was diagnosed with leukaemia. I still can't believe it myself, I'm in a state of confusion."

Ikee shot to fame at last year's Asian Games, where she captured a record six gold medals to fire a warning for the 2020 Olympics in her home city.

The teenage superstar, who holds a string of national records, has been tipped to push for gold on several fronts, in particular in the women's 100 metres butterfly.

Ikee told fans she was determined to beat her illness after being forced to abandon her training camp on Australia's Gold Coast.

"If treated properly it's a disease that can be beaten," said Ikee, who confirmed she will withdraw from the Japanese championships in April. "I will devote myself to my treatment and strive to be able to show an even stronger Rikako Ikee."

Ikee's coach Jiro Miki confessed he had never seen the swimmer struggle as much as she had while training in Australia.

"I had never seen her breathing as heavily as that," he said.

"We took her to a local hospital to check her blood and heart but decided to return

to Japan as quickly as possible to undergo further tests. But as for her motivation to beat this disease, I can only bow my head at her determination."

Miki revealed that Ikee has been admitted to hospital to begin treatment.

"She is not moping about," he added. "She is absolutely positive about beating this as quickly as possible."

Ikee stole the headlines from giant Chinese swimmer Sun Yang at the Asian Games in Jakarta as she finished with eight medals in total, a haul previously achieved only by North Korean shooter So Gin-man in 1982.

Japan's new swimming pin-up would have gone into this year's world championships in South Korea as a strong favourite in the 100m butterfly, while also a threat in the 200m freestyle.

After her breakout performance in Jakarta, Ikee told AFP that she welcomed the pressure to produce at the Tokyo Olympics.

"Pressure for me is something I thrive on," she said. "There will be a lot of Japanese fans cheering for me at the Tokyo Olympics in my home city -- maybe even some from overseas too -- and that's going to give me great strength."

"The more fans that come, the stronger I'll be," added Ikee. "When it comes to swimming, I just really hate to lose."

(Source: AFP)

I have a contract here."

During Madrid's run to the Copa del Rey semifinals opposition coaches have targeted Marcelo and Solari pointedly refused to comment when asked about another below par performance in last Wednesday's 1-1 draw with Barcelona.

The defender accepted that his form had suffered after a run of injuries, but added that he needs to play regularly to return to top fitness and confidence.

"The level I have been showing is difficult to always maintain," he said. "I am a little below that level at the moment, but my career has been like that, some little dips, and unfortunately this season I had three injuries in two months. I went through a difficult period in my football and within the club."

"But that phase is over now, I need to play to get back to my usual form and confidence. But I feel good now, physically good, I am training strongly. I need to play to get back my confidence, but physically I am good."

Solari is expected to keep faith with Reguilón for Wednesday's Champions League round of 16 first leg at Ajax, having praised the 22-year-old to everyone at the club's youth system following another excellent showing in Saturday's 3-1 La Liga win at Atlético Madrid.

(Source: ESPN)

## Real Madrid can 'pay me up' and I'll leave if they want - Marcelo



Real Madrid left-back Marcelo says all the club need to do is "pay me up" and he will leave this summer if they want him to.

Marcelo, 30, has won 20 trophies including four Champions Leagues over more than a decade at the Bernabeu, but has been on the bench for the team's last five La Liga games with coach Santi Solari preferring youth team graduate Sergio Reguilón at left-back.

The Brazil international has been regularly linked with a move to join Cristiano Ronaldo at Juventus and told Brazilian outlet Esporte Interativo that he would reluctantly accept an exit if that is what the Bernabeu hierarchy wanted.

"If I am on the list of players [Madrid] want to sell, then they can pay me up and all is sorted," Marcelo said. "I trust in myself, in my work, but if a day comes when Real Madrid do not want me, I'll go. I will be sad, but I'll go. But I am sure I will not be kicked out."

Ronaldo has reportedly been calling his former teammate in recent months to convince him to come to Juventus, but Marcelo talked down the prospect when asked again about the possibility of a move to Turin.

"I have seen mock-ups [of me] with the Juventus jersey, and they are a spectacular team," he said. "But I am at Real Madrid,

## Westbrook breaks 51-year-old NBA record



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He tied Wilt Chamberlain's run of nine triple-doubles in a row, set in 1968, on Sunday against Houston Rockets.

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Thunder team-mate Paul George top scored in the match with 47 points.

A triple-double is achieved when a player records a double-digit total in three of the following categories: points, total rebounds, assists, steals, and blocks.

(Source: BBC)

## Diplomatic gold? Joint North Korea-South Korea Olympic bid faces long odds

If North and South Korea succeed in their long-shot bid to host the 2032 Summer Olympics, any athletic feats at the Games may be overshadowed by the political achievements needed to make it happen.

Buoyed by the role the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics played in easing tensions last year, South Korean and North Korean officials are due to meet on Friday with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Switzerland to discuss what would be the first ever bid by two countries.

To make Olympic history, experts say the bid would need to overcome international sanctions against North Korea, decades of mistrust between Seoul and Pyongyang, and wide political and economic differences between two countries still officially at war.

The Switzerland meeting comes ahead of a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump in Vietnam, which will be key to the future of reclusive North Korea's relations with the world.

Since the Olympic bid was announced after a summit between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang in September, South Korean officials have been pushing forward with plans despite the obstacles. On Monday Seoul was named as the city that would make the South Korean bid.

In a statement, Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon said officials would soon seek to establish a line of communication with Pyongyang and "make all-out efforts" to co-host with North Korea and make the 2032 Olympics the "last stop to establish the peace".

On Tuesday, the North's state news agency, KCNA, said an Olympic committee delegation led by minister of physical culture and sports Kim Il Guk had left for Switzerland, but did not mention the joint bid.

For its part, the IOC said in a statement it "welcomes very much" the two Koreas' intention to jointly host the 2032 games, as "sport could once more make a contribution to peace on the Korean Peninsula and the world".

"From a political perspective it would be huge," said one senior IOC member who spoke to Reuters on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive process.

"Because we can say that the IOC brought peace in that area a year ago during the Games in Pyeongchang and it is a huge achievement for the IOC and President Thomas Bach."

But privately, IOC members also expressed scepticism.

"We have not really spoken about it yet," another member said. "Any discussions today are more an exercise in political marketing than real details of such Games."

### CONTENTIOUS HISTORY

Last year's Games in Pyeongchang may have left warm

feelings in Seoul and Pyongyang, but the two Koreas share an older, darker Olympic history.

After Seoul was selected to host the 1988 Summer Olympics, North Korea proposed that it be allowed to co-host the Games.

Those talks went nowhere and just months before the Olympics opened, North Korean agents bombed a South Korean airliner, killing 115 people. The one surviving agent said the attack was aimed at disrupting the Games.

Later, North Korea pursued its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, earning the ire of South Korea and the international community, which imposed stifling sanctions on Pyongyang.

North Korea also faces

# Iran and the U.S. drawn in 2019 Freestyle World Cup

**SPORTS TEHRAN** — United de sk World Wrestling has announced the draw for the 2019 Freestyle World Cup Yakutia, Russia.

The annual dual-meet event is a highlight of the international wrestling calendar and features the top eight teams from the 2018 World Championships in Budapest.

The UWW executive board determined this week that all World Cup competitions, including the Greco-Roman and Women's World Cup, should follow the same competition format for placement of teams in their respective pools, or groups.

With the new system, the No. 1 team

will be paired with the No. 4, No. 5, and No. 8 teams from the world championships. The No. 2 team will in a group with the No. 3, No. 6, and No. 7, unitedworldwrestling.org reported.

## The groups for the 2019 Freestyle World Cup:

Group A - RUS (1), CUB (4), JPN (5), TUR (8)  
Group B - USA (2), GEO (3), IRI (6), MGL (7)

In Group A, world champion Russia will look to recapture the World Cup team title after the United States won the 2018 Freestyle World Cup in Iowa City, Iowa.



To earn top-billing in 2019 the home side will need to win their group which includes a resurgent Cuban team, Japan, and Turkey.

The United States heads up Group B but faces steep competition from a Georgia squad rife with former world and

Olympic champions, including two-time defending heavyweight world champion Geno Petriashvili. A young Iranian team and ever-improving Mongolia squad fill out Group B.

The match-by-match dual schedule and medal rounds have yet to be determined.

## Iran needs youth league for talent identification: Katayoun Khosrowyar



**SPORTS TEHRAN** — Katayoun Khosrowyar, head coach of Iran's U19 women's football team, is worried for not having a youth league for talent identification and for development of young players.

The Iranian team will participate at the Kuban Spring Women's U19 Football Tournament next month and she will test four new American-Iranian players in the event.

"My only worry right now is that we don't have a youth league for talent identification and for development of young players. If we can fix this, then Iranian women's football will be able to gradually become better, continuously," Khosrowyar

told Tehran Times.

"As an American- Iranian, who has played for Team Melli, I also wanted other American-Iranian girls to experience this once in a lifetime opportunity. I think it's important to include Iranians who live elsewhere since at the end of the day we all love our country and football," she declared.

"I have four players who will join Team Melli to take part at Kuban Spring tournament. They currently play for American clubs Emory University, Vanderbilt University, LA Galaxy and one plays in a top level club team. They are very talented players. And they will fit in perfectly with the U19 team we are creating," she concluded.

## Facing Messi, a World Cup goal and new challenge with Sydney FC: Reza's journey to A-League



He's played – and scored - at the FIFA World Cup and faced-off against some of the biggest names in world football but Reza Ghoochannejhad plans to make even more memories with Sydney FC.

The 31-year-old made his Hyundai A-League debut for the Sky Blues in last Friday night's shock 2-1 loss to Brisbane Roar.

While the result wasn't the ideal start to his career in Australia, Ghoochannejhad is seen as a key addition by Sydney FC as they chase success on two fronts – the Hyundai A-League and AFC Champions League.

And it's easy to see why given the pedigree of the 44-cap Iranian international and the career he has had so far.

--Delivering on the biggest stage at the FIFA World Cup

While he was born in Iran, Ghoochannejhad spent most of his early life in the Netherlands and even played youth football for the Dutch national team.

But a call from Iranian national team coach Carlos Queiroz in 2012 changed all that, with the classy attacker having no hesitation pledging his allegiance to Team Melli.

And he enjoyed a wonderful international career, playing at two FIFA World Cups in 2014 and 2018 and scoring 16 goals, including one against Bosnia and Herzegovina at the FIFA World Cup in Brazil five years ago.

"As a kid, you dream to be a part of the World Cup and to play in a World Cup," Ghoochannejhad told www.a-league.com.au.

"It was a great experience to be a part of this great event, an event the whole world is watching and also playing against the best football players in the world.

"At that moment you don't realize but when it's all over you realize you have played in a World Cup against some great players... I will cherish it for the rest of my life."

"[The goal against Bosnia] was also a great memory

system, the organizational structure, the tasks and responsibilities of the standing and judicial committees and the working mechanisms therein, in order to raise the level of the efficiency and quality of performance in its work."

Pizzi, best known for guiding Chile to the 2016 Copa America title in the United States, took over the Saudi Arabia coaching role in 2017.

The Argentine then led Saudi Arabia's revival in the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia by defeating Egypt 2-1 in the final group

"They are the big names everybody knows and those are players that will always be remembered, especially when you played against them."

"Those moments are unforgettable for me."

## Asian Cup in Oz and goals with Sydney FC

Ghoochannejhad's move to the Hyundai A-League is not the first time he's been to Australia, a part of Iran's squad that came Down Under for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

While Iran were eliminated by fierce rivals Iraq in the quarter-finals of that tournament, Ghoochannejhad always planned to return at some point.

And when he was approached by the Sky Blues – who he rates as one of the best clubs in not only the Hyundai A-League but all of Asia – he wasn't going to pass up the opportunity.

Now here, he wants to showcase his talent to Australia as he embarks on the latest adventure and challenge of his playing career.

"I'm not here on holiday, I'm here to focus on the main thing and that's football at Sydney FC," Ghoochannejhad declared.

"If I get a few days I would like to go with my family and explore Sydney but I have plenty of time for that, the most important thing is focusing on the football right now."

He added: "I'm going to try to do the best I can and show my qualities. I'll try to score many goals."

"It's always challenging to come to a new team, new environment, you have to get used to the way the new team plays [and] the lads have to get to know me better of course."

"It will take some time... I'm just going to give the best I can, try to add something to the team because the team is playing well."

(Source: A-league.com.au)

## Saudi Arabia part ways with Pizzi

The Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) has decided not to renew head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi's contract.

SAFF's has given its Technical Committee the mandate to hire a new national head coach.

The SAFF said in a statement: "The board has entrusted during its meeting on Monday, the Technical Committee to take over the choice of the next coach of the Saudi National Team, according to the standards to suit the needs of the coming period."

"The Board reviewed the governance

game after they opened their campaign with a 5-0 defeat against Russia.

Saudi Arabia began their AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 as one of the firm contenders to land the Continental title.

The three-time champions went on to win two of their Group E matches, defeating DPR Korea 4-0 and Lebanon 2-0.

However, a 2-0 loss to Qatar in their final group game pitted the Green Falcons against Japan in the Round of 16 as Pizzi's men fell 1-0 to the Samurai Blue.

(Source: the-afc)



## Team Melli's future in doubt

**PLDC** — Iran football federation has yet to reach an agreement with a coach after parting company with Carlos Queiroz.

The 65-year-old Portuguese coach left Team Melli after the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, where he failed to bring an end to Iran's 43-year title drought in the competition.

Soon after, president of Iran's Football Federation (FFIR) Mehdi Taj said they will hire a big coach as a replacement for Queiroz. Former Netherlands coach Bert van Marwijk was a nominee to take charge of Team Melli, according to reports from Saudi Arabian journalist Saad Al Harthy, but the Dutchman has joined coaching staff of PSV Eindhoven.

Morocco coach Hervé Renard was another nominee to lead Iran but the Frenchman said he is under contract with Lions of the Atlas. He also refuted claims that he has negotiated with the UAE football federation.

Then, the media reports suggest that Laurent Blanc has been shortlisted to take charge of Team Melli but the Frenchman will not come to Iran.

Blanc has been out of work since leaving Paris Saint-Germain in 2016 after his side were knocked out of the Champions League quarter-finals to Manchester City.

But he has thrown himself in the shop window and admits a move to England would be too difficult to turn down.

Team Melli will start the 2022 World Cup qualification in June but has yet to reach an agreement with any coach.

## Uzbek referee: Iran plays decisive role in Asian chess

**IRNA** — Uzbek referee of the International Chess Championship of Fajr Cup, describing the amount of chess players' participation in the competition as unparalleled, said the presence of more than 800 chess players in the Fajr Cup Championship is sign of Iran's decisive role in chess in Asia.

Hossein Tard Aliyev, who spoke on the sidelines of the Fajr Chess International Competition, said, "The presence of more than 800 chess players at different age groups from Iran and the world during this tournament shows that your country (Iran) has an important and decisive role in chess in Asia."

"In the course of the competition, given the presence of Iranian and foreign great chess players, we witnessed a tough competition between them in the final rounds," Uzbek noted.

He said there were fewer Grandmasters in the course of the competition, one of the main reasons being the low prize, but the players would undoubtedly compete in the course.

The 27th Fajr International Chess Championship was held on Tuesday, January 26th, with more than 800 domestic and foreign players in three parts of the masters, free and adolescents, which ended with Alireza Firouzja's championship. Also, Pavel Pencheratov was runner-up from Russia and Ehsan Qaem Maqami, the Grandmaster of our country, stood in third place.

## Iran needs to develop the grassroots football: Heshmat Mohajerani

**TASNIM** — Ex-Iran national football team coach Heshmat Mohajerani says that the country needs to develop the grassroots football. Mohajerani is known as the most successful Iranian coach, who won AFC Asian Cup in 1976 and led the team to the quarter-finals of 1976 Summer Olympics and also qualification to the 1978 FIFA World Cup.

Now, the 80-year-old coach says the Iranian football officials must take the grassroots football into consideration.

"I think the officials of football federation should not rush to choose new coach for Team Melli. They need time to select the best option," Mohajerani said. "The next coach must develop our grassroots football as Qatar has done in the previous years. They won the 2019 AFC Asian Cup and will earn more in the upcoming years," he added.

"We have to invest in young players because they can help our football in the future," he concluded.

## BWF hosts technical course in West Asia

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has hosted a sport technical course for Para badminton athletes and coaches from West Asia, ahead of the 7th IWAS World Games in Sharjah, UAE.

The course, held from 8-10 February, included activities for athletes, coaches and classifiers, with 40 participants from participants from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Yemen, Pakistan, and UAE.

With Para badminton making its debut at Tokyo 2020, the BWF is committed to the development of the sport globally, by identifying talented athletes and developing these athletes towards Paralympic Games qualification.

BWF Vice President Paul Kurzo said: "I would like to thank the Agitos Foundation, UAE Badminton and Table Tennis Federation, the IWAS World Games Organizing Committee and our team of BWF experts for their hard work and effort to deliver this workshop.

"I hope all these activities will further develop the sport in this region and on the continent, and we will see more countries and players taking part in Para-Badminton Events in the coming years."

This was the second sport technical course in 2019 supported by the Agitos Foundation through its NPC Development Program, which was launched in early 2017 thanks to the worldwide partnership agreement between the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and Toyota. Xavier Gonzalez, Deputy Chairperson of the Agitos Foundation Executive Committee, said:

"The Agitos Foundation is proud to support this sport technical course and contribute to the development of Para badminton in West Asia. "Training camps like this delivered by the Badminton World Federation are essential to ensure that athletes, coaches and classifiers have the opportunity to learn and exchange experiences on their road to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games."

Asian Paralympic Committee Sports Manager, Shaun Lee, said: "Projects like the one supported by the BWF and Agitos Foundation help to build more technical knowledge and experience and allow all countries to be involved in Para badminton, particularly in those countries that may not have the resources or expertise to develop themselves."

"We are pleased to see so many countries and female participants involved in this project."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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Zip Code: 1599814713**GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

By God, they nourished Islam like a colt newly weaned and let it graze with the sheep in pastures and fattened by their generous hands, open hearts and sharp tongues.

Imam Ali (AS)

**Troupes from 12 countries competing in Fajr theater festival**

**A R T TEHRAN** — Thirteen theater troupes from 12 countries are competing in the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival, which opened on Monday.

Among the plays are "Only Bones" by Thomas Monckton from Finland, "Swarm" by Gabor Goda from Hungary, "Pity: Part 1" by Iraqi-Swedish director Anmar Taha from Sweden, "Notes by a Crazy Man" by Jannat Selim Ava from Azerbaijan and "The Small Theatre from the End of the World" by Ézéquiel García-Romeu from France.

"Lift - Boys Will Be Boys" by Fehér Ferenc from Romania, "I Is Another - Rimbaud in Africa" by Lars Øyvind from Norway, "The Sun Will Rise From Aleppo", a joint production between Iran and Syria by Iranian director Kurosh Zarei and two more plays from Lebanon and Georgia are also in the lineup for the festival.

"Dialogue in the Wonderland" by Cologne-based Iranian director Alireza Kushki-Jalali from Germany and "I Put a Spell on You" by Brussels-based Iranian director Ehsan Hemat are also on stage in this section. The festival is also hosting a multimedia installation entitled "Passage" on the theme of memories by French artist Pierre Jodlowksi.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will run in Tehran until February 23.

**"Beautiful Jinn" to premiere in Tehran today**

**A R T TEHRAN** — "Beautiful Jinn", a co-production between Iran and Turkey by Iranian director Bairam Fazli, will hit silver screens in Tehran today.

"After several changes in the screening program, 'Beautiful Jinn' will finally go on screen," producer Mehrdad Farid told the Persian service of ILNA on Tuesday.

He also said that they will arrange several special screenings in Tehran over the next ten days.

Starring Nurgul Yesilçay, the Turkish actress who is known in Iran for her role in the acclaimed TV series "The Magnificent Century", and Iranian actor Farhad Aslani, the film is about a middle-aged man who has lost his wife. He lives a sad and lonely life until he meets someone new.

**Pol Literary Agency to present "Persian Gulf" at Paris Book Fair**

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — The Pol Literary and Translation Agency, a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian language publications around the world, will introduce "The Persian Gulf" at the Paris Book Fair.

The book has been compiled by young author Javad Noruzi and has been translated into 10 different languages, including Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish and Russian, the agency announced in a press release published on Tuesday.

It also contains a selection of 120 maps of the Persian Gulf in addition to 10 UN documents related to the ancient bay.

The book will be introduced during a ceremony on March 17 and Noruzi and a number of Iranian cultural officials are expected to attend the ceremony.

Also at the book fair, the London-based Iranian-British publishing house Candle & Fog plans to offer "Tant De Doute Pour Une Evidence", a book written by Iranian scholar Mohammad-Ali Movahhed on the Persian Gulf. Mithra Farzad is the translator of the book.

The Paris Book Fair will be held from March 15 to 18.

**Narges Abyar's love, terror story sweeps awards at Fajr Film Festival**

**A R T TEHRAN** — Narges Abyar's "The Night When the Moon Was Full", a true love story of Jundallah terrorist group member Abdul-Hamid Rigi, won Crystal Simorghs in six categories, including best film and best director, at the 37th Fajr Film Festival, the organizers announced Monday evening.

The film is about Abdul-Hamid Rigi, the younger brother of Abdul-Malik Rigi, the founder and leader of the Jundallah terrorist group in southeastern Iran, who marries Faezeh Mansuri, a woman from Tehran. He forces Faezeh to leave her homeland along with her brother, Shahab, to live in Pakistan where they find themselves involved in Jundallah terrorist activities.

Speaking after accepting her award at Tehran's Milad Tower, Abyar said, "I always became sad that I was never nominated for an award in my country, but this award is really valuable to me and I'm proud of it."

Producer Mohammad-Hossein Qasemi, who is also Abyar's husband, dedicated his award to Azam Mohsenoost, the mother of Faezeh and Shahab who were killed by Jundallah terrorists.

The movie also won Hutan Shakiba the award best actor for playing the role of Abdul-Hamid Rigi.

"Thanks very much from my father and mother for the theatrical lessons I learned from them over 16 years," Shakiba said. "Thanks a lot from the cinema family that let me be beside them."

Elnaz Shakerdoost was crowned best actress for the portrayal of Faezeh. "By this award, I found that this film was worthy of the fighting... In this film, Faezeh represents all the mothers who think of nothing but their children's happiness," she said.

The movie also brought Fereshteh Sadr-Orafai the award for best supporting actress for the portrayal of the mother of the Rigi brothers.

"I wish that our world would change into a world of love against takfir and a world of peace against war," she stated.

Iman Omidvari won the award for best makeup artist for his collaboration in the movie.

The jury composed of filmmakers Mohammad-Ali Basheh Ahangar, Mohammad Bozorgnia, Puran Derakhshandeh and Mohammad Ehsani, cinematographer Mahmud Kalari, film critic Mehrzad Danesh and actress Rima Raminfar presented their special award to director Nima Javidi for his drama "The Indian" about a prison warden who is assigned the task of transferring prisoners to a new building during the 1960s.

Mohsen Qarai and Mohammad Davudi won the award for best screenwriter for their collaboration in "Qasre Shirin" directed by Reza Mirkamiri. The film tells the story of a man who kills a family in a car crash. He chooses to live away from his family after serving a prison sentence. However, he returns home two years later after he learns that his wife is diagnosed as brain dead.

The audience award was presented to "6.5 for a Meter", director Saeid Rustai's drama about a family battling with



Producer Mohammad-Hossein Qasemi accepts the Crystal Simorgh for best film for "The Night When the Moon Was Full" during the 37th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Milad Tower on February 11, 2019. (Mehr/Mohammad Khodabakhsh)

drug addiction.

Veteran actor Ali Nasirian won the award for best supporting actor for his role in Homayun Ghanizadeh's directorial debut "The Clown".

"I was very lucky to take part in this creative work directed by Homayun Ghanizadeh who is in place of my grandchild and son," 84-year-old Nasirian said.

"He is a promising young director," he added.

Ghanizadeh's movie won the award in New Look, a section dedicated to the directorial debuts. He also received an award in the Art and Experience section.

The Golden Simorgh for best film from the national point of view was presented to producer Mojtaba Faravardeh for "23 Individuals", a true story about 23 young Iranian volunteers who were captives during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

The organizer also honored the 22 volunteers who were in attendance at the closing ceremony of the festival. One of the volunteers died several years ago as a result of an illness.

The following is a list of other winners at the festival,



Producer Mojtaba Faravardeh (L) receives the Golden Simorgh for best film from the national point of view for "23 Individuals" from Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi during the 37th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Milad Tower on February 11, 2019. (Fajr Film Festival/Moein Baqeri)

which is Iran's most important film event:

Best editor: Bahram Dehqani for "6.5 for a Meter".

Best director of cinematography: Hamid Khozuei Abyaneh for "Gholamreza Takhti".

Best composer: Amin Honarmand for "Qasre Shirin".

Best sound engineer: Iraj Shahzadi for "6.5 for a Meter".

Best sound effects engineer: Mehrshad Malakuti for "Blood Trap".

Best set design: Keyvan Moqaddam for "Gholamreza Takhti".

Best practical special effects supervisor: Iman Karimian for "Blood Trap".

Best computerized special effects supervisor: Javad Motavvari for "The Clown".

Best animated film: "The Last Fiction" by Ashkan Rahgozar.

Best documentary: "Baharesan, the House of the Nation" directed by Babak Behdad.

Best short film: "Pedovore" (Child Eater) by Mohammad Kart.

**Tehran exhibit to explore 40 years of Iran theater history**

**A R T TEHRAN** — Tehran's Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art will be playing host to an exhibition of documents from the history of Iranian theater over the past 40 years.

Entitled "40 Years of Documents on Iranian Theater", the exhibit has been arranged to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the organizers have announced.

The exhibit, which will open on Friday, is part of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival currently underway at over 30 halls across Tehran.

The showcase will be running until February 23 at the museum located at 74 Mozaffar St., Taleqani Ave., Felestin Sq.



A poster for "40 Years of Documents of Iranian Theater".

**Tehran gallery to display paintings inspired by Rumi poetry**

**A R T TEHRAN** — A collection of paintings inspired by poems from Persian mystic Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi will open at Tehran's Shirin Gallery on Friday.

"Who's That" by Alireza Aslanlu features the relations between mankind and the world, the gallery announced in a press release published on Tuesday.

Aslanlu who has long practiced creating figurative paintings, has distanced himself from the realistic style and has painted his experience of living in the moment by stepping into Eastern mysticism.

The collection composed of 15 paintings will be on view until February 27 at the gallery located at No. 5, 13th St., Karim Khan Ave.



A poster for "Who's That" by Alireza Aslanlu.

**Harrison Ford knocks Trump, others who "denigrate science"**

**DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)** — Actor Harrison Ford offered an emphatic plea on Tuesday for protecting the world's oceans, calling out President Donald Trump and others who "deny or denigrate science."

The 76-year-old actor, best known for his roles in "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones," stressed the importance of acknowledging the effects of climate change on the world in a speech on the closing day of the World Government Summit in Dubai.

Though never saying Trump's name, he clearly targeted the American president within the opening moments of his remarks.

"Around the world, elements of leadership — including in my own country — to preserve their state and the status quo, deny or denigrate science," Ford said. "They are on the wrong side of history."

There was no immediate reaction overnight from the White House.

Trump repeatedly has criticized the idea of climate change, despite it being supported by the vast majority of peer-reviewed studies, science organizations and scientists.



American actor Harrison Ford speaks about ocean conservation at the World Government Summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2019. (AP Photo/Jon Gambrell)

Just Monday, Trump tweeted that Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota, announced her presidential

run "talking proudly of fighting global warming while standing in a virtual blizzard of snow, ice and freezing temperatures."

"Bad timing," the president wrote.

Trump often conflates cold spells and other incidents of weather with climate, which is long-term.

Ford has long supported conservation efforts. Before coming out on stage, his Emirati hosts played a video of him narrating a piece for Conservation International on the importance of protecting the ocean called "Nature is Speaking."

"One way or another, everything living thing here needs me," Ford growls in the video. "I'm the source. I'm what they crawled out of."

In his address, Ford called on governments and officials to rely on "sound science" to shape their policy.

"We are faced (with), what I believe, is the greatest moral crisis of our time," Ford said. "That those least responsible for nature's destruction will suffer the greatest consequences."

He added: "We need nature now more than ever because nature doesn't need people, people need nature."

**Self-shredding Banksy painting goes on display in Germany**

**BADEN-BADEN, Germany (Reuters)** — "Love is in the Bin", the work by graffiti artist Banksy that shredded itself live after it

was sold at auction last year, went on display at a German museum - after officials had made sure its shredding mechanism was no longer working.

The painting was originally auctioned as "Girl with Balloon", the image of a young girl holding a heart-shaped red balloon that has become the artist's most popular since it was

first sprayed on to London's Waterloo Bridge in 2002.

But the moment the auctioneer's gavel fell, a hidden mechanism inside the frame shredded the painting, which had just been sold for over a million pounds.

Museum director Henning Schaper said they had been anxious to avoid being the victim of another of the "subversive, clever" artist's practical jokes and seeing the rest of the painting shred itself while it was in their charge.

"We opened up the frame and found the shredder machinery, the battery holders, the wires and satisfied ourselves that the batteries had been removed and the wires cut," he said after curators wearing white gloves had carefully hung the work in its new place.

The owner, an anonymous European art collector, agreed to go through with the purchase of the painting, which the artist officially renamed after its shredding, and has now loaned it to the Frieder Burda Museum

in Baden-Baden for a month.

The museum will not charge the public to see the painting. Schaper said that since Banksy was an advocate of the democratization of art and a street artist, it would be wrong to make the public pay to see it.

"We wanted to engage with his philosophy by hanging the art work where people don't have to pay to get in and can experience Banksy's art and join us in a critical debate on developments on the art market," Schaper said.