



**Officials should pave the way for young mangers** **2**



**Warsaw final statement testifies to summit's failure** **2**



**Sepahan edge Paykan, Tractor Sazi beat Esteghlal** **15**



**Danish Athelas takes Carl Nielsen's "Beautiful Square" to Fajr** **16**

# Fighting terrorism is our common cause



See page 2

## Iranian trade-industry delegation to visit Syria on Feb. 16-19

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN**—An Iranian trade and industry delegation will visit Syria from February 16 to 19, the portal of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) published. The delegation comprises private sector directors active in the fields of construction, technical and engineering services, petrochemicals and polymer products, steel and iron, foodstuffs, agricultural

machinery, logistics, banking and insurance, IT, SMEs, etc. Participating in a meeting to get informed of the investment making opportunities in Syria and also the business environment in that country, having B2B meetings with the members of Damascus Chamber of Commerce, and visiting Iranian ambassador to Syria are some of the programs arranged for the Iranian delegates during their stay in Syria.

## Japan lauds Tokyo-Tehran 'friendly' ties

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN**—Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has hailed his country's ties with Iran as "traditionally friendly. The Japanese prime minister made the comment as he met with visiting Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani in the capital city of Tokyo. Abe underlined that Tokyo and Tehran are marking the 90th anniversary of

diplomatic relations this year, adding that Tokyo is keen to further boost its cooperation with Tehran. On the second day of his visit to Japan, Larijani conferred with Abe on the expansion of commercial and economic cooperation between the two countries. Both officials agreed on a policy to strengthen traditionally friendly relations.

## Bahrainis stage nationwide rallies to mark eighth uprising anniversary

Bahrainis have held rallies across the tiny Persian Gulf state to mark their eighth anniversary of the popular uprising against the ruling monarchy. Pro-democracy protesters in several cities, including the capital Manama, called for an end to human rights violations and the release of rights activists. They urged the House of Khalifah re-

gime to relinquish power and allow the establishment of a just system representing all Bahrainis. Several prominent Shia clerics including Sheikh Ali Salman and Sheikh Isa Qassim issued statements highlighting the commitment of the Bahrainis to peacefully pursue their demands for democracy. **→13**



## ARTICLE

**Hanif Ghaffari**  
Political analyst

## Three main messages of the Warsaw Summit

The Warsaw Summit had come to an end without mentioning Iran's name in the final statement of the summit, and that was despite the attempts made by American officials and anti-Iran groups to introduce Iran as the destabilizer of peace and security in the region.

In the meanwhile, many of the Western sources had to confess that the former remarks made by the U.S. officials didn't really match the result of this meeting. Mike Pompeo, the U.S. secretary of State had announced before that the Warsaw summit will focus on the destructive role of Iran! In the West Asia region.

In other words, the American authorities intended to turn the Warsaw summit into a specific "Anti-Iran move" in the international system. As the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said; "Despite Washington's extensive attempts to hold an all-inclusive summit and forge a new alliance against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the number of participants and their low levels of participation, coupled with their reluctance to support any anti-Iran decision... turned the final statement of the summit into a useless document." early Friday.

Accordingly, it's important to take the main messages of the Warsaw Summit into consideration:

.... First message: The U.S. international isolation

The contradiction between the initial targets and the final product of the Warsaw Summit, once again demonstrated the isolation of the United States in the international system. Though Trump had spoken about restoring U.S. authority in the world during the 2016 presidential elections, the Warsaw Summit showed that the White House authorities had failed to convince and persuade their allies to help them reaching their goals.

This was well reflected in the remarkable disagreement between European countries and Washington during the Warsaw anti-Iran summit. So far, many of the U.S. officials, including Jimmy Carter, Brzezinski and Bill Clinton, have spoken about the end of the unipolar system. But today, everyone can see the White House's isolation in global equations. **→7**

## Foreign spy agencies behind terror attack on IRGC forces: Leader

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN**—Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has denounced a bloody terrorist attack on members of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), saying the spy agencies of certain regional and trans-regional countries certainly had a hand in the crime.

In a message on Thursday, Ayatollah Khamenei offered his condolences to the bereaved families of the IRGC forces who lost their lives in Wednesday's terrorist attack, which took place in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, Press TV reported.

A car laden with explosives hit a bus carrying members of the IRGC on Wednesday,

killing 27 border guards and injuring 13 others.

According to the Islamic Republic News Agency, quoting the Quds Base of the IRGC Ground Force, the suicide attack against the IRGC took place on a highway near the city of Zahedan, which is located close to the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. **→2**

## We have legitimate government voted into power by Venezuelan people: Adib-Moghaddam

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN**—Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute believes that "We have a legitimate government voted into power by the Venezuelan people and the supposed champions of democracy such as the United States, but also the so called liberal government

of Justin Trudeau in Canada and the European Union call for "re-elections" and/or for Maduro to step down."

Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, also adds that "This is a rather ludicrous and insulting demand to everyone who believes in democratic legitimacy and the sovereignty of Venezuelans."

He says that "Even the Trump administration,

which has no real conception of world politics, understands that there is no military option in Venezuela or anywhere else for that matter."

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ On January 30, Guido, the opposition leader and head of the Venezuelan congressional party, with U.S. support, questioned Maduro's legitimacy and introduced himself as the president of this Latin American state. What are the roots of this crisis and what is the role of the U.S. in it? **→7**

## JCPOA Procurement Channel's experience overshadowing INSTEX

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN**—The experience of JCPOA Procurement Channel, which was supposed to ensure that Iran is able to benefit from regular trade in the field of single and dual-use items of nuclear relevance, proves that the Europe's newly created Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges, INSTEX, would not be able to meet Iranian nation's demand for food and medicine either, according to Mehr news agency's Friday report.

Run by Procurement Channel Working Group

(PWG), which is coordinated by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and has seven participating states: United Kingdom; the United States of America; France; Germany; Russia; China; and Iran, JCPOA Procurement Channel is set up under Annex IV of the JCPOA.

PWG as the operational tool of the Procurement Channel was to review proposals by states seeking to engage in the supply, sale or transfer of nuclear and dual-use items, materials, equipment, goods, and technology (paras. 6.1.1-6.1.3 of Annex IV

of the JCPOA) and provide its recommendation to the UN Security Council for its final review and decision.

The group has 20 working days (extendable to 30 days) to consider the proposals on any one export good. The PWG operates by consensus and once their decision has been made it is sent to the Security Council for its final decision. The Security Council has five days to make its decision, which is then communicated to the proposing state in the form of a written letter. **→4**



File photo

## Pouran Shariat-Razavi dies aged 85

Fatemeh (Pouran) Shariat-Razavi, succumbed to illness on Friday. She suffered a stroke on Monday 11 February.

Shariat-Razavi was an Iranian author and held a PhD degree from the Sorbonne in Persian Literature. She was the wife of the late Ali Shariati, renowned Iranian intellectual, sociologist, and religious-political activist of the 1960s and 70s.

She was also the sister of Mehdi Shariat-Razavi, one of three students who were shot to death by forces of the Pahlavi Shah on December 7, 1953.



## REPORT

**Ramin Hossein Abadian**  
Mehr News Agency  
journalist

## Warsaw circus: in the name of peace but in interest of terrorists

In his speech at the beginning of the Warsaw Summit, Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz put forward a statement against the Islamic Republic of Iran and claimed that they want "stabilization of the region" and expressed concerns over Iran's activities.

On the other hand, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on Thursday for a new era of cooperation on the Middle and said no country could afford to stay on the sidelines in tackling regional challenges such as Syria, Yemen, and Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also called the conference a "historical turning point" and said that they talked about "unity against the common threat of the Iranian regime."

■ **Giving the wrong address to the public**

The Warsaw Summit, under the false pretense of "peace and security in the Middle East", has gathered the world leaders who support terrorism.

The U.S. attempted to mislead the public by announcing that the objective of the Warsaw Summit wasn't to confront Iran, yet the participants' position shows that their aim is to find a new way to counter Iran.

For example, the Secretary of State of the U.S. and UK as well as the Saudi and Emirati foreign ministers addressed the need for "peace" in Yemen, while throw accusation against Iran.

■ **Revealing a ridiculous lie in the fight against terrorism**

During the ridiculous circus show in Warsaw, a suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying the border guards of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in Sistan and Baluchestan, which martyred as many as 27 and severely injured others. However, participants in the Warsaw conference, who have supposedly gathered to combat terrorism, even refused to issue a statement to condemn the atrocious crime. **→7**



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**Rouhani tasks govt. to implement Leader's guidelines**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday his administration will give priority to implementation of the guidelines outlined by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the fortieth anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

In a letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, Rouhani hailed the Leader's strategic statement on the 40th victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, saying it revealed the enemies' attempts to tarnish the image of the revolution, Mehr reported.

Rouhani then tasked his cabinet to adopt appropriate programs and policies to implement the guidelines as a top priority.



**Officials should pave the way for young managers: cleric**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Hojatoleslam Mohammad Javad Haj Ali Akbari, interim Tehran Friday prayer leader, has called on Iranian authorities to pave the way for the new generations to assume top managerial posts in the country.

Addressing worshippers in Tehran on Friday, Haj Ali Akbari said the authorities should humbly accept their mistakes and create ways for the younger generations to play a role in the country's affairs.

He also pointed to the Leader's statement on the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, saying the Leader put a bright future ahead of the Iranian nation.



**Zarif arrives in Germany for Munich Security Conference**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif arrived in Germany on Friday to take part in the 55th Munich Security Conference. Upon arrival, Zarif criticized the anti-Iran Warsaw conference, which was co-hosted by the U.S., saying it was destined to fail from the beginning.

"I feel if the Westerners, especially America, realize their mistakes as soon as possible, life for them and the region will become much easier," he said.

While in Munich, Zarif met his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, where she voiced her country's willingness to sustain the relations with Iran regardless of the sanctions against Tehran.

Zarif is scheduled to address the conference on Sunday.



**Tehran denounces India terror attack**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has strongly condemned the terrorist attack in India's Srinagar, which killed and injured dozens of people.

Offering condolences to the Indian government and nation, Qassemi sympathized with the families of the victims of the tragic incident, Foreign Ministry website reported.

"As a country that has been a victim of terrorism and has taken major and effective steps to root out terrorist groups in the West Asia region and has paid heavy costs and is resolved to keep up this path with strong determination, we believe using such bloody and inhumane methods by any group and with any motive and under any name is unacceptable," he said.



**Iran becomes member of UN Peacebuilding Commission**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Members of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have endorsed Iran's membership in the body's Peacebuilding Commission in spite of U.S. pressure.

In their Thursday meeting at the UN headquarters in New York, 35 out of 46 member states of the ECOSOC voted in favor of Iran's membership in the commission.

"Iran's membership in the council came amid U.S. delegation's fierce opposition," a report by IRNA said.

It added that the U.S. delegation called for a secret ballot as part of a larger plan to stop Iran's membership in the council.



**Pompeo meets Mogherini after Pence's Iran accusations**

**POLITICS** **U.S.** Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini in Brussels on Friday, a day after Vice President Mike Pence accused America's traditional European allies of trying to undermine U.S. sanctions against Iran, Reuters reported.

Pompeo's meeting with Mogherini was scheduled before Pence's rebuke of European powers, during a Middle East conference in Warsaw on Thursday. Mogherini missed the conference, citing a scheduling conflict at NATO.

Mogherini, who helped seal the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, greeted Pompeo at EU headquarters in Brussels.

# Foreign spy agencies behind terror attack on IRGC forces: Leader

UN denounces "heinous and cowardly" attack "in the strongest terms"



Family of a victim of the Wednesday terrorist attack on IRGC members faring their beloved one well — Isfahan, February 15, 2019. (Tasnim photo: Morteza Salehi)

**1 →** In his message, the Leader called on the IRGC and relevant government institutions to swiftly and seriously follow up on the incident and deal with the perpetrators.

The incident was also widely condemned both in Iran and abroad.

According to Mehr, IRGC Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari said the IRGC will take vengeance on the enemies for the attack.

He said the attack was the enemies' reaction to the huge turnout of the Iranian nation in recent rallies marking the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi made similar remarks, and voiced his condolences to the families of the victims.

Iran's intelligence forces will "wreak revenge on the planners, perpetrators and sponsors of this heinous crime," Alavi said.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested that it was no coincidence that terrorists attacked the IRGC on the same day that an anti-Iran summit organized by the United States kicked off in Warsaw, Poland.

"Is it no coincidence that Iran is hit by

terror on the very day that #WarsawCircus begins? Especially when cohorts of same terrorists cheer it from Warsaw streets & support it with twitter bots? U.S. seems to always make the same wrong choices,

but expect different results," he tweeted on Wednesday.

The IRGC Ground Force Commander Mohammad Pakpour said the perpetrators of the attack should await a "harsh

## Iran, Russia, Turkey reaffirm commitment to Syria's sovereignty

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran, Russia and Turkey issued a joint statement on Thursday at the end of Sochi conference on Syrian crisis and reaffirmed commitment to Syria's sovereignty and independence.

The statement was issued by Hassan Rouhani, Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Following is full text of the statement published by website of Iran's Foreign Ministry:

The Presidents:

1. Discussed the current situation on the ground in Syria, took stock of the developments following their last meeting in Tehran on 7 September 2018 and underscored their determination to strengthen the trilateral coordination in light of their agreements.

2. Emphasised their strong and continued commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as well as to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

3. Highlighted that these principles should be universally respected and that no actions, no matter by whom they were undertaken, should undermine them.

4. Rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism and expressed their determination to stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the national security of neighboring countries.

5. Took note in this regard that the US decision on the withdrawal of its forces from Syria, if implemented, would be a step that would help strengthen stability and security in the country in compliance with the above-mentioned principles.

6. Examined in details the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area, denounced and expressed serious concern with the attempts of the terrorist organization "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" to increase its control over the area, and agreed to effectively counter these attempts as well as to take con-

crete steps to reduce violations in the Idlib de-escalation area through full implementation of the agreements on Idlib, including the Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-escalation Area of 17 September 2018. They also reaffirmed the determination to continue cooperation in order to ultimately eliminate DAESH/ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaeda or DAESH/ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council.

7. Discussed the situation in the north-east of Syria and agreed to coordinate their activities to ensure security, safety and stability in this area including through existing agreements, while respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

8. Reaffirmed their conviction that there could be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that it could only be resolved through the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated political process in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

9. Reaffirmed their determination to facilitate the launch of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible, including by agreeing on its composition and elaborating recommendations for its rules of procedure based on the work undertaken by the three guarantors. They emphasised in this regard the importance of continuing interaction and coordination with the Syrian parties and the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen.

10. Welcomed the successful development of the second mutual release of detainees within the framework of efforts of the respective Working Group. The releases that took place on 24 November 2018 and 12 February 2019 constituted important contribution of the Astana format to building confidence between the Syrian parties and creating necessary conditions for advancing the political process.

11. Emphasised the need to continue all efforts to help all Syrians restore normal and peaceful life as well as alleviate their sufferings. In this regard, they called upon the international community, particularly the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, to increase their assistance to Syria by providing additional humanitarian aid, restoring humanitarian infrastructure assets, including water and power supply facilities, schools and hospitals.

12. Highlighted the importance of creating conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Syria. They assessed positively the interaction with all interested parties, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and reaffirmed their readiness to continue this coordination.

13. Agreed to assign their representatives with the task of holding the next International Meeting on Syria in Astana in April 2019.

14. In addition to the Syrian issue, discussed recent developments in the world as well as their collaboration in different fields and decided to boost joint economic and commercial cooperation.

15. Condemned the recent terrorist attack in Iran (Sistan-Baluchestan Province). President of the Russian Federation H.E. Vladimir Putin and President of the Republic of Turkey H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed their condolences to the families of the victims of this attack and sympathy with the people and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

16. Decided to hold the next Tripartite Summit in the Republic of Turkey upon the invitation of President of the Republic of Turkey H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

17. The Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey expressed their sincere gratitude to President of the Russian Federation H.E. Vladimir Putin for hosting the Tripartite Summit in Sochi.

## Warsaw final statement testifies to summit's failure: Tehran

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has dismissed the allegations raised in the final statement of the Warsaw Conference, describing the statement as a proof of the anti-Iran summit's failure.

Despite Washington's tremendous efforts to hold an all-inclusive summit and create a new alliance against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the small number and low level of those attending the conference turned the final statement of the summit into a useless document which was developed only by the two organizers of the summit and lacked any credibility, Qassemi said in a Friday statement.

According to Qassemi, even those few and low-ranking participants refused to put

their weight behind any anti-Iran decision at the conference, which was a nonstarter from the beginning.

From the early stages of its development, the failure of the idea of holding the summit was completely imaginable and predictable to all leading and wise visionaries, analysts and politicians.

"How can a conference titled Peace and Security in the Middle East gain success while main regional players like Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Palestine are absent and significant countries such as China, Russia and many other leading European and non-European states are either not in attendance or represented in a very

low level," he asked.

The spokesman said the nervous and tense remarks and behaviors of the U.S. secretary of state and vice president who, during their speeches and interviews openly criticized Europe or insistently asked them, from a position of weakness, to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal, are the best testimony to and a sign of their failure and incapability to achieve their desired goals in the summit.

Qassemi also pointed out that the U.S., on the one hand, sponsors a conference on Peace and Security in the Middle East, and on the other hand, fans the flames of tension among regional states.

"The U.S. promotes insecurity, instability, poverty, war and extremism in the region through its unilateral pullout from the Iran nuclear deal and by violating all international laws and pursuing hypocritical policies and sponsoring terrorism," the spokesman added.

He underlined that despite all hostile and belligerent policies by the U.S. and the Israeli regime, fight and resistance to create a secure and stable region free from the presence of foreign and aggressive powers will keep going on.

Qassemi said the U.S. should immediately put an end to its fruitless grudge and resentful policies by understanding the realities of this sensitive region of the world.

## Fighting terrorism is our common cause, Rouhani says after Sochi talks

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that fighting terrorism is a common cause for Iran, Russia and Turkey.

"Our common cause is fighting terrorism, restoring stability and security to Syria, preparing new constitution and strengthening a democratic government in the country," he said in a joint press conference with his counterparts Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan after the Sochi talks.

Rouhani said, "There are many worries about future of terrorists, because many of them are imprisoned in Syria and will spread chaos and terrorism once they are back to their countries."

He added that the U.S. act in relocating Daesh terrorists to Afghanistan is worrisome.

"Our second concern about the U.S. is that it has seemingly removed its forces from Syria, however, it is still continuing interference in Syria based on our information," he added.

He noted that it is the Syria people who should decide for their country and territorial integrity of the country should be respected.

Rouhani said that all the neighboring countries to Syria should have friendly relations with the country to help establishing long-term security in Syria.

Elsewhere, he condemned the Zionist regime of Israel's "illegal interferences" in Syria.

■ **'U.S. is relocating Daesh terrorists'**

During his speech at the Sochi conference, Rouhani said

that the U.S. is transferring Daesh terrorists.

"There are credible reports based on which the U.S. is helping relocate Daesh terrorists inside Syria and also a number of them to Afghanistan," he said.

He added, "Unfortunately, in continuation of its illegal actions, the U.S. government is still supporting terrorists in Iraq and Syria and uses them in line with its own interests."

Rouhani noted that terrorists should not feel safe anywhere in the world and their supporters should not imagine that they can use terrorism as tool to gain benefits in international equations.

He said that Iran-Turkey-Russia cooperation in helping settle the Syrian crisis has resulted in restoring peace and stability in most parts of the country and maintaining its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Elsewhere, he said that inter-Syrian talks without any foreign interference should be continued.

He urged the international community to help refugees return to their country and also reconstruct Syria.

■ **Rouhani described Iran-Russia ties growing**  
During a bilateral meeting with Putin on the sidelines of the Sochi summit, Rouhani said that Iran-Russia ties are "friendly" and "growing".

He described cooperation as "strategic".

Rouhani called for expansion of relations in various areas of transportation and business and also banking ties.

He added that doing transactions in the two countries'

national currencies is a big step in expanding relations.

He also attached great importance to Russia's role in preserving the 2015 nuclear deal after the U.S. withdrawal in May 2018.

Putin, for his part, praised Iran's compliance to its obligations under the deal.

He noted that cooperation between the two countries should be expanded.

He also praised Iran's role in helping settle crisis in Syria.

■ **Rouhani calls for expanding banking ties with Turkey**  
In a separate meeting with the Turkish president, Rouhani called for expanding banking ties.

He also noted that cooperation in energy sphere should be expanded.

Erdogan said that Turkey welcomes Europe's financial mechanisms to keep the nuclear deal.

Ankara is ready to establish similar bilateral mechanisms with Iran, he added.

After months of delay on January 31, France, Germany and Britain finally announced the creation of INSTEX, a special purpose vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

The European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran.



# Maduro: U.S. making ‘mistakes’ in Venezuela

Venezuela's embattled President Nicolas Maduro, in an interview with Al Jazeera, says the United States is trying to destabilize his country and that efforts by the U.S.-backed opposition to bring aid into the country are political theatre.

Maduro says his government should have control over its borders and imports.

"Any material that comes from outside the country must be subject to certain conditions such as inspection and taxes as in all countries, whether by air, sea or land, and then there will be no problems," he told Al Jazeera. "The theatrical presentation they are attempting on February 23 will not happen."

That's when Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido said aid would arrive in the country.

Speaking at a rally in Caracas, on Tuesday, Guaido said the armed forces, which remain loyal to Maduro, should allow the aid to enter the country.

Guaido denounces Maduro's presidency as illegitimate while Maduro says a U.S.-backed coup seeks to oust him.

About 50 United Nations-member countries have pledged their support to Maduro, while 65 countries, including the U.S., stand behind Guaido, who has declared himself interim president.

Maduro criticized European nations for supporting the possibility of the U.S. military intervention in his country citing their support of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

"Was it necessary to intervene militarily in Iraq and divide it and kill millions of its people? I think they also made a mistake when they bombed Libya and killed more than 100,000 civilians. Can these errors be corrected? I also think they have also erred in a destructive policy approach in Syria, and are now making mistakes with Venezuela," Maduro told Al Jazeera.

Last month, the U.S. blocked the transfer of dividends from CITGO (Citgo Petroleum Corporation), the state oil company PDVSA's (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A./Petroleum of Venezuela) the U.S. subsidiary, cutting off about 70 percent of the country's hard currency, and ramping up pressure on Maduro.

"They suffocate us, steal our money and



then say 'hold on to this crumb' and put on a show for the world," said Maduro.

"Venezuela with dignity says no to the global show. Whoever wants to help Venezuela, welcome. But we are able to pay for everything we need. We do not beg from anyone," Maduro said.

The opposition-controlled Congress named a new board of directors for the state oil giant PDVSA as well as it's the U.S. subsidiary - a move welcomed by Washington.

But Venezuela's top court has ruled that the opposition-appointed petroleum executives must face criminal prosecution.

The decision by the Supreme Court, which backs Maduro, is the latest move in the tussle for control of Venezuela's oil revenues.

■ **Maduro invites U.S. special envoy, reveals secret meetings**

The developments follow as Maduro has invited a United States special envoy to come to Venezuela after revealing in an interview with The Associated Press news agency that his foreign minister recently held secret meetings with the U.S. official in New York.

The second of two meetings took place on February 11, four days after the envoy - Elliott Abrams - said the time for dialogue with Maduro's government had long passed.

Even while criticizing the U.S. President Donald Trump's confrontational stance to-

ward his socialist government, Maduro said he holds out hope of meeting him to resolve an impasse over his recognition of Guaido.

Maduro said that while in New York, his foreign minister invited Abrams to come to Venezuela "privately, publicly or secretly."

"If he wants to meet, just tell me when, where and how and I'll be there," Maduro told AP, without providing more details. He said both New York meetings lasted several hours.

There was no immediate comment from Washington.

Maduro said he would not give up power and called the U.S. aid currently sitting on the border with Colombia mere "crumbs" following Washington's move to freeze billions of dollars in Venezuela's assets.

He blamed the economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Venezuela for the severe food and medicine shortages in his country.

■ **U.S. violating UN charter principles**

Meantime, Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has announced the formation of a group that believes the United Nations Charter's commitment to non-interference in another country's affairs is being violated, particularly in the South American nation.

Arreaza was surrounded by diplomats from 16 countries including Russia, China, Iran,

Syria, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua.

He told reporters at UN headquarters in New York on Thursday there were many more supporters.

■ **Venezuela official calls U.S. aid a 'spectacle'**

Elsewhere, Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said that "the momentum of the coup that the government of the United States was promoting is over - it didn't happen".

He told reporters at UN headquarters in New York on Thursday that the U.S. needs to rethink its strategy because "the loyalty of our armed forces."

Arreaza dismissed a February 23 deadline set by self-declared president Juan Guaido to bring badly needed food and medicine into Venezuela, saying the opposition leader doesn't control a single policeman and "whatever he says is absolutely absurd".

He said President Nicolas Maduro controls the government and is the only one who can give deadlines. Maduro is blocking the aid, saying that Venezuelans are not beggars and that the move is part of a U.S.-led coup.

Arreaza called the assistance a "spectacle that the U.S. is organizing" and denounced U.S. sanctions against Venezuela.

"The U.S. has blocked our economy," he said. "The cost of this blockade is over \$30bn - and they are sending this so-called humanitarian aid for \$20m. So what is this? I'm choking you, I'm killing you, and then I'm giving you a cookie? So that's a show."

■ **Venezuela prosecutor to probe Guaido appointments**

Separately, Venezuela's chief prosecutor says he's launched an investigation into opposition leader Juan Guaido's appointment of a transitional board of directors for the state oil company.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab said Thursday in a news conference that Guaido's appointments are part of an illegal power grab.

Saab says he's investigating the board members designated to oversee PDVSA and its Houston-based subsidiary Citgo. He calls the appointments by Guaido and the National Assembly a "circus."

Guaido has also appointed several ambassadors, including a representative to the United States.

(Source: agencies)

## Trump set to declare border emergency, sign shutdown-averting bill

The United States President Donald Trump was poised on Friday to declare a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border, a move that Democrats vowed to challenge as an unconstitutional attempt to fund his proposed border wall without approval from Congress.

Trump was also expected to sign a bipartisan government spending bill approved by Congress on Thursday that would prevent another federal shutdown by funding several agencies that otherwise would have closed on Saturday morning.

The Republican president was scheduled to deliver remarks on the issue at 10 a.m. EST (1500 GMT) in the Rose Garden at the White House. The bill, lacking any money for his wall, is a defeat for Trump in Congress, where his demand for \$5.7 billion in barrier funding yielded no results, other than a record-long 35-day December-January partial government shutdown that damaged the U.S. economy and his poll numbers.

Reorienting his wall-funding quest toward a legally uncertain strategy based on declaring a national emergency could plunge Trump into a lengthy battle with Democrats and divide his fellow Republicans.

Even before the White House said on Thursday that Trump would declare an emergency, Republican senators, while sympathetic to his view that the southern border is in crisis, were skeptical of the declaration that would shift funds to the wall from other commitments set by Congress.

"No crisis justifies violating the Constitution," Republican Senator Marco Rubio said on Twitter on Thursday.

Republican Senator John Cornyn told reporters on Capitol Hill he had concerns about an emergency declaration.



He said it "would not be a practical solution, because there would be a lawsuit filed immediately and the money would be presumably balled up ..."

Some Republicans were more supportive of Trump's tactic. "I'm not uncomfortable. I think the president's probably on pretty solid ground," said Republican Senator Richard Shelby.

Fifteen Democrats in the Republican-controlled Senate introduced legislation to prevent the transfer of funds from accounts Trump likely would target to pay for his wall.

A senior White House official said the administration had found nearly \$7 billion to reallocate to the wall, including \$600 million from a Treasury Department forfeiture fund, \$2.5 billion from a Defense Department drug interdiction

fund and \$3.5 billion from a military construction budget.

The funds would cover just part of the estimated \$23 billion cost of the wall promised by Trump along the 2,000-mile (3,200-km) border with Mexico.

The Senate Democrats' bill also would stop Trump from using appropriated money to acquire lands to build the wall unless specifically authorized by Congress.

■ **Phony national emergency**

Meantime, Trump says the wall is needed to curb illegal immigrants and illicit drugs streaming across the southern border despite statistics that show illegal immigration there is at a 20-year low and that many drug shipments are likely smuggled through legal ports of entry.

Democratic Representative David Price urged lawmakers on the House floor to block Trump's "phony national emergency."

Representative Jerrold Nadler, chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, said he would back a joint resolution to terminate the president's emergency declaration under the National Emergencies Act, and pursue "all other available legal options."

On Thursday evening, the Senate passed the government funding bill by a vote of 83-16, and the House by 300-128, with 86 House Republicans voting in favor.

Trump was expected to sign it and declare an emergency, then fly to his private golf club in Florida for a holiday weekend break.

(Source: Reuters)

## Khashoggi's body possibly burnt in oven at Saudi consul-general's residency: Turkey

Turkish police have discovered a tandoori oven at the Saudi regime consul-general's residency in Istanbul, suggesting that the body of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi has been burnt.

A police statement said Turkish police had found two wells and an oven inside the residency.

"According to experts, the oven can heat up to 1,000 degrees Celsius, destroying any biological tissue and leaving no possibility to detect any DNA traces," it said.

Khashoggi, an outspoken critic of the House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), disappeared after he entered the Saudi regime diplomatic mission in the Istanbul in October but never came out.

The prominent journalist had told his fiancée Hatice Cengiz waiting outside the building to call a top aide to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in case he did not emerge from the premises.

After weeks of denials of any involvement, Riyadh eventually acknowledged the "pre-meditated" murder, yet many questions including the whereabouts of Khashoggi's body went unanswered.

In October, the Middle East Eye cited Turkish investigators as saying that the murder took seven minutes and that Salah Muhammad al-Tubaigy, the head of forensic pathologist and a member of a Saudi hit squad, began to cut the journalist's body while he was alive.

According to new findings, Turkish police

have realized that the Saudi hit team ordered 32 kilograms of raw meat from a restaurant in the neighborhood.

That raised new questions about the whereabouts of Khashoggi's body which was previously considered to have been destroyed in acid or taken to Saudi Arabia.

"One cannot help but ask these questions. Was cooking up meat in the tandoori oven part of their premeditated plans? Of course these questions will be answered one day. The investigations aren't completed yet," the report said.

The report added that 60 police officers and 100 intelligence agents were assigned to conduct a probe into the murder of the Saudi journalist.

It also said 224 people contacted Turkish

officials to provide information on Khashoggi's disappearance and killing.

Although Istanbul and Riyadh agreed to conduct an investigation into the murder, the joint inquiry has made little progress, with the Turkish authorities considering their Saudi counterparts uncooperative.

Eleven Saudis suspected of being an accessory to the murder are on trial in Riyadh and five others face capital punishment.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said the order to kill Khashoggi came from the "highest levels" of Saudi officials.

The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has also concluded the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the murder.

(Source: agencies)

## India's PM Modi warns Pakistan of strong response to Kashmir attack



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned Pakistan on Friday to expect a strong response to a bomb attack in the disputed region of Kashmir that killed 44 paramilitary policemen, ratcheting up tension between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

Meanwhile, India summoned Pakistan's envoy Friday over a deadly attack in Kashmir and served a diplomatic notice demanding Islamabad take action against the militant group that has taken responsibility for the attack, a government source said.

The Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (The Army of Muhammad) said one of its suicide bombers had carried out the attack on a bus carrying Indian paramilitary forces on a Kashmir highway, killing 44 of them on Thursday.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale called Pakistan's ambassador Sohail Mahmood and "issued a very strong demarche in connection with the terrorist attack in Pulwama yesterday," the source said. Pakistan has condemned the attack and denied any complicity. A suicide car bomber rammed a bus carrying Indian police officers in Kashmir Thursday, killing 30 of them in a major attack on security forces in the disputed region that could raise tensions with Pakistan.

Kashmir is a Muslim-majority region at the heart of decades of hostility between India and Pakistan, which both claim the entire territory as theirs while ruling part of it.

India accuses Pakistan of giving material support to the militants. Islamabad says it only offers moral and diplomatic support to Muslim Kashmiris in their struggle for self-determination.

Indian forces have sporadically battled militants in mountainous Kashmir since an armed revolt in 1989 in which tens of thousands were killed, but car bombings are rare.

"I strongly condemn this dastardly attack. The sacrifices of our brave security personnel shall not go in vain. The entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the families of the brave martyrs," Modi said in a tweet.

The last major attack was in 2016 when militants raided an Indian army camp in Uri that killed 20 soldiers. Tension with Pakistan rose after New Delhi said the attackers had come from Pakistan to stage the attack.

Pakistan denied any involvement.

Thursday's explosion was heard from several miles away, according to witnesses. Mohammad Yunis, a journalist who reached the site minutes later, told Reuters he saw blood and body parts scattered along a 100-meter stretch of the highway.

A Jaish-e-Mohammad spokesperson, in a statement carried by GNS new agency, said dozens of security force vehicles were destroyed in the attack. Jaish-e-Mohammad, one of the most powerful terrorist groups operating in Kashmir, was blamed for a 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that led to India deploying its military on the border with Pakistan.

On Wednesday, an explosion at a school in Kashmir wounded a dozen students. The cause of the blast remains unclear.

(Source: Reuters)

## Acting Pentagon chief backs NATO, despite Trump's past criticism

Acting United States Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said on Thursday that he backed a strong NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a move likely to calm allies nervous about Washington's commitment to the alliance after his predecessor resigned over differences with President Donald Trump.

"The United States is committed to NATO, our Article 5 obligations remain ironclad and America will continue to lead and support transatlantic unity [and] security," Shanahan told a news conference at the end of his first NATO meeting.

In his December resignation letter, Jim Mattis laid bare what he saw as an irreparable divide between himself and Trump, and implicitly criticized the president for failing to value allies who have fought alongside the United States in several wars.

Mattis, who was seen as a reassuring presence by European allies, mentioned NATO twice in his resignation letter.

Shanahan, a former Boeing Co. executive, is not as well known in foreign policy circles, and allies have been keen to see whether he will push back on Trump rhetoric that has questioned the need for NATO. In the past Trump has called NATO obsolete. He has also pushed NATO allies to spend more on defense and during a NATO meeting in July, told them in a closed-door meeting that governments needed to raise spending to 2 percent of economic output or the United States would go its own way.

Shanahan, asked about Germany's defense spending in particular, said 1.5 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on defense was not enough.

"It is not [enough], it has to be more... the threat warrants more," Shanahan said. The German government has reassured the North Atlantic Treaty Organization it will stick to its plans to continue increasing military spending to reach 1.5 percent of gross domestic product by 2024 despite declining tax revenues.

Those plans had been called into question after a Finance Ministry document seen by Reuters showed the government's tax revenues were likely to rise less than expected in coming years due to a slowing economy.

Shanahan said the general public was not aware of the threats being faced by NATO countries, ranging from Russia and China to cybersecurity. "What I hear from President Trump is that we collectively all need to [do] more, I don't think there is a divergence," he said. "In my previous experience I wasn't aware to the same degree of the emerging threats... With what I know now, I would spend more," Shanahan said.

Article 5 that he referred to is the NATO principle that an attack against one ally should be seen as an attack against the group.

(Source: AP)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	157310.8
IFX	1935.95

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,370 rials
GBP	54,030 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.54/b
WTI	\$65.54/b
OPEC Basket	\$61.56/b
Gold	\$1,317.35 /oz
Silver	\$15.68/oz
Platinum	\$796.60 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Red meat imports at 126,000 tons since last March

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN**— Some 126,000 tons of red meat has been imported to the country since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), the chairman of Agriculture Committee of Iranian Parliament announced.

In an interview conducted by IRNA, Ahmad-Ali Keikha said the figure shows a significant rise compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Putting Iran's annual red meat consumption at one million tons, he said some 10 percent of this amount is imported.

JCPOA Procurement Channel's experience overshadowing INSTEX

**1 →** According to Mehr news agency, after two years of putting the mentioned channel into action, official reports of Iranian foreign ministry show that the channel has not acted successfully in supplying Iran's industrial needs. The procedure to investigate and ratify the registered orders in PGW is a long and time-consuming one and the channel's practicality is much less than predicted in JCPOA.



In addition to its bureaucratic issues, the channel's inefficiency can also be the result of the re-imposition of U.S.-led sanctions on Iran, the report added, which makes working with the channel risky for foreign companies and banks.

The explained circumstances also exists for INSTEX, the report confirmed. INSTEX will function under the highest international standards with regards to anti-money laundering, combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) and EU and UN sanctions compliance. Thus the risk would even be higher for foreigners aiming to work with Iran under INSTEX, it said.

Italy's 2018 debt load likely rose less than government forecast

Italy's debt load, the euro region's second-biggest, rose last year but the increase was slightly smaller than the populist government had expected, Bloomberg calculations show.

The ratio of debt to gross domestic product reached 131.5 percent, according to Bloomberg calculations based on Bank of Italy figures released Friday. While that's a slight increase from 2017, the ratio would be lower than the 131.7 percent estimated by the Treasury.

Successive Italian governments have said cutting the debt burden is a main priority. The European Union has repeatedly said a reduction is needed to boost the country's economy.

Not too bad

Italy's budget plan for this year and next, including a decline in the 2019 debt-to-GDP ratio to 130.7 percent, was reached in December after tense negotiations between Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's government and the European Commission.

Since then, the targets have been questioned by policy makers and economists across the region as new data showed that the nation slipped into a technical recession by contracting for a second successive quarter in the final three months of 2018. Only Greece has a higher debt-to-GDP ratio in the 19-nation euro area.

At a meeting of euro region Finance ministers in Brussels this week, Slovakia's Peter Kazimir expressed his skepticism about Italy's ability to respect its commitments.

"I'm a Catholic, so I believe in miracles, and that keeps me calm, even when it comes to Italy's ability to deliver," the finance chief said.

The latest warnings come after the European Commission cut its 2019 growth forecast for the country to 0.2 percent from an earlier projection of 1.2 percent, the lowest pace among the euro zone's 19 members.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Second platform of South Pars phase 22-24 installed on offshore spot

ENERGY

**TEHRAN**— The second platform of Iran's South Pars gas field's phase 22-24 of development was installed on its designated offshore spot on Thursday, Public Relations Department of Pars Oil and Gas Company, which is in charge of developing the gas field, announced.

While starting operation, platform 24A is planned to produce 500 million cubic feet (14.2 million cubic meters) of gas per day.

Installation of this 2,300-ton platform, compared to the other platforms of South Pars, was the fastest one, Farhad Izadjou, the operator of phases 22-24, announced.

Phases 22-24 are expected to produce 56 million cubic meters of sour gas, 75,000 billion barrels of gas condensate, and 400 tons of sulfur per day, in addition to 50



million cubic meters of methane, 2,900 tons of LPG and 2,750 tons of ethane.

South Pars is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

The huge field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

‘Completing 12,000 semi-finished industrial projects to be facilitated’

ECONOMY

**TEHRAN** — Completing 12,000 semi-finished industrial projects with over 60 percent progress across Iran is a priority for the ministry of industry, mining and trade, ISNA reported on Thursday quoting Industry Minister Reza Rahmani.

The official underlined supporting domestic producers to be the most important development strategy for the country, saying "Affordable facilities are in the government's special agenda to support industrial, manufacturing and mining units."

According to the official, removing barriers in the way of domestic production and facilitation of economic development are among the ministry's top priorities.

"Providing raw materials for active production units and also providing funds for



industrial projects are the government's priorities for further development of the country's economy." He said.

The official noted that 209 major industrial projects were inaugurated during the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).

New incentives for exporters that re-inject foreign currency to NIMA

ECONOMY

**TEHRAN** — Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has unveiled a decree containing a list of new incentives for the country's exporters that re-inject their earned foreign currency to Iran's domestic Forex Management Integrated System (locally known as NIMA).

According to the announcement which was published on the CBI portal on Wednesday, the announced decree is valid up to the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019) and meanwhile all the provisions of other related regulations remain valid.

Based on the announcement, those exporters who return more than 60 percent of their earned currency to the country's economic cycle in accordance with previous decrees, in addition to the listed incen-



tives, they will become CBI's priority for allocation and supply of foreign exchange [in case they need it].

The details of the mentioned decree are published in the form of a table based on the revenue injected to NIMA and the total amount of foreign currency earned by the exporters.

South Korea imports nearly 3m barrels of Iranian oil in January

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** — South Korea imported 12.46 million tons or 2.94 million barrels of crude oil from Iran in January, data from the country's customs office showed.

The data indicated that the Asian country has shipped in 227,941 tons of Iranian crude in January, or 53,676 barrels per day (bpd).

South Korea, one of Iran's biggest Asian customers resumed imports of Iranian oil in January after a four-month hiatus.

The world's fifth-largest crude importer won a six-month

waiver in November from U.S. sanctions on Tehran's oil exports, but did not immediately start imports, mainly due to payment and insurance issues.

The new round of sanctions targeting Iran's oil sector were put in action on November 4, 2018.

However, soon after the sanctions took effect the U.S. government agreed to let eight countries, including close allies South Korea and Japan, as well as India, keep buying Iranian oil and it is expected that Iran's oil exports will rise in February and March.



Chance of a U.S. recession up, number of Fed rate hikes down

There is a one-in-four chance of a U.S. recession in the next 12 months, a scenario that should keep the Federal Reserve from raising interest rates next month, according to a Reuters poll of economists who now expect only one rate hike this year.

Given a global economic slowdown and a dimming outlook for U.S. growth, economists said the Fed's tightening cycle will likely draw to a halt before July.

While financial markets have recovered from a deep sell-off late last year, the Feb 8-14 poll of over 110 economists showed a cut to the outlook for U.S. economic growth and the number of Fed rate hikes this year and next.

"There is a lot of uncertainty and there are some good reasons to forecast a slowdown in 2019 as compared to in 2018," said Jim O'Sullivan, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

"It certainly does makes sense for the Fed to take a pause on policy to see how things play out, because it is not impossible for the economy to slow down in 2019 between weakening global growth, tighter financial conditions and fading

fiscal stimulus."

U.S. economic growth was forecast to slow and average 2.4 percent this year, a downgrade from January and the lowest since April last year.

On Wednesday, U.S. President Donald Trump said trade talks with China were "going along very well" as the world's two biggest economies try to resolve their tariff war ahead of a March 1 deadline.

Reuters polls in recent months have repeatedly highlighted the U.S.-China trade war as the prominent downside risk for the American economy.

Over half the economists who answered an extra question warned any further escalation in the trade war would bring the next U.S. recession.

That compared to about 60 percent of economists in a July 2018 poll who said the trade war did not pose a significant risk.

The median probability of a recession in the next year rose to 25 percent from 20 percent in January. It held at 40 percent over the next two years, although the most pessimistic call was 75 percent.

(Source: Reuters)

Mnuchin says U.S. had ‘productive’ trade meetings with China

Top U.S. and Chinese trade negotiators had "productive meetings", U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a tweet on Friday, as the world's largest economies wound down two days of high-level talks to resolve their bruising trade war.

Mnuchin did not elaborate on the discussions he and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer had with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, a top economic advisor to President Xi Jinping, who the two U.S. officials met later on Friday in Beijing.

The U.S. delegation had a banquet with Chinese counterparts at a Beijing hotel on Thursday night, a person with knowledge of the meetings said. But neither country had offered details on how the two sides might de-escalate a tariff war that has roiled financial markets and disrupted manufacturing supply chains.

U.S. duties on \$200 billion worth of imports from China are scheduled to rise to 25 percent from 10 percent if no deal is reached by March 1 to address U.S. demands that China curb forced technology transfers and better enforce intellectual property rights.

Although U.S. President Donald Trump said earlier in the week that an extension of

the deadline was possible if a "real deal" was close, Larry Kudlow, director of the National Economic Council, said the White House had made no such decision.

Several sources informed about the meetings told Reuters there was little indication negotiators had made major progress on sticking points to pave the way for a potential meeting between Xi and Trump in coming weeks to hammer out a deal.

"Stalemate on the important stuff," said one of the sources, all of whom requested anonymity because the talks are confidential.

"There's still a lot of distance between parties on structural and enforcement issues. I wouldn't quite call it hitting a wall, but it's not a field of dreams either," said a second source.

The Financial Times cited sources as saying the two sides were trying to reach a memorandum of understanding to help bring about a leaders meeting.

A third source told Reuters the White House was "irate" over earlier reports that the Trump administration was considering a 60-day extension to the tariff deadline.

(Source: Reuters)

Singapore's government will likely spend big ahead of an upcoming election

With an election looming, the Singaporean government is expected to announce on Monday a "generous" budget that subsidizes health care and other costs of living for a substantial portion of the population.

"Budget 2019 will likely be generous and expansionary, setting the stage for a possible early general election," analysts from Malaysian financial services firm Maybank Kim Eng wrote in a recent report.

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has suggested that the election, which must be held by April 2021, could take place as early as this year. Lee's People's Action Party has been in power on the island since 1959 — even before the city-state became independent.

The impending election and the need to spur economic growth amid a challenging global environment mean the government will likely — for the first time in four years — spend more than it is projected to earn.

Singapore's budget deficit for the year starting April 2019 is estimated to be between 1.2 billion and 6.9 billion Singapore dollars (approximately \$883.3 million to \$5.08 billion), according to five analyst forecasts compiled by CNBC. That's around 0.3 percent to 1.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

Singapore's financial ammunition

The tiny but wealthy Southeast Asian city-state can, in



theory, fund a much bigger deficit than what's expected because it has accumulated large surpluses from past years' budgets. Under Singapore's constitution, the government's revenue and expenditure must be balanced over a typical five-year term. Budget 2019 is the fourth — and possibly last — before a new electoral cycle.

From 2016 through the current financial year, the country is estimated to accumulate surpluses totaling 20 billion Singapore dollars, according to analysts from Citi. That would give Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat — who's tipped to take

over as prime minister from Lee — financial ammunition to fund higher spending in the next year or two.

But Heng is not likely to spend all of that money, Citi added. Singapore is typically conservative in managing its finances, so Citi analysts projected that more than half of the surpluses will eventually head to the country's reserves.

A big ticket item

An expected big ticket item in the coming financial year's budget is a raft of health care subsidies for roughly 500,000 Singaporeans born in the 1950s — a national program called the "Merdeka Generation Package." Merdeka is the Malay word for independence.

The initiative was announced last year by Lee, who said more details will be revealed during the budget speech on Monday.

Economists from Singaporean bank OCBC said the package could cost 4 billion to 7 billion Singapore dollars, but analysts from Citi and Maybank Kim Eng estimated the price tag to be as high as 8 billion Singapore dollars.

If the 2019 budget does turn out to be a pre-election spending spree, OCBC analysts said — based on the bank's analysis of past government expenditure — there could be personal tax income rebates and cash bonuses for Singaporeans.

(Source: CNBC)



# Brent oil briefly hits \$65 as production cuts fuel 2019 high

Brent crude oil briefly reached 2019 highs above \$65 per barrel on Friday, as OPEC-led supply cuts and the announcement of a higher-than-expected cut by Saudi Arabia this week encouraged investors.

The international benchmark for oil prices rose as high as \$65.10, pushing past \$65 for the first time this year. It fell back to \$64.75 by 0850 GMT, up 18 cents or 0.28 percent from the last close.

Brent is near a three-month high and set for a more than 1 percent gain on the week.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures were at \$54.50 per barrel, up 9 cents from their last settlement.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries along with allies led by Russia made voluntary production cuts beginning last month aimed at tightening the market.

Top exporter and de facto OPEC leader Saudi Arabia said on Tuesday it would cut over half a million barrels per day (bpd) more in March than the deal called for, sending prices surging.

Prices were also buoyed by the partial



closure of Saudi Arabia's Safaniya, its largest offshore oilfield with a production capacity of more than 1 million bpd.

The shutdown occurred about two weeks ago, a source said, and it was not immediately clear when the field would return to

full capacity.

"Brent should average \$70 per barrel in 2019, helped by voluntary (Saudi, Kuwait, UAE) and involuntary (Venezuela, Iran) declines in OPEC supply," Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a note.

It also said it expected a drop of 2.5 million bpd in OPEC supply in the fourth quarter of 2019 compared to a year earlier.

But faltering economic growth is also a concern, with signs of a slowdown now abundant in Europe, Asia and the United States.

"Our macroeconomic view remains firmly bearish," commodities brokerage Marex Spectron said.

Surging U.S. output may also undermine OPEC's efforts to tighten the market.

U.S. crude production rose by more than 2 million bpd last year, to 11.9 million bpd, making the United States the world's biggest oil producer.

Most analysts expect U.S. output to rise past 12 million bpd soon, and perhaps even hit 13 million bpd by the end of the year.

(Source: Reuters)

## Asian LNG prices drop to 17-mth low on tepid demand

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) continued their downward spiral this week, hitting a 17-month low as the market moved further away from the peak winter-demand period and inventories remained high in the region.

Spot prices for March delivery to Asia fell to \$6.50 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) this week, down 20 cents from the previous week to their lowest since Sept. 8, 2017, trade sources said.

April prices are estimated at about \$6.30 per mmBtu, the sources said.

Demand in China remained tepid as many factories there were still shut for Lunar New Year celebrations, trade sources said. The Lunar New Year fell on Feb. 5 and 6 this year, but the festival typically lasts for about two weeks.

While temperatures in Beijing and Shanghai briefly dipped below normal levels, they are expected to rise next week, weather data on Refinitiv Eikon showed.

"It snowed in Beijing but it's not that cold still, plus the factories are still shut, so the inventory levels are still quite high," a China-based trade source said.

Several unplanned outages failed to lift prices, indicating just how weak demand is currently, trade sources said.

Loadings of LNG cargoes at Malaysia's Bintulu export plant, operated by Petronas, were delayed this week due to lower production, sources have said.

But the delay was due to minor glitches



at the plant which have since been resolved, one of the sources said.

In Australia, at least one train was down briefly at Chevron Corp's Wheatstone LNG plant but operations have resumed since, sources said. Chevron declined to comment.

Train 3 of Chevron's Gorgon LNG project in Western Australia is still down after it was shut in mid-January following a mechanical issue, sources said.

All sources declined to be identified as they were not authorized to speak with media.

Woodside Petroleum's Pluto LNG facility has also resumed full output after a brief outage.

With prices falling, there is also less incentive for producers to keep output at high levels, an industry source said.

LNG exports from U.S. LNG terminals are returning to normal after loadings were delayed earlier this month when natural gas flows to terminals fell to their lowest level in almost a year due to maintenance work and a fog along the U.S. Gulf Coast.

(Source: CNBC)

## Brent/Dubai spread falls to record low as sour crude oil complex surges

Dubai crude's discount to Brent narrowed to its lowest on record Thursday, as robust trading amid tightening medium sour crude oil supplies led the Middle East sour crude complex higher.

The April Brent/Dubai Exchange Futures for Swaps spread -- a derivative instrument tied to spot market sentiment of Brent-linked and Dubai-linked crudes globally -- shrank to 21 cents/b at the close of Asian trading at 0830 GMT on Thursday.

This is a record low for the EFS spread since S&P Global Platts started publishing it in August 2011. The front-month EFS spread's last low was on August 28, 2015, at 30 cents/b, Platts data showed.

The EFS, often used as a proxy by crude traders to hedge barrels of physical oil moving between the Europe and Asia, has been on a downward trajectory since the beginning of this year.

Global crude oil fundamentals typically dictate that lighter, lower sulfur crude oil such as Brent command a premium over heavier and higher sulfur grades -- a large chunk of which is produced in the Middle East and priced against Dubai.

However, several geopolitical events, including OPEC production cuts and the sanctions on Iran and then on Venezuela, have shrunk supplies of medium and heavy crude grades, as well as those higher in sulfur content.

The EFS slid from a multi-year high of \$4.42/b on April 30, 2018, to begin



the year at \$1.05/b as the momentum of shrinking supplies started to amplify.

It slid below \$1/b -- a level the spread has only sunk below a handful of times in the last decade -- on January 22, and has remained below that since.

Meanwhile, production of lighter, sweeter crude grades, including from the US, is on the rise, adding to an oversupply of such grades globally.

The shifting fundamentals between grades has been reflected in the prompt physical market as well.

Platts cash Dubai crude was assessed at \$65.30/b on Thursday, a premium of 71 cents/b over Brent futures as of 0830 GMT.

Similarly, the front-month March Brent/Dubai swap touched a record low at minus 21 cents/b as of 4:30 pm Singapore time (0830 GMT), Platts data showed. This is also the first time that the swap has flipped into negative territory since Platts started publishing the swap spread in 2001.

(Source: Platts)

## Oil market's 'shock and awe' isn't coming from Saudi Arabia

Goldman Sachs thinks Saudi Arabia is leading oil cartel OPEC in a policy of "shock and awe," making bigger than expected supply cuts in an effort to lift prices.

Khalid al Falih, Saudi Arabia's energy minister, said this week that the kingdom's production would decline to near 9.8m barrels a day next month.

That is more than 1m bpd less than it pumped in November before agreeing with the rest of OPEC and Russia to tighten the spigots, and 500,000 bpd below its output target from the group. The country's exports will also fall to the lowest level for the month of March since 2011.

It is not hard to see why Goldman's analysts believe Saudi Arabia is pursuing shock and awe -- and not just because it

chimes with their own view that crude will rise next quarter.

So should investors line up with the world's top oil exporter and one of the most influential banks in commodities to bet it all on the black stuff? You could be forgiven for thinking there is easy money to be made when two powerhouses of physical and financial oil align.

Not so fast. The oil market has already absorbed a remarkable amount of bullish news over the past month, from sanctions on Venezuela to signs Washington will try to squeeze Iran's oil exports harder this year.

The oil price has responded by bobbing around in a narrow range just above \$60 a barrel, with last year's highs of more

than \$86 now a distant memory.

So why is oil so flat? Well, quite simply, not everybody buys the bullish narrative. The primary reason remains the U.S. shale industry, whose rapid production growth triggered crude's 40 percent peak-to-trough slide late last year.

Traders have reason to be wary. The U.S. Energy Information Administration this week raised its forecasts for average U.S. production in 2019 to 12.4m bpd, an annual increase of 1.45m bpd.

It is also 350,000 bpd higher than predicted three months ago, despite warnings from some quarters that shale is slowing down. Twelve months ago the EIA forecast 2019 growth would be just 590,000 bpd.

Goldman itself acknowledges more U.S. oil will reach international markets later this year as pipeline bottlenecks in Texas ease, and say they are "cautious" on further price gains. Even their second-quarter forecast is just \$67.50 a barrel.

Little wonder then that the Commodities Trading Corporation, a hedging consultancy run by veterans of Morgan Stanley, says oil producers are lining up to sell into rallies. If Saudi Arabia did succeed in pushing prices up, it could prove shortlived with even stronger shale growth on the horizon.

Shock and awe in the oil market? Maybe, but U.S. investment banks might find it's actually happening a lot closer to home.

(Source: Financial Times)

## Record oil output powers Eni to almost double operating profit

Italy's Eni almost doubled its operating profits as record oil production and higher crude prices resulted in surging cash flow for the Italian energy company.

The company said that its full-year operating profits increased by 94 percent year on year to €11.24bn, while the fourth-quarter figure rose 49 percent compared with the previous three months. The bulk of this improvement came from the company's exploration and production division, which increased operating profits by 110 percent compared with 2017.

Claudio Descalzi, Eni chief executive, said the results were "our best performance in the last decade" and were a demonstration of the company's longer-term strategy to improve efficiency and diversification of its asset base.

"We doubled our operating profits, and we doubled our net profit, and you have to consider we did this when the oil price in euros increased by only 25 percent," Descalzi said. "We have not only been able to grow, but we have kept flat capital expenditure and been able to reduce our debt."

Descalzi, an Eni veteran and expert in oil exploration, has implemented a strategy of organic growth through mostly developing assets rather than buying them, allowing



the company to reduce its capital intensity and bolster its free cash flow.

"Seventy percent of the production projects we have had in last three years come from discoveries in the last five years," he said. "This speed of development has been exceptional, so we have had organic growth but at a low cost."

Cash flow from operations rose by 32 percent in the fourth quarter to €4.3bn compared to the same period last year, while net borrowing fell by 24 percent to €8.3bn

compared to the end of 2017. Net capital expenditure over the year was almost flat, with a 4 percent increase to €7.9bn, but rose by 28 percent in the fourth quarter compared with the same period last year.

Eni's hydrocarbon production over the year hit an all-time record in 2018, increasing by 2 percent to 1.85m barrels per day.

The Italian group signed this month a deal with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to take a stake in the Ruwais refinery, the largest in the United Arab Emirates, which the company said would increase its downstream capacity by 35 percent.

Descalzi said Eni's pivot towards the Middle East would help diversify its asset base and balance its upstream portfolio with refining to protect against oil price volatility in the future.

"In the last 50 years it was not really our area but our growth in the Middle East in recent years is really a strategic achievement to diversify our portfolio," he said. "We have been able to create an exploration asset base there in a short amount of time, which is one of the largest owned by an international oil company."

(Source: Financial Times)

## How blockchain is changing the face of oil trading

As the hype around blockchain subsidies and actual applications come to light, the technology is beginning to change the face of a huge industry: crude oil and gas trading. This could be just the start of a lot more wide-scale adoption in oil and gas.

Earlier this month, Total and Chevron joined Shell, BP, Equinor, Mercuria, and Gunvor as shareholders of Vakt, a post-trade processing platform grounded in blockchain and aiming to eliminate the substantial fuss and paperwork around oil trades to reduce transaction times and costs. The platform's owners claim it can drive efficiency and trade finance savings of as much as 30-40 percent.

Without context, these percentages don't mean a whole lot. But when you know that the average trade finance transaction for a commodity cargo could involve as many as 36 different original documents plus 240 copies from 27 different parties, according to this overview of blockchain in commodity trading, it puts commodity trading--oil trading--in a different light that shines bright on blockchain.

Vakt is not the only oil trading platform that uses the distributed ledger technology behind bitcoin. Kongo came into existence earlier than Vakt, set up by a group of banks, covering all commodities. The latest arrival is PermianChain Technologies' blockchain platform that doesn't even handle actual physical transactions: it will handle trades of potential, undeveloped oil and gas resources.

Let's focus on Vakt, however, since it involves a lot of oil heavyweights, all of whom are apparently living up to the promise that "This time it will be different" and strict cost control will continue. The difference with previous promises following oil price collapses was supermajors did not have the technological capabilities to live up to them. Now, it seems, they do, so I asked three people familiar with blockchain technology and digital tech in the oil industry about the real benefits to be reaped and, of course, the risks.

The immediate benefits for post-trade processing are clear enough. Companies such as Total, Chevron, BP, and Shell, along with two of the world's largest commodity traders would not have thrown their weight--and money--behind a project if it would not deliver on the promise for lower costs. But can these benefits extend beyond trade processing?

"Absolutely," according to Brian Walker, principal of the CAP Group Cybersecurity.

"The energy industry is a complex ecosystem of joint ventures with accountants on all sides of every well, many gas plants, etc. So creating an authoritative record would eliminate tremendous amounts of 'checkers-checking-checkers' activity that is required today."

That's not all, either. According to Duncan Greatwood, CEO of Xage Security, blockchain adoption can extend into virtually every stage of oil and gas production and refining.

"For instance, a blockchain-protected fabric can underpin access control and identity management in highly distributed environments such as oil and gas fields, serving to tamperproof cybersecurity enforcement while avoiding the single points of security failure found in more centralized architectures," he told me.

Refineries, for their part, could utilize the technology to share information with suppliers in a more secure manner, enhancing data integrity and authenticity.

Blockchain can also enhance the integrity of data around oil shipments, says former Aramco security team leader and CEO of security firm HypaSec Chris Kubecka. With blockchain, one can track and verify the origin of an oil cargo, which has relevance for the quality of cargoes and other considerations such as avoidance of smuggled Islamic State oil cargoes.

In a more general but crucial sense, blockchain is all about security. In fact, from a certain perspective, Vakt could be interpreted as a test drive of the technology before adopting it for other processes, in addition to being a cost-cutting tool.

The oil and gas industry started out slow with the adoption of digital technology but it quickly picked up the pace as the push to keep costs low and returns high persisted. However, with digital technology come cybersecurity risks and, according to the experts interviewed by Oilprice, blockchain can help with that.

"The distributed systems common in the oil and gas industry need decentralized security, removing a single point of failure to ensure that in the event that a few devices are hacked, the rest of the network is not compromised," Xage's Greatwood said.

The theme of decentralizing cybersecurity to reduce risk features heavily on the cybersecurity agenda regardless of industry but when we're dealing with oil and gas, we're dealing with critical infrastructure, and security acquires additional importance. In this context, anything that promises this greater security through decentralization deserves attention, and blockchain is pretty much the poster tech for decentralization and security.

However, be that as it may, blockchain is also hackable. Despite numerous assurances from blockchain evangelists and enthusiasts that the distributed ledger cannot be hacked, it was. The Ethereum Classic hack stained the unhackable image of blockchain, with cybercriminals succeeding at something hitherto considered impossible: they rewrote the actual ledger of transactions in Coinbase, a cryptocurrency exchange, and stole \$460,000.

At this point, one would think all the supermajors in Vakt would have gotten worried were it not for the fact that not all blockchains are equal.

The Ethereum Classic hack was made possible because the hacker was able to connect to the Ethereum Classic blockchain with more than 51 percent of the available compute. While this (a "51 percent" attack) is always a risk for smaller public blockchains, for larger blockchains it can be ruinously expensive to implement, and very hard to hide the origin of the attack, due to the amount of compute power involved," Xage's Greatwood explains.

What's more, according to Greatwood, there are many proprietary blockchains that simply ban new nodes from joining them, effectively eliminating the risk of a 51 percent attack. In other words, hacking a blockchain is still impossible for the right kind of blockchain. For now.

"Anything given enough time and computing power, is hackable," says Chris Kubecka. "If the algorithm itself is more difficult to hack, then underlying systems or application components might not be."

The "Anything that can be hacked will be hacked" adage is a valid one, which means the danger is there, however far in the future. For now, though, this danger is only a potential for proprietary blockchains of the sort Vakt is built on.

It seems, then, that Vakt is the latest indication of something many industry observers considered impossible: Big Oil getting out of its cyclical behavior following the cycles in oil fundamentals. Despite a marked and stable improvement in benchmark prices, the supermajors are still spending carefully and looking to boost efficiencies--such as cutting out a lot of middlemen along the oil trade transaction chain thanks to blockchain--and lower costs. That's a strong bullish factor for these companies, comparable with their growing presence in renewable energy.

(Source: oilprice.com)



# Restoring a high threshold for war

## South Sudan's civil war may be over, but the need for humanitarian funding is ever more urgent



By Bel Trew

For the last five days Elizabeth, 44, who lives in an isolated village in South Sudan, has been living off wild berries and blood tapped from a neighbor's cow because she has no food to eat. The mother of eight risks being beaten or raped by gangs when she scavenges for bitter fleshless fruit in the bleak and dry bush around Gumuruk to feed her children.

She faces the same dangers during the punishing eight hour walk to the nearest fresh water pump.

Most of the boreholes around her village, which is located about 300km north-east of the capital Juba, have been destroyed in a five-year civil war that ripped apart South Sudan, sparking one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world.

Despite a peace deal signed in September officially ending the conflict, she tells me nothing has been rebuilt and so she is even more desperate this year. With a blind husband, and too many mouths to feed, there is little she can do.

"We need water, food, healthcare facilities, just about everything," Elizabeth tells me from within a mud-packed reed hut that offers little protection from the 45C heat.

Emaciated children with bloated bellies, the telltale sign of malnutrition, play in the dirt outside.

"I know of at least 10 people who died from hunger last year, and yet more from thirst. The hardest hit are the women as the responsibility is with us to get supplies," Elizabeth says.

To access the village, we had to take an hour-and-a-half UN helicopter ride from Juba and then drive three hours on dirt track roads, which are often impassable in the long rainy seasons.

NGOs that do operate there such as Oxfam, who are trying to rehabilitate water pumps, say they are facing chronic funding shortfalls due to donor fatigue.

Last year the total humanitarian response for South Sudan was only two-thirds funded. In 2019 they actually need to reach more people and so need more money, yet targeted funding is \$200m (£155m) less than last year's projected \$1.72bn.

But many fear the response program will be even less funded than 2018, now there is an assumption the humanitarian crisis is over because the guns have largely gone silent.

And it is this that The Independent will be exploring in the coming days with a mini-series from South Sudan.

**In 2019 a staggering 7.1 million, or around two thirds of South Sudan's population, will require humanitarian assistance.**

According to the United Nations, in 2019 a staggering 7.1 million, or two thirds of South Sudan's population, will require humanitarian assistance, which is an increase on last year. Of that more than 5.2 million are going hungry.

This is even after the peace deal was signed between South Sudan's president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the rebel group led by Riek Machar in September. The historic agreement ended most of the fighting that intermittently raged since 2013, killing at least 50,000 people and displacing over four million people internally and externally.

With the fighting dying down, some of the two million South Sudanese who fled to neighboring countries may return, which will pile added pressure on scant and stretched resources.

"While the peace deal signed in September 2018 offers new hope for South Sudanese people, five years of devastating conflict has brought the country to its knees," Ranjan Poudyal, Oxfam country director in South Sudan tells me.

He adds that it is now essential for the international community to give its full support to rebuild South Sudan and keep people alive.

"Each year, there are more hungry people – compared to 2018, even more people need support this year. Aid efforts have so far kept famine at bay, but we cannot be complacent now."

There was a flurry of media attention around the country in 2017, at the height of the fighting, when pockets of famine were officially declared across different states within the country.

While the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report has not identified specific areas of famine at the start of this year, around 36,000 people scattered across the country, including in Boma where Gumuruk is located, are in Phase 5 famine.

Most of the rest of country is one step below in Phase 4 food emergency.

There are also several vulnerable areas like Yei and Lainya, where the data is simply not available, as skirmishes between rebel factions that are not party to the peace deal, and the government and opposition groups that are, has flared over the last few weeks.

Few are happy to speak about this, but they have apparently been internal tussles between the authorities and monitors over declaration of famine, with the government not wanting the "f" word to be used. The crisis in Boma has apparently been at the heart of that battle.

And that is why now, more than ever, aid is needed to pull South Sudan, which is finally at peace, back from the brink – and that is no more keenly felt than in Gumuruk.

"Hundreds have died from things like hunger already, and it's mostly the women and children," Elizabeth says as she bids goodbye.

"I have been living off fresh blood from an alive cow. I try to get wild fruit to survive. There are many like me. What can we do?"

(Source: Independent)

On Wednesday, the House voted to stop American military assistance for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen. In coming weeks, the Senate is expected to follow suit. The measure, however, lacks enough votes to overcome a threatened veto by President Trump. The tragic war in Yemen, with its unacceptable toll on civilians, probably will go on. And that might be the end of yet another political drama in Washington with no real-world impact.

But wait, something historic may be happening anyway. Not since Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973 has it voted with a majority to cease United States involvement in a conflict. After decades of allowing presidents to decide when to initiate force and when to end it, the legislative branch could be indicating that it is gaining the courage to fully restore its sole authority under the Constitution to declare war.

That authority has been steadily given away to succeeding presidents over dozens of conflicts, large and small. The last time Congress officially declared a war was for World War II. The Founders "would probably be thunderstruck" at how much war power has been given to the executive branch, writes historian Michael Beschloss in a new book, "Presidents of War."

Article I of the Constitution, which grants war-initiation power to Congress, was designed to help Americans decide, through



## In trying to end the U.S. role in Yemen's war, Congress may finally be returning authority for war – and the protection of liberty – to itself.

their representatives, when a war is "just." Equally important, it was meant to prevent a single person, the chief executive, from

using war as an excuse for other purposes, such as oppressing domestic opponents or to seek glory or a diversion before an election.

# Saudi crown prince looks to Asia trip to boost image

By Bruce Riedel

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is traveling to five Asian countries later this month in his first foreign travels since the G-20 summit in Argentina. The Saudis desperately want to portray this as a business as usual trip, suggesting the fallout from the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul is over. Details of the itinerary have been kept vague, probably for security reasons and fears of hostile demonstrations.

The crown prince, commonly referred to by his initials MBS, will first travel to Pakistan on Sunday. The crown prince is widely believed to have ordered the murder and dispatched a team of his henchmen to carry out the gruesome killing. The White House continues to try to shield him from investigation and sanctions, but the media and Congress are determined to hold him accountable.

Despite the Saudi aid, the kingdom is not popular in Pakistan. Four years ago the Pakistani parliament voted unanimously to reject MBS' request for Pakistani troops to fight his war in Yemen. The Saudi war in Yemen is still deeply unpopular with Pakistanis. The crown prince is bringing his own vehicles and scores of bodyguards for security and the Pakistani army will be out in force to protect him.

The crown prince is bringing an entourage of over 1,100 people, including many Saudi business leaders. He is expected to sign multiple deals worth up to \$15 billion in investments



## The Saudis desperately want to portray this as a business as usual trip, suggesting the fallout from the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul is over.

in Pakistan, including at its new Chinese-built port of Gwadar on the Indian Ocean.

After Pakistan he goes on to China, Malaysia, Indonesia and, finally, India. China and India are major consumers of Saudi oil. The Saudis are eager to attract foreign investors to the kingdom, especially as many in the West are leery of business with the Saudi prince after the Khashoggi murder and the continued revelations about his role in the killing.

Indonesia sends more pilgrims to the hajj each year than any other country, but relations between Riyadh and Jakarta have long been frosty. Abuse of Indonesian domestic workers in the kingdom keeps the relationship strained. Past promises of large-scale Saudi investments have not materialized. The crown prince is eager to repair his image and reboot the relationship.

The visit to India comes in the midst of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign for re-election. The crown prince is likely to face some harsh media criticism over the Khashoggi murder from the usually contentious Indian press.

MBS was snubbed by the king of Morocco on his last trip and the president of Algeria did not receive him, citing poor health. The Saudis are eager for a better reception this time in South and East Asia.

Saudi King Salman made a similar trip to Asia in April 2017. King Abdullah made Asia the choice for his first foreign travel after ascending to the throne. The kingdom is increasingly tied economically to Asia. With the crown prince a pariah in the West, he needs a smooth trip in the East.

(Source: Al Monitor)

# Trump still has no strategy for foreign policy

By Kang Jie

On February 5, after a two-week delay, U.S. President Donald Trump gave his second State of the Union address, flaunting his government's achievements on both domestic and foreign policy fields.

Although Trump repeatedly traced back American's great past to justify himself, pretended that his foreign policy, to a certain extent, was the continuation of some great tradition, the U.S. foreign policy under Trump featured self-contradictory goals, imprudent operations and short-sighted egoism. It seems that there's still no clear and coherent strategy or roadmap in the White House.

Since Trump came into power, transatlantic relations have deteriorated at a dangerously rapid pace and face the greatest uncertainty after the end of the Cold War according to many observers on both sides of the Atlantic.

France and Germany are worried about the strategic uncertainties caused by Trump administration's "America First" diplomacy and believe that the EU needs to enhance its strategic autonomy and develop crisis man-

agement capabilities outside the framework of NATO.

Trump administration continually pressed European allies to dramatically increase their defense budgets, which have caused anxieties among European countries facing financial

security strategy.

It's believed that Trump administration is always attempting to make a great deal with Kremlin. In fact, since the end of the Cold War, every newly elected U.S. president had held an overly optimistic

## Since Trump came into power, transatlantic relations have deteriorated at a dangerously rapid pace and face the greatest uncertainty after the end of the Cold War according to many observers on both sides of the Atlantic.

difficulties. In Trump and his decision-making elites' minds, increasing the defense budget is the panacea for solving all kinds of security problems. What they have ignored is, comparing with those traditional security issues such as wars and military crisis, domestic governance deficits and public policy failures have contributed more to the security threats facing the West today.

"Great power competition" has been regarded as the symbol of Trump's national

expectation for improving U.S.-Russian relations. However, the structural contradictions such as geopolitical competition and differences in political values dispelled this optimism at each time.

Trump's recently withdrawal from the landmarked INF treaty has severely shocked the cornerstone of the international nuclear disarmament regime and may drag the United States into an unwinnable and uncontrollable arms race. Interfering with

Venezuelan politics is also a dangerous move that may make Latin America into another Syria.

In the Middle East, the Trump administration takes side with Israel and Saudi Arabia while against Iran and its allies. Trump has named this policy "Principled Realism" in his address.

The double standards on the murder of Khashoggi and the tearing-up of the Iran nuclear deal are two of the most notorious examples. These not only eroded U.S.' soft power but also deprived the U.S. Middle East policy of its strategic resilience.

Under the Trump administration, the role of the United States in the region has slid from a benevolent hegemon to a short-sighted gang leader.

Trump repeatedly mentioned the greatness of the United States in World War II in his address. Compared with the U.S. in World War II, the U.S. under Trump doesn't have such a large military and economic advantage, and its advantage in strategic thinking is also in decline.

(Source: CGTN)

# Buhari expresses worries has elections approach

**ABUJA** — President Muhammadu Buhari has expressed worries over the ruling delivered by the Supreme Court, prohibits his party, the All Progressives Congress, APC, from participating in all the elections in Rivers state, aside presidential election.

President Buhari, who expressed his worries over the ruling on Tuesday while in Rivers state also said that, his party will ensure that justice is done over the issue.

Ironically, it surprising that Buhari is advocating for justice over is political ambition and fail to give justice to his citizens, under his governance many has been oppressed, unlawfully killed and detained with justice denied.

Several of rulings has been passed by the court for Buhari to release those who have been unlawful detained and given justice to the oppressed citizens, especially in the case of Sheikh Zakzaky but has vehemently refused.

The Supreme court, in her ruling, had upheld the earlier ruling delivered by a High Court in the state which barred the APC from fielding candidates for the coming elections.



Muhammadu Buhari (L) with Atiku Abubakar

Justice Aliyu Sanusi-led Supreme Court, had, Tuesday, struck out the appeal filed by the All Progressives Congress, APC, to be allowed to field candidates in the forthcoming general election in Rivers State. The court had struck out the appeal by the APC challenging the earlier judgment of a

High Court in Rivers State which barred it from conducting any primaries in the state.

In the judgement, Justice Aliyu Sanusi, had ruled that the preliminary objection raised by the respondents, Ibrahim Umah and 22 other aggrieved members of the APC, had substance and therefore, struck out the appeal by the APC.

Buhari, while speaking at the APC rally in Rivers on Tuesday, said he was disturbed over the ruling which has barred his party from presenting candidates in the elections, and however urged his supporters to remain "patient and resolute".

According to him, "I am very disturbed by the decision that we are not allowed to participate in some of the processes. I have no doubt that I got elected but I have to respect the institutions that I inherited. I assure you and I recommend that you remain patient and resolute. We will ensure that justice is done in this country."

A country was he had failed to give justice and the civic right of the masses, and situation were Democracy and become Autocracy.



# We have legitimate government voted into power by Venezuelan people: Adib-Moghaddam

**1 →** A: Undoubtedly, there are serious socio-economic problems in Venezuela and the government of Nicolas Maduro has proven to be too passive in resolving some of these problems. Venezuelans who were prospering only a decade ago were suddenly forced to migrate all over Latin America for work, as large numbers arrived in Peru for instance, one of the countries that initially welcomed them. But problems such as these are common to governments all over the world. For instance, simply because the pro-Brexit political elites in Britain are seriously damaging the economy of the country in their inept and illiterate efforts to split from the European Union, it should not mean that country X should call for the downfall of the government of Theresa May. The Venezuelan case is exactly comparable to this example. Here we have a legitimate government voted into power by the Venezuelan people and the supposed champions of democracy such as the United States, but also the so called liberal government of Justin Trudeau in Canada and the European Union call for "re-elections" and/or for Maduro to step down. This is a rather ludicrous and insulting demand to everyone who believes in democratic legitimacy and the sovereignty of Venezuelans. It is ironic to most Latin Americans that I talk to, that Donald Trump who insulted them and who wants to keep Mexicans out of the country by building a wall, is now pretending to care about the fate of a continent that brims with political culture and awareness.

The U.S. agenda is clear and it is distinctly neo-imperial. Venezuela under the late Hugo Chavez became the economic engine of the Bolivarian revolution in Latin America which achieved and sustained independence from the bad old days of western interference - the period when successive U.S. governments propped up dictatorial regimes under the pretext of a Cold War rationale that was meant to contain "communism". The first wave was the Cuban revolution, the second the Chavez era. The changes are irreversible and Latin America today is struggling to make them last against the odds.



■ Russia supported the Mexican and Uruguayan initiative to help resolve the political crisis in Venezuela and the direct dialogue between the Caracas government and the opposition. What is the official position of the Venezuelan government about this crisis? Do you support direct dialogue with the opposition?

A: And here we have exactly the difference to the past. The United States and its allies on this issue can't force anything within a world order that is increasingly multipolar. The military option is impossible because Russia already indicated that it would react. Even the Trump administration, which has no real conception of world politics, understands that there is no military option in Venezuela or anywhere else for that matter. The global context of the crisis in Venezuela indicates the fissures of today's world politics. There is no

UNSC option because China and Russia would veto any anti-Maduro resolution. On the other side, Turkey, the United States' NATO ally, also supports the legitimacy of the Maduro government. In addition, the European Union has had a rather more nuanced approach to the crisis than the United States and Canada.

But their repeated insistence on an ultimatum is disappointing, self-defeating and untenable in terms of international norms of appropriate behaviour. The reason why President Maduro is still in power is exactly because of this splintered global context which is distinctly multi-polar - several powers in the international system are balancing each other out which gives Venezuela options to choose its allies. Russia and China will find themselves on the right side of history in Latin America if they stay the course as the battle between truth and

falsehood will always be decided in favour of the former - sooner or later the truth prevails despite of the Orwellian nature of the Trump Presidency which can only be characterised as the politics of misinformation and short-sighted, half-literate propaganda.

Successive U.S. governments have proven that they demand subservience. I am in no doubt that the forces behind Guido are exactly that - subservient pawns who do not act in the name of national independence. In terms of political acumen, he made a big mistake to be seen as such, as the deep political culture in Latin America, rich and educated as it is, does not lend itself to subservience to anyone. The Hollywood actor Danny Glover was absolutely right to mention this in a recent interview for The Real News Network in the United States.

■ How do you assess the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the crisis in Venezuela?

A: The struggle in Latin America is probably the most crucial one for the future of world politics. This is an area of the world that has been at the behest of foreign interventions for decades. Yet with the Cuban revolution, and then with the Chavez era there was a concerted effort to rid the people of this region from subservience to foreign powers once and for all. There are, then, many commonalities between the history of Latin America and West Asia/North Africa in terms of western imperialism/colonialism, post-colonial independence, revolution etc. Iran needs to base its foreign policy on the basis of this deeper, cultural appreciation. There is more to be done in terms of liaising with potential partners in support of President Maduro, certainly with Turkey, but also with Latin American countries that are sympathetic, such as Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua. Iran has spent a lot of diplomatic capital to build long lasting relations with these countries and they could be turned into a rather more strategic dialogue especially at this time of crisis when the battle lines are clear. Turning a threat into an opportunity could be the formula for a wise diplomatic initiative exactly now.

## Statement by the Revolutionary Government of Cuba:

### 'It is imperative to halt the imperialist military adventure against Venezuela'

**HAVANA** — The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Cuba condemns the escalation of pressures and actions of the U.S. government in preparation for a military adventure under the guise of a "humanitarian intervention" in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and calls on the international community to mobilize in order to prevent its consummation.

Between February 6 and 10 of 2019, several military transport aircraft have been flying to the Rafael Miranda Airport in Puerto Rico; the San Isidro Air Base in the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean Islands that have a strategic location, most certainly without the knowledge of the governments of those nations. These flights took off from U.S. military facilities from where Special Operation Troops and U.S. Marine Corps units operate. These units have been used for covert operations, even against leaders of other countries.

Media and political circles, even in the U.S., have revealed that extremist figures of that government with a long history of actions and slanders aimed at causing or instigating wars, such as John Bolton, U.S. National Security Advisor; and Mauricio Claver-Carone, Director of the National Security Council's Office of Western Hemisphere Affairs, counting on the connivance of Marco Rubio, Senator of the anti-Cuban mafia of Florida, designed, directly and thoroughly organized and obtained the funds, from their posts in Washington, for the attempted coup d'etat in Venezuela by means of the illegal self-proclamation of a president.

They are the same who, either personally or through the State Department, have been putting brutal pressures on numerous governments to force them to support the arbitrary call for new presidential elections in Venezuela, while promoting recognition for the usurper who hardly earned 97 000 votes as a parliamentarian, against the more than 6 million Venezuelans who elected Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro Moros last May.

After the resistance put up by the Bolivarian and Chavista people against the coup, evidenced by the mass demonstrations in support of President Maduro and the loyalty of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces, the U.S. Government has intensified its international political and media campaign and strengthened unilateral economic coercive measures against Venezuela, among them the blocking of Venezuelan funds in third countries banks, which are billions of dollars worth; and the theft of the oil revenues of that sister nation, which are causing grave humanitarian damages and harsh deprivations to its people.

In addition to this cruel and unjustifiable plunder, the U.S. intends to fabricate a humanitarian pretext in order to launch a military aggression against Venezuela and is seeking to introduce in the territory of that sovereign nation, by resorting to intimidation, pressures and force, an alleged humanitarian aid which is one thousand times inferior as compared to the economic damages provoked by the siege imposed from Washington.

The usurper and self-proclaimed "president" shamelessly announced his disposition to call for a U.S. military



**The U.S. government attempts to remove the biggest obstacle -the Bolivarian and Chavista Revolution- to the imperialist domination of Our America and deprive the Venezuelan people from the largest certified oil reserve of the planet and numerous strategic natural resources.**

intervention under the pretext of receiving the aforementioned "humanitarian aid"; and has described the sovereign and proud rejection of that maneuver as a "crime against humanity".

U.S. high officials have been arrogantly and blatantly reminding us all, day after day, that when it comes to Venezuela, "all options are on the table, including military action".

In the process of fabricating pretexts, the U.S. government has resorted to deception and slanders, for it presented a draft resolution at the UN Security Council which, cynically and hypocritically expresses deep concern about "the human rights and humanitarian situation.... the recent attempts to block the delivery of humanitarian aid, the millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants", the excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, the breakdown of regional peace and security in Venezuela, and urges "to take the necessary steps".

It is obvious that the United States is paving the way to forcibly establish "a humanitarian corridor" under "international supervision", invoke "the obligation to protect" civilians and take "all necessary steps".

It is worth recalling that similar behaviors and pretexts were resorted to by the U.S. during the prelude to the wars it launched against Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya,

which resulted in tremendous human losses and caused enormous suffering.

The U.S. government attempts to remove the biggest obstacle -the Bolivarian and Chavista Revolution- to the imperialist domination of Our America and deprive the Venezuelan people from the largest certified oil reserve of the planet and numerous strategic natural resources.

It would be impossible to forget the sad and painful history of U.S. military interventions perpetrated more than once in Mexico, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Honduras, and most recently Grenada and Panama.

As was warned by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz on July 14, 2017: "The aggression and coup violence against Venezuela harm all of ?Our America? and only benefit the interests of those set on dividing us in order to exercise their control over our peoples, unconcerned about causing conflicts of incalculable consequences in this region, like those we are seeing in different parts of the world".

History will severely judge a new imperialist military intervention in the region and the complicity of those who might irresponsibly support it.

What is at stake today in Venezuela is the sovereignty and dignity of Latin America and the Caribbean and the peoples of the South. Equally at stake is the survival of the rules of International Law and the UN Charter. What is being defined today is whether the legitimacy of a government emanates from the express and sovereign will of its people or from the recognition of foreign powers.

The Revolutionary Government calls for an international mobilization in defense of peace in Venezuela and the region, based on the principles enshrined in the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, which was adopted by the Heads of State and Government of CELAC in 2014.

It likewise welcomes and supports the Montevideo Mechanism, an initiative promoted by Mexico, Uruguay, the Caribbean Commonwealth (CARICOM) and Bolivia, which seeks to preserve peace in Venezuela based on the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, legal equality of States and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as stated in its recent Declaration.

It welcomes the positive consideration given to said initiative by President Maduro Moros and the international community and expresses its concern about the categorical rejection by the U.S. government of the initiatives of dialogue promoted by several countries, including this.

The Revolutionary Government reiterates its firm and unwavering solidarity with Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro Moros, the Bolivarian and Chavista Revolution and the civic and military unity of its people and calls upon all peoples and governments of the world to defend Peace and put up a joint opposition, over and above political or ideological differences, to a new military and imperialist intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean which will harm the independence, sovereignty and interests of all peoples from Rio Bravo to Patagonia.

## Three main messages of the Warsaw Summit



**1 →** This isolation is not the result of the presence of Democrats or Republicans in the White House. It should be noted that such an isolation isn't the result of the Democrats or the Republican's presence, but rather a new structure that is getting stronger among international players. Accordingly, Washington has lost its power to impose its will on other players.

■ **Second message: The link between productive terrorism and takfiri terrorism**

The terrorist attack which has recently happened in the Khash-Zahedan road and led to the martyrdom of dozens of our country's guards exactly at a time when the Warsaw Summit was held, proved the link between productive terrorism (American terrorism) and its pieces, namely the Takfiri terrorists.

In this equation, we can see a network that includes the United States and the Zionist regime as the head, and the Takfiri terrorists as the fingers (executives of Washington and Tel Aviv's orders). This link has long been established between the United States and the Takfiri terrorism, however, we have witnessed it becoming more significant over the past eight years and following the ongoing changes in the region (especially in Syria and Iraq).

■ **Third message: Iran's growing power in the region**

The third and most important message of the Warsaw Summit is the rise of the regional power of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the main reasons for the failure of the Warsaw Summit (contrary to Washington's will) is the confusion of the White House leaders in the face of our country's influential and undeniable power.

Obviously, the longer this confusion continues, the United States will have to pay heavier costs as a result of its opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this complicated process, not only the Donald Trump government, but also the U.S. next administrations, has no way but surrendering before a "Powerful Iran," and accepting it in the region and the international system. This is the same truth that many Western strategists has emphasized on.

## Warsaw circus: in the name of peace but in interest of terrorists



**1 →** ■ **The level of contribution of different countries at the Warsaw Summit**

To Washington's disappointment, a number of countries refused to take part in the summit. The Russian and Turkish officials, and the German and French ministers as well as Federica Maria Mogherini didn't accepted to be attended the ridiculous summit. In addition, a number of Arab countries such as Lebanon and Palestinian groups also rejected any form of participation in Warsaw to further isolate Washington.

■ **American media narrative of Mike Pompeo's defeat**

The U.S. secretary of state has chosen Warsaw as a turning point of his recent week-long European trip, but the Washington Post, in an analysis, challenged his efforts to hold a convent entitled "The Future of Stability and Prosperity in the Middle East."

The Washington Post, in its critical article titled "Pompeo won't find a future for Middle East peace in Warsaw" wrote that the meeting, aimed at building an international alliance against Iran, proves Trump's contradictory policy in the Middle East.

■ **Warsaw, an arena for accelerating the normalization of relations with Israel**

The Warsaw Summit, despite claims by U.S. officials, was not an assembly for finding a solution to counter terrorism, but was a meeting to expedite the normalization of ties between the Arab reactionaries and the Zionist regime. Since the start of the Warsaw Summit, Israeli PM Netanyahu has met with a number of Arab leaders and will meet with some other officials in the future.

In this regard, the Hamas Islamic resistance movement reacted to Netanyahu's meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Youssef Bin Alawi.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri emphasized: "This visit is a great mistake and acts as a dagger being stabbed in the back of the Palestinians."



# Pars Diplomatic Real Estate

## Apartment

Apt in Farmanieh  
1<sup>st</sup> floor, 350 sq.m, 4 Bdrs.  
fully furn, equipped kitchen  
4 bath rooms, spj, gym laundry,  
green yard, storage parking spot  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Apt in Elahieh  
1<sup>st</sup> floor, 170 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.  
fully furn, equipped kitchen  
spj, fire place, lobby  
parking spot, **\$2000**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Apt in Zafaranih  
brand new, 180 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.  
beautiful furn, roof garden  
parking spot, **\$3000**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Apt in Jordan  
5<sup>th</sup> floor, 140 sq.m  
2 Bdrs., furn, equipped kitchen,  
swimming pool storage, parking  
spot, **\$1000**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Apt in Fereshteh  
230 sq.m, 3 Bdrs., fur, spj  
equipped kitchen, gathering room,  
parking spot, **\$4000**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Apt in Valiasr  
near Mellat Park, opposite of  
Jam e Jam, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 260 sq.m 3  
Bdrs., furn, balcony, parking spot,  
storage, **\$2000**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

## Villa

Duplex Villa in Jordan  
1200 sq.m built up, 3700 sq.m  
land, 6 Bdrs., servant quarter  
2-side entrances  
**Suitable for Embassy**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Villa in North Kamranieh  
duplex, 750 sq.m land, 500 sq.m  
built up, unfurn, renovated  
servant quarter, 2 parking spots  
**Price negotiable**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Villa in Darous  
3 floors, 640 sq.m, swimming pool,  
6 parking spots, yard  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Triplex Villa in Zafaranih  
1200 sq.m, 15 Bdrs. unfurn  
parking spot, **\$10000**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Duplex Villa in Soheil  
500 sq.m land, 600 sq.m built up  
8 Bdrs., 6 bath rooms, unfurn  
servant quarter, completely  
renovated, 3 storages  
12 parking spots  
3-side entrances  
**\$5500**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Villa in Elahieh  
duplex, 3000 sq.m land  
furn/unfurn, 500 sq.m built up  
Beautiful garden, parking spot  
**Price negotiable**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**



Holder of

ISO 9001:2008

ISO 10004:2012

ISO 10002:2014

From Oxford Cert Universal

**Best Consultation**  
**Best Services, Best Result**

Intl. Department Manager "Tina 09128103205"

Tel: 22662452-8, Fax: 22667173

**Hot Line: 28141**  
**info@parsdiplomatic.com**

**www.parsdiplomatic.com**

## Building & Office

Whole Building in Zafar  
3 floors, each apt 200 sq.m  
clean & nice, elevator  
parking spots, storage, **\$3800**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Whole Building in Zafaranih  
4 floors, each floor one apt  
each apt 350 sq.m with 4 Bdrs.  
fully furn, equipped kitchen  
spj, 2 parking spots, **\$14000**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Mahmoodieh Whole Building in  
5 floors, 2600 sq.m totally  
30 Bdrs., 1 penthouse, spj, gym  
rooftop, 40 parking spots  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Whole Building  
in Argentina Square  
brand new, 6 floors, 6 apts  
each floor 250 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.  
elevator, parking spots  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Whole Building in Jordan  
3 floors, 500 sq.m land, totally 650  
sq.m built up, swimming pool  
**\$7000**

**Suitable for**  
**Embassies, International companies**  
**& Guesthouses**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Office in Saadat Abad  
administrative office license  
2 apts, 110 sq.m, parking spots  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

## Ideal Offers

Apt in Niavaran  
1<sup>st</sup> floor, 250 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.  
unfurn, sauna & swimming pool,  
parking spot, **\$1800**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Apartment in Velenjak  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 200 sq.m, 3 Bdrs. furn,  
balcony elevator, storage spj,  
parking spot, 24/7 security  
**\$1700**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Apt in Evin  
90 sq.m, 2 Bdrs., nice & clean furn,  
equipped kitchen  
parking spot, **\$900**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Apt in Elahieh  
3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 280 sq.m, 3 Bdrs.  
fully furn, terrace, spj, gym  
parking spot, **\$2000**  
**Ms.Sara: 09128103207**

Luxury Apt in Zafaranih  
brand new, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor 50 sq.m  
1 Bdr., fully furn, good light spj,  
elevator, parking spot  
**\$1500**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

Luxury Apt in Mahmoodieh  
4<sup>th</sup> floor, 120 sq.m, 2 master rooms,  
almost new, luxury lobby, luxury  
& new furn  
parking spot, spj  
good access to highway  
**\$1800**  
**Mr.Shayan: 09128440156**

مالکین محترم

ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان،  
ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت

مالکین محترم املاک مبله و غیر مبله، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات  
شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

ویلاهای شما را جهت اجاره به منزل سفیر و مدیران  
شرکت های بین المللی در مناطق شمالی تهران  
نیازمندیم.

**PARSIAN Real Estate**  
**SHANON**  
Shanon\_tari@yahoo.com  
+989121907875  
Tel : 88745542

Ajoudanieh (\$2000) 220sq.m, 3bdrs S/p, S, J, & F.F	Jordan (\$1800) 200sq.m, 3bdrs S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F	Tajrish Villa (\$3000) 1000sq.m, 5bdrs S/p, yard, & F.F
---	--	---

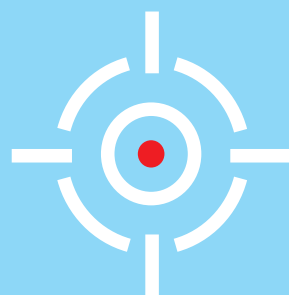
Mahmoodieh (\$3000) 400sq.m, 4bdrs, & F.F  
Elahieh (\$2400) 250sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F  
with S/p, S, J

**Don't Waste Your Time**  
Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties  
**www.DeltaHOME.ir**  
The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners  
**HOME**  
Real Estate  
Member of DELTA Real Estate Group  
(021) 88888865

**maharaja**  
Indian Restaurant  
**FIRST INDIAN RESTAURANT**  
**IN IRAN**  
**PRIVATE PARKING LOT**  
Jahan Hotel (Exelsior) – Rahimzade Alley – Taleqani  
Crossroads – Valiasr St. Tel: 66476855

TEHRAN TIMES

Iran's Leading  
International Daily  
Advertising Dept



Tel:

021 - 430 51 450



carpetiranzamin.com

**FOR,40-YEARS VICTORY**

**WE HAVE 40,DAYS.**

**SPICAL. OFFER. EVRY.**

**CARPET. ANY. SIZE**

**25. P\_SQ\_M,,6\_M=150**

**USD,,, 12\_M=300,,USD,, \$,, MONY BACK**

**GRANTY PLEASE. VISIT OUR. WEB.**

**,,,WWW,CARPETIRANZAMIN,COM,,,**

**BRING,THIS,ADD,TO. COLLET. YOUR.**

**GIFT88876342**

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.

For more information contact:

**Tel:021 - 430 51 450**

times1979@gmail.com





# WHO to laud Iran on elimination of trachoma

**HEALTH** **TEHRAN** — Concurrent with the 11th Festival of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences of Professor Mohammad Gholi Chams (The father of modern ophthalmology in Iran and the founder of Farabi eye hospital) on February 21 World Health Organization (WHO) will laud Iran on elimination of trachoma, Mehr news agency reported.

Trachoma, a devastating eye disease caused by infection with the bacterium Chlamydia trachomatis, is spread through contact with infective eye or nose discharges, either directly from person to person, or mediated by flies. Active (inflammatory) trachoma occurs as a result of infection, and is common among preschool-aged children. Women are blinded up to four times as often as men, mainly due to their close contact with infected children.

Farzad Mohammadi, the coordinator of the event, explained that the Islamic Republic of Iran success in eradicating trachoma will be acclaimed by the WHO during the 11th Festival of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences of Professor Mohammad Gholi Chams with Dr. Christoph Hamelmann, the WHO Representative Iran in attendance.

In late September 2018 WHO has validated the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem in the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to the WHO by achieving this milestone, the country becomes the third in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, after Oman in 2012 and Morocco in 2016, to overcome this centuries-old disease.

In a letter addressed to the Iranian Health Ministry, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, informed Iran that the country has successfully achieved elimination of trachoma as a public health problem.

The dossier of the Islamic Republic of Iran on elimination of trachoma as a public health problems which provides information on the current epidemiological situation of trachoma in the country and the systems for identifying and managing patients trachomatous trichiasis was reviewed by an external Dossier Review Group (DRG) convened by the WHO Regional office for the Eastern



**In a letter addressed to the Iranian Health Ministry, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, informed Iran that the country has successfully achieved elimination of trachoma as a public health problem.**

Mediterranean, the letter reads.

"I have the pleasure to inform you that based on the evidence provided in the dossier and the recommendation of the Dossier Review Group, WHO concludes that the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved elimination of trachoma as a public health problem."

Ghebreyesus highlighted that WHO recommends continued surveillance for trachoma and delivery of care for affected patients.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean said that "WHO is pleased to have supported the Islamic Republic of Iran through the validation process."

"But this achievement was made possible by the Government and people of Islamic

Republic of Iran, who have worked tirelessly over decades to eliminate trachoma as a cause of preventable blindness and unnecessary suffering," he added.

■ **Decades of fight against trachoma**  
Trachoma was a major cause of visual impairment in Iran in the early decades of the 20th century.

In 1959, in rural areas of the district of Malayer, Hamedan province, two thirds of the population were infected by the disease. In 1961 a survey in the Dezful district, southern province of Khuzestan, showed that 91% of people were affected, including 62% with the active (inflammatory) form. At that time, prevalence in the capital, Tehran, was estimated to be 30–40%.

In 1972, tetracycline ointment was introduced as an essential medication in the Health facilities of Iran, and people, who needed it for treatment of active trachoma, were provided with free of charge ointments.

Ophthalmologists were trained during their residency programmes to perform surgical management of trichiasis: the advanced, sight-threatening form of trachoma. Health education campaigns designed jointly by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, including messages about washing hands and faces, were delivered as part of broad-based hygiene improvement initiatives in preschools and primary schools.

In 2013 and in an attempt to speed up the elimination process an awareness-raising programme in more than 20 000 schools in regions and localities endemic for the disease was introduced which benefited the regions by enhancing students' school personnel's, and parents' as well as communities' health.

Meanwhile, the Steering Committee for the National Water Programme, a joint committee of the Ministry of Energy and the Environmental Health Centre of the Ministry of Health, allocated \$500 million to improve water supply and sewerage systems in remote areas.

In 2004, assessments were undertaken in rural areas of four provinces (Bushehr, Kerman, Hormozgan, and Sistan-Baluchestan) in the southern and southeastern Iran, where trachoma was last recognized as a problem. These surveys showed nearly a complete absence of disease. Active trachoma was only seen in Sistan-Baluchestan, where less than 1% of children were affected by the disease.

In 2012–2013, a population-based prevalence study in rural areas of Sistan and Baluchestan re-estimated the prevalence of trachoma at 0.6% of children.

Trachoma is known to be a public health problem in 41 countries, and is responsible for the blindness or visual impairment of about 1.9 million people. In 2016, 190.2 million people lived in trachoma endemic areas and were at risk of trachoma blindness.

Transmission is associated with poor sanitation and hygiene, which increase eye discharges and encourage the breeding of flies.

## Up to 60,000 cases of depression in UK could be avoided if teenagers stay off cannabis, study says

As many as 60,000 cases of depression in adults could have been avoided by preventing teenagers trying cannabis, researchers behind a major new analysis have said.

In the largest study to date, researchers from Canada and Oxford University found robust evidence that trying the drug before the age of 18 meant young people were more likely to develop depression and experience suicidal thoughts.

Researchers said the widespread use of the drug among teenagers was unlikely to change, but with potencies increasing then much more work was needed to educate young people on these risks.

"The proportion of people with depression where that would not occur if the population did not use cannabis is around 7 per cent," Professor Andrea Cipriani, one of the authors from the University of Oxford, said.

"This equates to around 400,000 cases of depression in the U.S., 25,000 in Canada or around 60,000 cases of depression in the UK which would be avoided if adolescents no longer used it."

"It's a big public health and mental health problem, we think," he added.

The study, published in JAMA Psychiatry on Wednesday, is a meta-analysis of 11 other studies following 23,000 people in all, tracing their drug use and mental health from the point before they had tried cannabis for the first time up until the age of 34.

Researchers found no significant link between anxiety and cannabis use, but with depression the effect was equivalent to a 37 per cent rise in an individual's risk. However, Dr Cipriani said individual factors like family history and other life stresses still played a bigger role.

With around 4 per cent of teenagers aged 11 to 15 in England estimated to have used cannabis in the past month, the study's conclusions could have widespread consequences.

Dr Gabriella Gobbi, the study's first author, from McGill University in Canada, where cannabis was legalized for over-18s in October, said her work with schools showed misunderstandings were rife.

"Some teenagers think because it's a plant it's without harm," she said. "It's important to inform adolescents about the risks and the kind of cannabis they use."

"Today, unlike the 1980s and 1990s where THC concentration was about 6 per cent, we now we have joints of 10-15 per cent THC or more."

THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis, and one of at least 113 cannabinoids identified in the substance.

An increased concentration of THC means the same analysis conducted with teenagers trying cannabis today could show even more pronounced impacts, but this won't be seen for another decade.

(Source: The Independent)

## TASHRIFAT INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE AGENCY

**SATISFACTION  
GUARANTEED**

### APARTMENT

Jordan  
4 Bdrs,fully  
furn,260sq.m,spj,\$3000

Elahiyeh Chenaran  
Fantastic 4 Bdrs,500 Sq.m, for  
those seeking the best

Darous  
2Bdrs,fully furn,3rd fl.,brand  
new,100 sqm,lobby  
1600

Zaferaniyeh-Yekta,  
Apartment-villa  
French-style  
3Bdrs,fully furn 360 sq.m.sp,  
EURO 5000

Valiasre-Bagheferdos  
3 Bdrs,fully furn,brand  
new,5th fl., 150 sq.m ,indoor  
spj,\$1900

Mirdamad-Naft  
3 Bdrs,fully furn,5th fl.,200  
sq.m, \$ 2000  
Close to Paladium Shopping  
center  
3Bdrs,180 sq.m,fully  
furn,lobby,sp,garden,\$2000

### VILLA

Elahiyeh  
Triplex-800 sq.m built up,1000  
sq.m land,Semi-furn,7  
Bdrs,spj,\$9000

Zaferaniyeh  
Duplex, 4 Bdrs,unfurn,350  
sq.m,spj,\$8000

Niavaran  
2000 sq.m land,green  
garden,500 sq.m built up  
area,indoor spj,4Bdrs,fully  
furn,triplex,\$15000

Darous  
1000 sq.m land,400 sq.m built  
up area, flat.4 Bdrs,spj.\$7000

Jordan  
850 sq.m land,500 sq.m  
built up,5 Bdrs,spj,furn/  
unfurn,duplex,\$7000



**Mr. Shahin**

Nobody does it better

**09121081212**

Since: 1987

مالکین محترم املاک مسکونی و اداری شما را  
جهت اجاره به خارجی نیازمندیم

**Tel: 22723121**

**tehranfirstchoice@gmail.com**

**We give service with a  
difference... We care!**  
✓ Long & Short term rentals  
✓ Purchase Properties

**FURNISHED - UNFURNISHED  
Villa-Apartment-Office-  
Building**

### OFFICE

From 50 to 8000 sq.m available  
With all facilities in different  
areas

Jordan  
100 sq.m,3  
rooms,parking,brand new  
3rd fl.,\$1700

Valiasre  
150 sq.m brand new, all  
facilities,5th fl.,\$2300

Vozara  
250 sq.m,all facilities  
8th fl.,,\$4000

Mirdamad-Naft  
120 sq.m,6th fl., \$1700

vanak  
shariati  
pasdaran  
shahrak gharb  
saadatabad  
4000-3000-5000-4000-1000  
sq.m,full,reasonable price

### FOR: EMBASSY/COMPANY

Farmaniye, h  
4-storey building,1000 sq.m,  
all facilities,\$10000

Zaferaniyeh  
Triplex villa,800 sq.m,built  
up,1000 sq.m land,12  
rooms,\$8500

Niavaran  
Triplex villa,2000 sq.m  
land,600 sq.m built up ,spj,all  
facilities,\$15000

Darous  
Duplex villa,600 sq.m built  
up,1000 sq.m land ,all  
facilities,\$8000

Other areas:  
Farmaniye h  
Aghdasiyeh  
Shahrak Gharb  
Shariati-Pasdaran  
Valiasre  
Tajrish  
Jordan  
Vanak  
Arjantin  
Zafar...  
nice cases ready to move in.



## Knowledge-based power projects are supported

**TECHNOLOGY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Energy Research Institute supports knowledge-based projects which promote and meet demands of the electric power industry, IRNA reported. Representatives of the Institute and the vice presidency for science and technology signed an agreement on Wednesday to support knowledge-based projects.



According to the agreement, the knowledge-based projects and plans in the field of photonics, laser, advanced materials and manufacturing are supported. The agreement identifies the priorities of the electric power industry sections and the knowledge-based plans, which fulfill the priorities, supported by the center, an official with the vice presidency Hamid Latifi announced. The plans and projects should be certificated by the center and the vice presidency also sponsor them, he explained.

## Companies know innovation is crucial, but do their boards?

Open the Wall Street Journal on any given day, and you are likely to find at least one story about how technology is disrupting yet another industry, and the pressures companies face to innovate. And yet, for board members of companies around the world, technology and innovation don’t make the top three on their list of concerns.

That’s the surprising finding in a new survey of boards of directors conducted by Harvard Business School professor Boris Groysberg and doctoral student Yo-Jud Cheng. “The concerns that ranked at the top for them were things like the regulatory environment and attracting top talent,” says Cheng. “I don’t want to discount the day-to-day concerns board members deal with, but they don’t seem to match up with the critical issues we see covered in the popular press.”

They surveyed some 5,000 board members around the world. Only 30 percent of board members ranked innovation among their top three concerns, and 21 percent cited technology. Those issues ranked fifth and seventh, respectively.

Even more telling was when the researchers asked board members what activities they thought their boards were good at. Technology and innovation ranked 17th and 18th, with only 42 percent of board members listing their handling of those issues above average—far below the proportion ranking of activities such as compliance, financial planning, and staying current on the company, all of which scored above 60 percent.

“Not only do board members not think of innovation and technology at the top of their lists, but it’s also not something that they do well,” concludes Groysberg, Richard P. Chapman Professor of Business Administration. The two findings, adds Cheng, “go hand in hand. If they don’t see innovation as a strategic imperative, they won’t be investing the time or recruiting people to improve those processes.”

**■ Inside the mind of a director** “There are many examples of companies that had great strategies but were completely disrupted by other firms,” Groysberg says. “You can look at CEOs’ and managers’ roles in that, but you also have to ask whether the board was asking the right questions or looking at the right factors to be innovative.”

He blames a lack of diversity on corporate boards for sometimes impeding their ability to be innovative. “Their backgrounds are often very homogeneous, and this is not really positioning boards to think outside of the box,” Groysberg says.

Recent research has backed that up, says Cheng. “Directors tend to recruit people similar to themselves, and our survey results suggest that many boards are not proactively evaluating potential gaps in their knowledge or addressing their shortcomings,” she says.

Age can also be a factor in keeping up with new technology. Among older directors, 39 percent admitted that keeping up with technology was one of the top three areas where they struggled, compared to 27 percent of younger directors.

A focus on innovation also seems to be lacking in specific industries. Board members in the fields of health care, IT, and telecommunications were more likely to consider innovation a top strategic challenge—not surprising given the disruptions in those fields. But other industries scored more dimly in this area; for example, only 13 percent of directors in energy and utilities ranked innovation to be of top importance.

**■ Reversing the trend** What should boards do to improve their focus on innovation? Making that strategic change starts with a frank analysis of the skills and expertise that may be lacking among directors.

“Too much emphasis is put on industry knowledge or expertise,” Groysberg says, “but if your company is going to be disrupted, that may very well come from a player from outside your industry.”

Having a diverse board, both demographically in terms of gender, racial background, and age—but also regarding diversity of perspective—can help inject a range of ideas into debates that can be used to formulate questions and strategic directives for management. That analysis can then filter down to the hiring and recruiting process when it comes time for the board to pick the right CEO to lead the company.

Those conversations can’t happen if boards aren’t making time for them, however. “There can be a tendency for longer-term discussions about innovation, technology, and strategy to be squeezed out by more immediate, short-term issues,” says Cheng. Their survey showed, however, that those companies that routinely took a longer-term view did better on innovation overall.

Board members may also need to take short-term hits in revenue and be able to explain to analysts the reason they are doing so. In all of these ways, Groysberg and Cheng say, boards can ensure that they are focused on the long-term innovation of a company and preparing for any signs of disruption on the horizon.

Rather than leaving it solely up to management to ensure a company retains its competitive edge, a proactive board can help to provide the guidance needed for the future.

(Source: forbes.com)

# Biotech products save Iran \$1 billion: official

**TECHNOLOGY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The domestically manufacturing of biotechnology products has so far saved one billion dollars for the country, Mostafa Qanei, secretary of biotech development center (BioDC) at science and technology vice-presidency said, Tasnim reported on Wednesday. The center aims to develop pharmaceutical technology in order to produce biopharmaceuticals, he said. There are 146 biopharmaceuticals in global market, out of which, 22 items are available in Iran which are monoclonal antibodies and recombinant proteins, he added.

He explained about biopharmaceuticals, which are used for therapeutic or in vivo diagnostic purposes, and are produced by means other than direct extraction from a non-engineered biological source. In July 2018, Qanei announced that Iran has developed 13 methods of pharmaceutical technology in less than one year.

### ■ Biotechnology in medicine

According to economywatch.com, the benefits of biotechnology in medicine are without doubt staggering. Although many exciting developments have taken place in the past few years, with continuing research, it is expected that more and more revolutionary procedures, substances, and devices will be developed to improve and enhance human life. When it comes to biotechnology in medicine, there are many different things that have already been discovered and even more on the near horizon.

For instance, today’s biotechnology is now being used to develop much-needed vaccines, new drugs to combat tough illnesses, creating xenotransplant organs, developing a variety of nanomedical diagnostic techniques, and even determining origins of disease.



**There are 146 biopharmaceuticals in global market, out of which, 22 items are available in Iran which are monoclonal antibodies and recombinant proteins.**

## Iran promotes using remote sensing satellites in agriculture



**TECHNOLOGY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — According to a recent agreement signed between the Iranian Space Research Center and the Ministry of Agriculture, remote sensing satellites are planned to be used in different sections of the agricultural industry, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

The two sides signed an agreement in January 2018 in order to boost their cooperation in different fields of research and operation.

The center has compiled a great knowledge in different fields of agriculture, which can be offered in different sections of the industry, the head of Iranian Space Research Center Hossein Samimi said.

By using satellite data in promoting agriculture, the public can believe the role of space technology in everyday life of people, he explained.

The center already provided a map

of cultivated area, which provides more than 95 percent of national rice market in five provinces, he added.

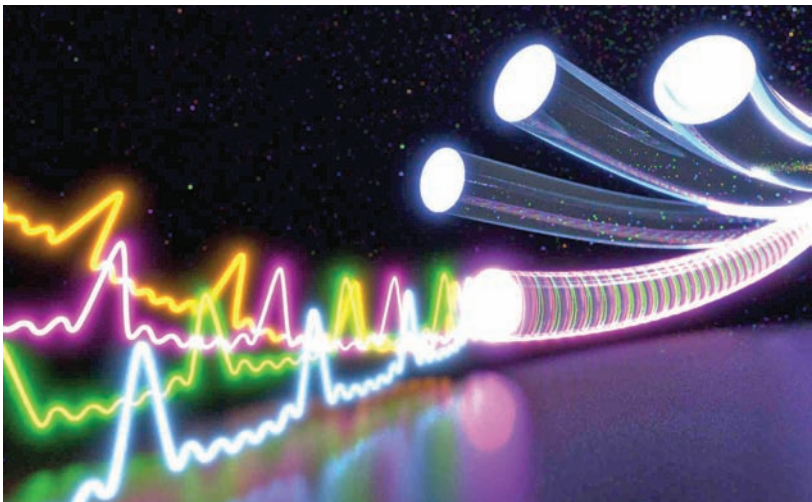
“We plan to provide information for other products wheat, barley and potatoes to estimate their production nationwide,” he said.

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

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

Some startups in Iran have recently been launched providing services for farmers with some space-based data on meteorology and smart agriculture.

## National optical fiber network to expand by 20% to 84,000km



**TECHNOLOGY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Telecommunication Infrastructure Company will expand the national optical fiber network by 14,000 kilometers to 84,000 kilometers by the next two months, the company’s managing director Sadeq Abbasi Shakkouh said, Mehr reported on Friday.

Fiber optic cabling is already done in many roads and cities in different parts of the country, he added.

The project which is done by the company affiliated to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry aims to expand national communication network for Internet service providers (ISPs), he noted.

Besides the increase in capacities of optical fiber network, the network of

transmission bandwidth and the national Internet Protocol (IP) are increased, he explained.

“During past ten months, the capacity of IP increased three times, which increases National Network of Information,” he said.

The project aims to increase the capacity of infrastructures for ISPs and their quality, he added.

With utilizing the capacities of IP networks, there is not deficiency in infrastructural facilities, he said.

Abbasi Shakkouh said that the national communication network also developed through the project.

In December 2018, ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced that Iran has already invested over five billion dollars to develop ICT infrastructures.

## Face recognition technology in classrooms is used



Recently, the Victorian Government brought in new rules stating Victorian state schools will be banned from using facial recognition technology in classrooms unless they have the approval of parents, students and the Department of Education.

Students may be justifiably horrified at the thought of being monitored as they move throughout the school during the day. But a roll marking system could be as simple as looking at a tablet or iPad once a day instead of being signed off on a paper roll. It simply depends on the implementation.

Trials have already begun in independent schools in NSW and up to 100 campuses across Australia. According to the developers, the technology promises to save teachers up to 2.5 hours a week by replacing the need for them to mark the roll at the start of every class.

Many students now have smart phones that recognize faces right now. There are also downloadable face recognition apps for Android phones and iPhones. So face recognition is already in our schools.

And I argue that, like earlier technologies such as the motor vehicle and mobile phone, a strategy where adoption is managed to create the most good and least harm is appropriate. We shouldn’t simply ban it.

### ■ How does it work?

Face recognition technology uses a camera to capture a face and then matches this face against a database to determine identity. First, the face or faces must be detected and localized in the camera frame. Then, face images are aligned and rescaled to a standard size. Finally, these faces are matched against a database. Matching is almost invariably performed using artificial intelligence technology.

We are now in a golden age of face recognition. The main reason for rapid adoption is recognition accuracy has improved astronomically in recent years with 20 times better accuracy from 2014 to 2018.

Now deep learning – a form of artificial intelligence that uses a machine to do a task that usually requires human intelligence – is used for face recognition and an increasing number of other vision tasks.

### ■ Saving time

The simple application of this technology proposed

for schools is to automate the collection of the student roll call for classes. This is a mandatory compliance requirement imposed by the education department.

Roll call is a menial task currently performed by highly skilled teachers or their assistants. Looplearn, the Melbourne startup running the face recognition trials, estimates approximately 2.5 hours of teaching time a week is wasted through mandatory roll calls.

Student time is also wasted. Most of us remember waiting in line many minutes to get marked off on a roll during our school days. Roll call is not a constructive use of time, but it is required by law.

In wider society, it’s now estimated each of us spends three working weeks of the year simply authenticating ourselves to computers and other people. This is time consumed in providing identity documents, password resets, signing documents, waiting in phone queues, and so on.

Clearly authentication is vitally important, but it is consuming increasing amounts of our daily lives. Time is one resource none of us can ever recover.

Many of us remember how bad and slow airport immigration control was before Australia adopted face recognition. Now we can leave Australia with very short delays using SmartGates.

An electronic image of our passport photo is securely stored within the passport itself. The SmartGate termi-

nal extracts the photo from the passport chip and gives us a blue ticket. We then insert the blue ticket into the SmartGate, look at the camera and wait for the face recognition technology. If the faces match, the gates open.

### ■ Privacy concerns

Privacy is often raised as an objection and this issue can never be dismissed lightly. Objections are mostly based on the collection and distribution of the photos. But every school collects photos of their students already and schools have strict control over distribution.

Such controls would necessarily be built into any school certified system. The only fundamental change to the process is whether the teacher or a computer recognizes the student.

Commercial face recognition technology is often quite unreliable unless the person cooperates by standing still and looking directly at the camera like a SmartGate. This is quite different from non-cooperative recognition of persons without their knowledge using surveillance cameras. Cooperative face recognition systems are now well-accepted by the public at the borders, and privacy has been carefully considered in their design.

The emerging non-cooperative surveillance systems have greater potential for invasion of privacy, but they are also faster and more convenient. Indeed, Australia is now rolling out facial recognition technology that will see international travellers pass through airports without even producing their passports

### ■ We can’t stop the tide – but we can manage it

Face recognition technologies will become widely adopted across society over the coming years. Concerns over implementation and privacy may slow down adoption in some places, but the tide will come in and will change business practices right across the world once that happens.

So who should manage and advise on these changes? Government will certainly have a role, but they need to be well advised and be aware of best practice worldwide. Such a role is often played by the Biometrics Institute which was established during the development of the SmartGate system to advice on biometrics best practice as well as privacy concerns.

(Source: theconversation.com)



# Monster magnetar pinpointed as trigger of ultrabright stellar detonation, say researchers

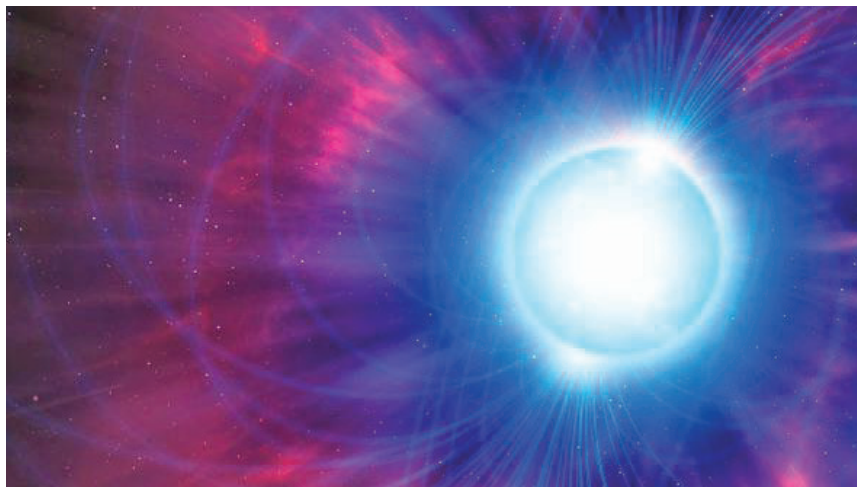
It was a dazzling death. Roughly 1.3 billion years ago a star exploded with such force that it was 50 times brighter than the hundred billion stars in its host galaxy combined. It was so bright that if it took place in the Andromeda Galaxy, it would be visible to the naked eye. The outburst, officially known as PTF10hgi, belongs to a rare class of explosions called “superluminous” supernovae, which can shine a hundred times brighter than typical ones. But astronomers cannot say why.

One hypothesis suggests they are powered by magnetars — ultradense, rapidly spinning and highly magnetized cinders of stellar cores that can form in the aftermath of supernova explosions. If those magnetars are spinning fast enough, say 1,000 times a second, they can slow down rapidly by releasing a magnetized wind. That wind, created the moment the magnetar forms, then shocks the ejecta, adding a steadily increasing amount of heat and light to the explosion over the course of several weeks, making it much more luminous than it would be otherwise. But this scenario is only a hypothesis.

## ■ The holy grail

The “holy grail — the thing that we’re missing — is this direct observational confirmation that there is a magnetar, this beast, in the center of the explosion,” says Brian Metzger, an astronomer at Columbia University. Now a study posted to the preprint server arXiv late last month just might provide that holy grail.

Tarraneh Eftekhari, a graduate student at Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, her advisor Edo Berger, Metzger and their colleagues have detected radio light at



the precise location where PTF10hgi once erupted. It is the first time astronomers have spotted radio emission in the aftermath of one of these superluminous supernovae.

Because radio light is produced when electrons are accelerated within a magnetic field, the finding suggests a magnetar sits squarely in the spot where the supernova burst—potentially solving a near-decade-old mystery. “It’s the first time that we’re

peering through the explosion and seeing the engine—seeing the wizard behind the curtain,” Berger says. “That just by itself is quite remarkable.”

## ■ Superluminous supernovae

Metzger is a little more conservative in his enthusiasm. “This is an exciting hint that we may have the first direct evidence that superluminous supernovae are powered by central magnetars, but we need more observations,”

he says. Already, the team has submitted several proposals to make follow-up studies of the object so they can say with certainty a magnetar, and not another culprit, produces the radio emission. And Deanne Coppejans, an astronomer at Northwestern University who was not involved in the study, agrees the future data are crucial. “At the moment it’s looking very promising, but the observations they’ve proposed should solve the mystery,” she says.

The study might also solve a second mystery — that of fast radio bursts, or FRBs. These brief, bright flashes of radio waves appear to originate in distant galaxies and yet their precise sources remain unknown, making them one of the most intriguing puzzles in astrophysics. Although they might seem unrelated to superluminous supernovae, when Eftekhari and her colleagues picked up the radio emission coincident with PTF10hgi, it was reminiscent of radio light associated with one such FRB. And it was not a surprise to the team — that was precisely the signature Eftekhari and her colleagues had hoped to find.

In 2016 astronomers announced a major clue in the FRB riddle: One of the bursts, known as FRB 121102, flared up more than once, making it the first burst to repeat. The finding allowed scientists to place it on the cosmic map — pinning it to a galaxy roughly 2.5 billion light-years away. Surprisingly, that galaxy was not run-of-the-mill, but rather a dwarf galaxy with few heavy elements — an oddity that looked remarkably similar to the galaxies where superluminous supernovae originate.

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

## Tarraneh Eftekhari, a graduate student at Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, her advisor Edo Berger, Metzger and their colleagues have detected radio light at the precise location where PTF10hgi once erupted.

## Surprise findings turn up the temperature on the study of vernalization

Researchers have uncovered new evidence about the agriculturally important process of vernalization in a development that could help farmers deal with financially damaging weather fluctuations.

Vernalization is the process by which plants require prolonged exposure to cold temperature before they transition from the vegetative state to flower. For decades it’s been a key focus of research into plant development and crop productivity.

But how vernalization might work under variable temperatures in the field has been unclear, as have some of the underlying molecular controls of the process.

The research carried out by John Innes Centre scientists in collaboration with colleagues in Hungary and France shows that vernalization is influenced by warm conditions as well as cold, and a much wider temperature range than previously thought.

Led by Dr. Laura Dixon, the study began as an exploration into how variance in ambient temperatures might influence flowering regulation in winter wheat. But it unexpectedly uncovered an “extreme vernalization response”.

## ■ The true temperature

“We have shown that vernalization responds to warmer conditions than those classically associated with vernalizing. Before this study we thought vernalization only happened up to a maximum of about 12°C, but the true temperature is much higher. This information is immediately useful to breeders,” says Dr. Dixon.

The researchers used a panel of 98 wheat cultivars and landraces and exposed them to temperatures ranging from 13 to 25 °C in controlled environments.

Normally, once the vernalization process completes, plant growth is accelerated under warm temperatures. But the team identified one cultivar, named Charger, which did not follow this standard response.



Gene expression analysis revealed that the wheat floral activator gene (VRN-A1) was responsible for this trait. Further experiments showed that expression of genes that delay flowering is reactivated in response to high temperatures (of up to 24 °C), demonstrating that vernalization is not only a consequence of how long the plant experiences continuous cold.

## ■ Floral activators and repressors

This study published in the journal Development highlights complex workings of a genetic network of floral activators and repressors that coordinate a plant’s response to a range of temperature inputs. It also finds that the Charger cultivar is an extreme version of a response to warmer temperatures that may be prevalent in winter wheat cultivars.

The team is now looking to provide diagnostic genetic markers which will allow breeders to track the distinct allele responsible for this warm-temperature vernalization trait. They also hope to use their new knowledge of warm weather interruption to reduce the length of vernalization in the breeding cycle, so that new wheat lines can be generated more quickly.

Dr. Dixon explains: “This study highlights that to understand the vernalization response in agriculture we must dissect the process in the field and under variable conditions. The knowledge can be used to develop new wheat cultivars that are more robust to changing temperatures.”

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

## Scientists developed a method that allows removal of antibiotic residue from waste water

In February the article “Metal-doped organic aerogels for photocatalytic degradation of trimethoprim” written by the researchers of two research groups (nanoporous materials and environmental technology research groups) of Tallinn University of Technology was published in the high-impact peer-reviewed professional journal Chemical Engineering Journal.

The head of the nanoporous materials research group, Lead Research Scientist Mihkel Koel, has, as a chemist, focused his research in particular on the implementation of the principles of waste-free chemistry, i.e. green chemistry. This article is also about development of new and effective methods for improving our living environment. Mihkel Koel said, “In modern materials science, the creation and application of materials with extreme properties is continuously of great practical interest.

These materials include also the aerogels (highly porous material with extremely low density and low thermal and electrical conductivity) developed by our research group. Novel materials enable also new and effective applications in technology.”

## ■ Organic aerogels

The article is focused in particular on organic aerogels produced from phenolic compounds obtained upon processing Estonian oil shale, i.e. from local raw material. In order to produce highly porous aerogel from gel, supercritical extraction with carbon dioxide is used, in the process of which liquid is replaced by gas resulting in aerogel - a very light and porous material.

It is crucial that this aerogel is produced from local raw material, i.e. Estonian oil shale phenolic compounds,” Koel says.

Due to the specificity of the compounds obtained from Estonian raw material, the reaction takes place quickly and at room



temperature (earlier the production of aerogel required heating at a temperature as high as 100 °C for a longer period of time). By doping these aerogels with metals, an excellent catalyst carrier is produced that can be used e.g. for waste water treatment.

## ■ A highly porous material

Mihkel Koel said, the “study of the photocatalytic activity of organic aerogels doped with metals (Fe, Cu, Co, and Ni) produced novel and surprising results. The best results were obtained by using nickel (Ni). Since aerogel is a highly porous material with large specific surface area, it is well-known for its excellent adsorbent properties, which is particularly important when acting as a catalyst. The article analyses photocatalytic degradation of substances in waste water. It appeared that this method can be successfully used e.g. for removal of the antibiotic trimethoprim, which is used to treat kidney infections, from waste water. Until now, cleaning water from pharmaceutical waste has been extremely complicated and not very effective.”

Mihkel Koel adds that the nanoporous materials research group studies also silica and cellulose aerogels and carbon aerogel produced at high temperature pyrolysis of organic aerogel (by heating up to 700-800 °C without air supply).

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

## Honeybees enter virtual reality so scientists can study their brains

Researchers at the Free University of Berlin have developed a method for directly recording the brains of honeybees as they navigate a virtual-reality environment. The team implanted electrodes into a region of the bee brain called the mushroom body, located in the front antennal lobe, to track neurological changes as the bees worked to complete a virtual maze, according to a study.

The experiment involved tethering honeybees to a Styrofoam ball “treadmill” and exposing them to a cone-shaped screen displaying images of their natural environment, while monitoring the electrical activity in their brains.

The “main strength of this study is the possibility offered by their setup to combine electrophysiological recording and a visual learning task,” says Aurore Avargues-Weber, a behavioral scientist at the University of Toulouse who was not involved in the study.

Virtual reality (VR) has been used to study the behavior, physiology, and neuroscience of species from flies to rodents, but it wasn’t until recently that it had been successfully used to study bees.

## ■ A VR environment

In 2017, Martin Giurfa, an animal behavior researcher at the University of Toulouse, became the first to create a VR environment for honeybees, using it to investigate the insects’ visual learning and their ability to transfer knowledge learned in the real world into a virtual environment.



The development of an effective VR setup for honeybees “was a big achievement,” says Giurfa. He says that the new study, which he did not participate in, shows how this technology can be paired with neural recording equipment, as has been done for fruit flies and mice, to gain more insight into mechanisms for learning and memory.

In a separate experiment, the group tested the bees’ ability to learn a maze solely in the virtual environment. This time, Zwaka and her colleagues implanted electrodes into the frontal lobe of their tiny brains to record changes in neurological signals. They specifically targeted the mushroom body, a region containing a variety of different neurons, as previous studies have demon-

strated that the structure is involved in learning and memory.

Sure enough, the team documented significant changes in the mushroom body over the course of training. The type of responding cells shifted as the bees responded to stimuli, as did the number of cells firing and the response frequency, explains Zwaka. The authors suggest that these changes are a product of the visual learning that occurs as the bees get a handle on the virtual maze.

## ■ The honeybee performance

The bees never learned to follow the maze as consistently as they had in the first experiment, however. To Weber, this suggests that the observed neuronal changes don’t represent learning. “(The study lacked) convincing, significant learning performance,” she says. Weber believes that the heavy electrodes might have impaired the honeybee performance, weighing the bees down or making them uncomfortable. “More work seems necessary to validate their findings on the implication of mushroom bodies in visual learning,” she says.

Zwaka doesn’t know exactly why the bees trained in the virtual environment navigated the maze less consistently than those trained in the real world, but she wouldn’t necessarily call their performance “impaired.” The novelty of this recording setup means “there is no real performance you could compare it to. Maybe they don’t perform exactly as we would expect during free flight.” But that does not mean that no learning occurred, she says.

(Source: [the-scientist.com](#))

## After 15 years, NASA officially ends Opportunity mission on Mars

NASA’s Opportunity rover far exceeded all expectations, but it’s finally time to say goodbye. On Wednesday, NASA officially confirmed the mission is over.

After months of trying to make contact with Opportunity following a planet-wide dust storm, NASA is calling it quits. This is not a time to be sad, though. Opportunity was only designed to operate for 90 Martian days, but it lasted almost 15 years (over 5,000 Martian days) and reshaped our understanding of the red planet along the way.

Opportunity landed on Mars on January 25, 2004, bouncing across the surface in an inflatable airbag. NASA designed Opportunity (and its sibling rover Spirit) with solar panels to recharge its onboard batteries. Unfortunately, a global dust storm that started in June 2018 was too much for the aging rover, which lost power early in the storm. Dust storms are common on Mars, but a global event like the one we saw in 2018 only happens every few years.

NASA received a ping from the rover on June 10th, 2018 as it waited in low-power mode. That was the last time the team had any communication with Opportunity. NASA tried for months to regain contact, finally sending the last message from the Mars Station antenna at NASA’s Goldstone Deep Space Complex in California on October 12th.

Opportunity started out in Eagle crater where it discovered hematite “blueberries,” the first strong evidence for water on ancient Mars. After that, it headed to Endurance crater where it drove down the side and studied the strata of Mars. Then, it was on to Victoria crater, and from there Opportunity traveled through Marathon Valley, so named because that’s where the rover crossed the “marathon” mark of 26.2 miles. Finally, Opportunity headed into Perseverance Valley, where the 2018 dust storm overtook the robot. That valley will be Opportunity’s eternal resting place.

During its time on Mars, the plucky little rover traveled more than 28 miles (45 kilometers). NASA was initially hopeful the mission would manage a single kilometer in its short lifespan. Covering all that distance taught NASA a great deal about how to build rovers for Mars.

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



## Massive Bolivian earthquake reveals mountains 660 kilometers below our feet: research

Geophysicists used data from an enormous earthquake in Bolivia to find mountains at the base of the mantle’s transition zone, located 660 kilometers below our feet. Their statistical model didn’t allow for precise height measurements, but these mountains may be bigger than anything on the surface of the Earth. The researchers also examined the top of the transition zone (410 km down) and did not find similar roughness.

Most schoolchildren learn that the Earth has three (or four) layers: a crust, mantle and core, which is sometimes subdivided into an inner and outer core. That’s not wrong, but it does leave out several other layers that scientists have identified within the Earth.

In a study published this week in Science, Princeton geophysicists Jessica Irving and Wenbo Wu, in collaboration with Sidao Ni from the Institute of Geodesy and Geophysics in China, used data from an enormous earthquake in Bolivia to find mountains and other topography on a layer located 660 kilometers (410 miles) straight down, which separates the upper and lower mantle. (Lacking a formal name for this layer, the researchers simply call it “the 660-km boundary.”)

To peer deep into the Earth, scientists use the most powerful waves on the planet, which are generated by massive earthquakes. “You want a big, deep earthquake to get the whole planet to shake,” said Irving, an assistant professor of geosciences.

Big earthquakes are vastly more powerful than small ones -- energy increases 30-fold with every step up the Richter scale -- and deep earthquakes, “instead of frittering away their energy in the crust, can get the whole mantle going,” Irving said. She gets her best data from earthquakes that are magnitude 7.0 or higher, she said, as the shockwaves they send out in all directions can travel through the core to the other side of the planet -- and back again. For this study, the key data came from waves picked up after a magnitude 8.2 earthquake -- the second-largest deep earthquake ever recorded -- that shook Bolivia in 1994.

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

## Our oceans are full of nurdles, and they’re not as cute as they sound

“Nurdles” may sound cute but they pose a huge risk to the marine environment. Also known as “mermaid tears”, these small plastic pellets are a feedstock in the plastic industry.

Instead of being converted into household items, many end up in the ocean, collecting toxins on their surfaces and being eaten by marine wildlife. Not so cute now, are they?

These small pellets -- normally between 1mm and 5mm -- are classed as a primary microplastic alongside the microbeads used in cosmetic products -- they’re small on purpose, as opposed to other microplastics that break off from larger plastic waste in the ocean.

“Mermaid tears” is an appropriate nickname when we consider the potential harm that nurdles have on marine life. Their small size, round shape and array of colours make them attractive food -- easily mistaken for fish eggs and small prey.

The large surface area to size ratio and polymer composition of the nurdle pellets allow persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in seawater to build up on their surfaces.

These toxins then transfer to the tissue of organisms which eat them. The problem is in the name -- POPs are “persistent”, meaning they don’t go away easily and can remain on the surface of nurdles for years.

Nurdles can be so noxious that people cleaning beaches or recording pellets in scientific surveys are advised not to touch them with their bare skin -- which makes sun bathing on many beaches in the summer an unattractive prospect.

So how many nurdles are out there in the ocean and on coastlines? It’s estimated that up to 53 billion nurdles are released annually in the UK from the plastic industry.

That’s the same amount of nurdles that it would take to make 88 million plastic bottles. So why are nurdles rarely discussed in the plastic pollution debate?

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



## Nationwide multi-sport event organized for the elderly

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s national retirement fund **d e s k** will hold a nationwide multi-sport event in the Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht (April 21-May 21), YJC reported on Friday.

The event is organized with regard to the importance of sports in improving physical activity among the older persons and addressing physical inactivity among them and keeping up their spirit, the national retirement fund director general said.



Encouraging physical activity among the elderly will also improve physical health and decrease health costs as well, Jamshid Taqizadeh added.

This is the third round of the event and those interested can refer to the national retirement fund’s website and participate in it until the yearend (March 20), he explained.

The sport festival will be held in all 31 provinces featuring competition in 6 sports including swimming, shooting, chess, table tennis, middle-distance running, and darts, Taqizadeh concluded.

## Eco-park opened in northern city of Astara

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — A wildlife eco-park was inaugurated in the northern city of Astara, Gilan province, on Friday, ISNA news agency reported.



The eco-park was opened with chief of Department of Environment, Issa Kalantari, in attendance, the report added.

The eco-park is some 4,500 square meters in area. A budget of 28 billion rials (nearly \$667,000) was spent on the project.

Moreover other projects in steel wetland as well as Lavan-devil wildlife refuge were inaugurated.

Astara lies on the border with Azerbaijan Republic and on the Caspian Sea. It is a relatively important border trade center between Iran and the Caucasus.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Volleyball

A: It’s a beautiful day here in New Zealand at the Men’s Volleyball world championship. My name is Rick Fields and I’m joined by the man with the plan, Bob Copeland.

B: Thank you, Rick. We’ve got a very exciting **encounter ahead of us** today as two **powerhouse** teams, Brazil and China, face off against each other and try to **qualify** for the next round. Without a doubt, both teams are **in top shape** and this will prove to be a competitive match.

A: The ref signals the start of the game and here we go. Ribeiro **serves** and China quickly receives the ball. Chen **bumps** it to the setter, and... a very nice **set** by Chen!

B: Xu **spikes** it! Wow, what a great hit! The Brazilian blockers **anticipated** the play and tried to block him but he managed to get the ball in! Great play.

A: It’s China’s service now. What a superb **jump serve** by Li, oh, and we have a **let serve**. The ball was coming in fast and almost made it over the net.

B: Brazil calls for a **time out** and we’ll be right back, after a short commercial break.

#### ■ Key vocabulary

**encounter**: meet for a game or battle

**ahead of (someone)**: in the future

**powerhouse**: a highly energetic, strong team

**qualify**: to reach the later stages of a selection process or contest by competing successfully in earlier rounds

**in top shape**: in their best condition

**serve**: hits the ball to start a set of the game

**bump**: to pass (a volleyball) by redirecting it with the forearms

**set**: the action of putting ball in the air so as to be driven to opponents’ court

**spike**: strongly hit the ball to opponents’ court using the palm of the hand

**anticipate**: to foresee and act in advance of

**jump serve**: a serve with the ball firstly thrown overhead and then the player jumping to hit it

**let serve**: the ball touches the net in a serve but still crosses into the opponents’ court

**time out**: a pause during a game

#### ■ Supplementary vocabulary

**side out**: when the team that served the ball loses the rally, causing the other team to serve the next point

**whiff**: a mishit when a player attempts to hit (or spike) the ball with the open hand and nearly misses the ball

**dig**: the ability to prevent the ball from touching one’s court after a spike or attack, particularly

**coin toss**: the practice of throwing a coin in the air to resolve a dispute between two parties

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# Plans on agenda to address sand and dust storms in 4 provinces

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Studies to **d e s k** combat sand and dust storms are almost completed and next year (starting on March 21) plans will be implemented in four provinces of Khuzestan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Kerman and Hormozgan, director of the national headquarters for combatting sand and dust storms has said.

Ali Mohammad Tahmasbi-Birgani explained that the national document to fight sand and dust storms will be hammered out next week and will be implemented once it is approved.

The five-year plan will set strategies and guidelines for developing early warning systems for sand and dust storms and restoration plans for wetlands and also task responsible bodies to tackle the environmental issue, ISNA quoted Tahmasbi-Birgani as saying on Friday.

Agriculture ministry and Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization affiliated to the ministry are mainly responsible for implementing the plans, he said, highlighting that, accordingly the biggest share of the budget will be allocated to the Agriculture Ministry.

Next, the Energy Ministry and the Department of Environment are tasked with providing the water right of the wetlands as well as facilitating coordination among responsible bodies, he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks Tahmasbi-Birgani said that reports on identifying sand and dust storm hotspots inside the country are also completed indicating that 24 million hectares of the country’s land area are potential hotspots for sand and dust storms while hotspots where san and dust storms originate from amount to 28 million hectares.

Currently the data on sand and dust storms gravity in all regions during various seasons are collected and will be released by the Iranian calendar month of Khordad (May 22-June 21), he said.

Last year the budget to combat sand



**Last year the budget to combat sand and dust storms were mostly allotted to the southwestern province of Khuzestan, but this year provinces Sistan-Baluchestan, Kerman and Hormozgan will be also high on agenda.**

and dust storms were mostly allotted to the southwestern province of Khuzestan, but this year provinces Sistan-Baluchestan, Kerman and Hormozgan will be also high on agenda, he added.

Thankfully this year with increased rainfalls in the province of Khuzestan as well as undertaking measures to address the issue sand and dust storms only stricken the areas one or twice during the first month of autumn.

According to data released on Friday by the National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center province of Khuzestan received 393.3 millimeters of rain since the beginning of autumn while

last year’s precipitations in the area amounted to 66.5 millimeters.

Commenting on identifying hotspots located outside the county Tahmasbi-Birgani explained that data on identifying these hotspots will be collected in an attempt with Iran’s Meteorological Organization by the next year (March 2019-March 2020).

#### ■ Detrainment effects of sand and dust storms

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Sand and dust storms usually occur when strong winds lift large amounts of sand and dust from bare, dry soils into the atmosphere.

## World on track to miss emissions ‘turning point’ for tackling climate change

The world is not on track to meet the greenhouse gas “turning point” required to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, experts have warned.

Inadequate progress has been made in shutting down coal plants, preventing deforestation and switching to electric cars, meaning emissions are unlikely to peak next year.

Experts agree that stabilizing global warming below 1.5C beyond pre-industrial levels is crucial to avoid the worst results climate change including coral reef extinction and the devastation of coastal communities.

However, getting there will require unprecedented changes to every aspect of society, and climate analysts have previously identified 2020 as the year when emissions need to start falling to achieve this target.

But despite some progress in renewable energy development and climate investments around the world, the World Resources Institute (WRI) think tank concluded in a new report that this is unlikely to happen.

The group previously identified six key areas that need to be revolutionized to achieve the ambitious target of a 2020 turning point. These sectors were energy, transport, land use, industry, infrastructure and finance.

“Progress is uneven across the six milestones ... in most cases action is insufficient or progress is off track,” the report’s authors wrote.



This target was initially established by the Mission2020 coalition, which was launched by ex-UN climate chief Christiana Figueres in partnership with scientists and NGOs.

When they initially laid out their plans in 2017, there was room for cautious optimism as massive declines in coal use across the US and China had caused CO2 pollution to level off.

However, since then emissions have begun to rise again, and the new WRI report reveals that many of the goals set by the coalition three years ago are not close to being realized.

One target was for a fifth of new car sales being

electric by 2020, and while there has been some progress towards this goal it is still expected to fall far short at around 3 per cent.

Another ambitious goal was for heavy industries such as steel and cement production to be on track for compliance with the Paris agreement, meaning halving emissions by 2050.

These industries produce enormous amounts of pollutants, but have proven difficult to decarbonize, and progress here has also fallen far short of the 2020 target.

In particular, the authors warned that all coal-fired power plants must be retired, and the enormous scale of deforestation that is removing some of the planet’s biggest carbon sinks must come to an end.

There has also been a failure to ramp up agricultural practices that both reduce CO2 emissions and increase the quantity of CO2 being sucked from the atmosphere by farmland.

“The report shows the pockets of significant activity where there is an opportunity to scale up and accelerate action, and we found there are many opportunities that remain untapped,” Kelly Levin, one of the report’s authors, told The Independent.

“Reaching many of the milestones is still technically feasible, but whether they are met will require exponential changes in policy, investment action and also mind set and behavior.”

(Source: The Independent)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Cancer diagnostic, prevention center to open in Tehran

A cancer diagnostic and prevention center will be inaugurated in Tehran within the next few months, CEO of Shahr-e Salem (healthy city) Company, affiliated to Tehran Municipality has said. The center will be up and running within few months in Keshavarz Boulevard, central Tehran, and we are just waiting for the Health Ministry’s permit for setting up the center, IRIB quoted Hamid Choubineh as saying on Wednesday.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-nomy, -nomic, -nomical, -nomically”

#### ■ Meaning:

laws or knowledge

■ For example: They discuss how to meet up with other **astronomy** enthusiasts.

### PHRASAL VERB

Wipe somebody/ something out

■ Meaning: to destroy, remove, or get rid of something completely

■ For example: Whole villages were wiped out by the floods.

### IDIOM

Get in(to) deep water

■ Explanation: to put or find oneself in a dangerous, vulnerable, or troublesome situation or position, especially that which could be beyond one’s abilities to resolve

■ For example: I think I’ve gotten in deep water with this master’s course—I don’t know how I’ll be able to keep up with all the work!

## افتتاح بزرگترین مرکز شناسایی و پیشگیری سرطان

مدیرعامل شرکت شهر سالم گفت: بزودی بزرگترین مرکز شناسایی و پیشگیری در سرطان توسط اداره کل شهر سالم شهرداری تهران افتتاح می شود. به گزارش روز چهارشنبه خبرنگار خبرگزاری صدا و سیما ، حمید چوبینه گفت: تمامی کارها ومراحل اخذ مجوز انجام شده است و منتظر دستورنهایی وزارت بهداشت هستیم ومکانی در بلوار کشاورز نیز مشخص شده وتاچندماه آینده به بهرهبرداری می رسد.



# Bahrainis stage nationwide rallies to mark eighth uprising anniversary

➔ Sheikh Ali Salman lashed out at a summit in the Polish capital Warsaw in which some Bahrain officials discussed the idea of normalizing relations between Bahrain and Israel.

On the sidelines of the United States-organized summit, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah told The Times of Israel on Thursday that Manama would "eventually" normalize ties with Tel Aviv.

His remark followed an earlier report by an Israeli news network that Bahrain informed Israel more than two years ago that it was interested in normalizing relations.

The report said Bahrain's foreign minister held a secret meeting with former Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni on the sidelines of the 2017 Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Sheikh Qassim called for a new type of relationship between the government and the people and urged the regime to realize peoples' right to decide their fate.

He cited lack of justice in political, economic, judicial and social areas the main problem in Bahrain and said the only solution to the problem is the active participation of



people in those affairs.

Since February 14, 2011, Bahraini people have been holding peaceful protest rallies on an almost daily basis. They are complaining about widespread discrimination against the Shia minority in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

The Bahraini regime, backed by forces from the House of Saud regime, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan, began a deadly crackdown on protesters, which has led to thousands of arrests, scores of deaths and systematic torture of detainees.

Anti-regime protests have continued for years despite a brutal crackdown in which scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others been injured or jailed.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3, 2017.

Bahrain is a close ally of Britain, the United States and the Saudi regime and home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

In April, the United Kingdom also opened a permanent military base in Bahrain in a ceremony attended by Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa and Britain's Prince Andrew.

Britain announced in 2014 it had sealed a deal to expand and reinforce its naval presence in Bahrain, allowing it to operate more and bigger ships in the Persian Gulf.

(Source: Press TV)

## Yemen FM faces backlash for smiling, sitting next to Netanyahu

Yemen's Foreign Minister Khaled al-Yamani has been widely criticized after he was pictured sitting next to, and smiling at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a conference aimed at isolating regional power house Iran.

Al-Yamani was seated next to Netanyahu during the opening session of the Middle East conference in the Polish capital Warsaw. During a part of the session that was closed to the media, the Yemeni minister was reported to have let the Israeli leader use his microphone when his wasn't working.

The United States peace envoy Jason Greenblatt called the incident a "light-hearted moment", but suggested it could be the first step in establishing cooperation between the two countries, which have never had diplomatic relations.

The Ansarullah (Houthi) movement who are at war with the Yemeni government denounced Yamani for attending the summit, accusing him of attempting to normalize ties with Israel "at the expense of the Ummah's causes [Global Muslim community], including the Palestinian one".

"Al-Yamani's act of sitting next to Netanyahu reflects the national treachery and moral bankruptcy of the Saudi-led government in Yemen," a statement issued by the Ansarullah said.

Condemnation also came from other prominent voices in the Middle East with Assaad Taha, an award-winning Egyptian journalist and documentary filmmaker, writing on Twitter: "I swear to God, these people are not from us at all."

"Houthi's (Ansarullah) just had a new reason to mock the Yemeni 'legitimate' government with these pics after FM Khaled al-Yamani sat next to Netanyahu at the Warsaw Summit," said Afrah Nasser, a Yemeni journalist.

"These little failures, let alone the big ones, will eventually lead to the defeat of this ill-managed government." Netanyahu on Thursday called on Arab states to continue normalizing relations with Israel, hailing the meetings with foreign ministers from 10 Arab states as a "historic

turning point"

"Yesterday was a historic turning point. In a room of some 60 foreign ministers and representatives of dozen of governments, an Israeli prime minister and the foreign ministers of leading Arab countries stood together and spoke with unusual force, clarity and unity against the common threat of the Iranian regime," he said.

Oman's foreign minister also said the coming together of Arab states and Israel signaled a "new era" for the Middle East.

"The people of the Middle East suffered a lot because they are stuck to the past. This is a new era for the future and for prosperity for every nation," said Yusuf bin Alawi.

Yamani refused to apologize for the incident but took to Twitter to say that Yemen's "position on the Palestinian cause, people and leaders is unchangeable and nonnegotiable".

Pointing out reactions to the photograph, he added that there were efforts to portray the situation differently based on political motivations.

According to the Polish Foreign Ministry, about 60 countries had confirmed their participation in the event, including the Arab states: Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, Yemen, Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia.

Turkey, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Iran did not attend.

■ **Humanitarian crisis deteriorating in Yemen, UN warns**

Meantime, the United Nations has warned that the situation in war-ravaged Yemen is further deteriorating as the country is facing the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world.

"The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world," said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in a statement on Thursday. "An estimated 80 percent of the population - 24 million -



require some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million who are in acute need," it added.

The House of Saud regime invaded Yemen in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall Yemen's former President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had resigned amid popular discontent and fled to Riyadh, and to eliminate the Ansarullah movement, which had been running state affairs.

The invasion, which has failed to achieve any of its goals, has reportedly killed over 56,000 people. The imposed war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories.

The Saudi regime-led military campaign has also paved the way for the outbreak of epidemics, most notably cholera, in the impoverished country.

"Severity of needs is deepening, with the number of people in acute need a staggering 27 percent higher than last year," the OCHA statement further read. It also warned that two-thirds of the country was "already pre-famine", while one-third faced "acute vulnerabilities."

With the war drawn into a deadlock, the Saudi regime is virtually mired in a quagmire, having faced repeated military backlashes in Yemen and reprisal attacks inside its own territories.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. general: America not 'winning' in Syria

The United States general in charge of special operations forces has cautioned against talk of "winning" against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Syria, contradicting the U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that the group had been defeated.

General Raymond Thomas, who heads U.S. Special Operations Command, made the comments Thursday during a U.S. Senate hearing after lawmakers asked him what winning in Syria would look like.

"I'd be hesitant to use the term winning, as opposed to the objective," Thomas told the Senate's Armed Services Committee.

Republican Senator Josh Hawley asked Thomas if he was satisfied the U.S. was at that point. "I do not think we're there yet," Thomas said.

Trump declared victory over ISIL in December, saying the U.S. had "beaten them

badly" and "won". He also announced he would withdraw the 2,000 or so American troops -- most of them Special Forces commandos -- from Syria.

Since Trump's announcement, the U.S. officials have rejected the idea of a clear victory over ISIL, stressing the group will remain indefinitely as an insurgency after they have lost control of the area they once claimed.

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

■ **New UN special envoy hopes to convene Syrian constitutional committee soon**

Meantime, United Nations Special

Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen hopes to convene the first session of a UN-sponsored Syrian Constitutional Committee in the Swiss city of Geneva "as soon as possible" early next year in a bid to begin a viable peace process to the country's nearly eight-year-old conflict.

The Norwegian diplomat, who took over from Staffan de Mistura in January, added, "My hope (is) that they will be able as soon as possible to have the constitution committee to meet in Geneva."

Pedersen further highlighted that he could not specify the time frame for a meeting of the committee, but he said his discussions with relevant parties had made good progress.

The senior UN official went on to say that his main goal was to negotiate an agree-

ment between the two parties involved in the conflict.

He underlined that he saw the constitutional committee as "a potential door opener" for the political process to the crisis.

Pedersen said work was also needed on other issues, expressing hope to secure more cooperation from both the incumbent Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad as well as the Saudi-backed Syrian National Coalition (SNC).

The UN envoy for Syria also hoped to see more prisoner exchanges, and clarity on missing persons in the wake of a swap between the government and Takfiri militant groups in the northwestern city of al-Bab.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said each side had released 20 prisoners.

(Source: Press TV)

## Next war on Gaza must be the last, former Israeli minister says

Former Israeli war Minister Avigdor Lieberman has repeated his aggressive rhetoric against the Gaza Strip, saying the next war on Palestinian resistance movements operating inside the besieged coastal enclave "must be the last."

Lieberman said on Thursday that a recent Israeli military intelligence assessment indicated that the Israeli regime is likely to launch a major offensive against Palestinians either in Gaza or the occupied West Bank within the next 12 months.

He asserted that the assessment "is completely consistent with my assessments over the past year."

"The question now is not 'Will there be another confrontation with Hamas in the Gaza Strip?' but rather 'When will this happen?'" Lieberman said.

The 60-year-old leader of Yisrael Beiteinu political party also took jibes at the Israeli regime, claiming that it is "strengthening" Palestinian resistance groups through not launching a war on Gaza and easing sanctions against the sliver.

Lieberman went on to say that the transfer of Qatari funds and fuel to Gaza in addition to the expansion of its fishing area all serve to strengthen Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, which is the military wing of Hamas resistance movement.

The former Israeli war minister highlighted that public support for Hamas is increasing both in Gaza and the



West Bank.

"The next confrontation must be the last confrontation. We must strike a hard and disproportionate blow on Hamas - completely break their willpower to continue to fight against us and destroy their belief that they could ever defeat us," Lieberman said.

Lieberman resigned from his post on November 14 last year, less than a day after Hamas and other resistance factions agreed to an Egypt-brokered ceasefire with Israel in Gaza.

Announcing his decision in a news conference, the hawk-

ish Israeli official described Gaza truce as "a capitulation to terror."

Lieberman also vehemently objected to Israel's allowing Qatar to deliver \$15 million to the financially-crippled strip to pay the salaries of government workers and civil servants last week.

"It is no secret that there were differences between the prime minister and I," Lieberman said. "I did not agree to allow entry of Qatari money [into Gaza], and I had to allow it only after the prime minister announced it."

The Israeli military frequently bombs Gaza, with civilians being the main target of such attacks.

Israel has also launched several wars on the Palestinian coastal sliver, the last of which began in early July 2014. The military aggression, which ended on August 26, 2014, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians. Over 11,100 others were also wounded in the war.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in the standards of living as well as unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty.

The Israeli regime denies about 1.8 million people in Gaza their basic rights, such as freedom of movement, jobs with proper wages as well as adequate healthcare and education.

(Source: Press TV)

## U.S. may trim over 1,000 troops from Afghanistan

Even before any peace push-related drawdowns, the United States military is expected to trim troop levels in Afghanistan as part of an efficiency drive by the new commander, a U.S. general told Reuters on Friday, estimating the cuts may exceed 1,000 forces.

The U.S. President Donald Trump told Congress this month he intended to reduce the U.S. forces from Afghanistan as negotiators make progress in talks with Taliban insurgents, saying: "Great nations do not fight endless wars."

The U.S. Army General Joseph Votel, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, said the decision to reduce some of the roughly 14,000 American forces in Afghanistan was not linked to those peace efforts, however.

Instead, he said it was part of an effort by Army General Scott Miller, who took over the more than 17-year war effort in September, to make better use of the U.S. resources.

"This is something that he started as he got into the position here and was looking at how we (can) be as efficient and as effective as we can be on the ground," Votel said in an interview during a trip to Oman.

Miller's decision represents a reversal of sorts after years in which the U.S. military sought to slow or halt troop drawdowns under Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, and previously lobbied for more troops under Trump.

It was unclear how far along any troop reductions might already be. The Pentagon says the U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan are at around 14,000 but adds the number can fluctuate.

Other sources offered lower estimates. Diplomatic sources believe the efficiency push, which has been raising eyebrows in Kabul, was already driving down the U.S. troop levels.

Votel added that some troops could be moved "over the horizon," still remotely supporting the war effort from overseas. That, he said, would also reduce vulnerabilities in America's longest war.

"This is his decision as commander here - how he most effectively uses the resources that he has and trying to be as efficient as he can be," Votel said, without offering a specific estimate of exactly how many troops Miller may withdraw.

Miller's spokesman, Army Colonel Dave Butler, declined to speculate on future troop levels. But Butler said Miller would still have surge capabilities into Afghanistan when needed for specific missions.

Costs have increasingly been a focus of discussions between Kabul and Washington. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani recently sent a letter to Trump offering to reduce the U.S. expenses in Afghanistan.

"How to do this more cost effectively is something that we have been working towards for a long time," Roya Rahmani, Afghanistan's ambassador to Washington, told Reuters.

The U.S. officials have held several rounds of talks with the Taliban in Qatar since last year in what is widely seen as the most serious bid for peace in the 17-year war. Taliban negotiators will meet their U.S. counterparts on Feb. 18 in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.

The U.S. officials have told Reuters the military is planning for what a withdrawal of about half of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan would look like.

That has raised concerns about whether a smaller force would be able to support the Afghan military and whether other European armies that rely on American helicopters and other support would pull out.

It also raises questions about how big of a U.S. counter-terrorism force might be able to remain in the country.

Votel declined to discuss any internal deliberations, noting he had not received orders for a withdrawal.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan offered a similar reassurance this week, telling nervous NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies on Thursday that any potential U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan will be done in a coordinated fashion.

Asked about Trump's concerns about endless wars, Votel said: "We don't want to fight endless wars either. We want to accomplish the mission here."

"I think the strategy that the president has allowed to get put in place here, the South Asia strategy, focused on reconciliation, has been a good one," he said.

Beyond U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the Pentagon relies on thousands of private contractors.

A recent report by the U.S. Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction noted there were an additional 861 Defense Department civilians and 10,698 contractors who were the U.S. citizens.

Diplomats familiar with NATO operations told Reuters they believed the number of contractors was not expected to be reduced along with the U.S. troop withdrawals, and could actually increase.

(Source: Reuters)

## Dubai airport disrupted after reported drone sightings

Flights at Dubai International Airport, one of the busiest in the world, were disrupted on Friday after sightings of a drone flying nearby.

The airport told the AP news agency that it halted flights from 10:13am to 10:45am (local time) over "suspected drone activity".

It said flights were later resumed.

Alleged drone sightings have previously disrupted flights into the airport, which is the base of the long-haul carrier Emirates.

Drones have become a major issue for the aviation industry after more than 1,000 flights were grounded or diverted over three days before Christmas in Britain following reports of drone sightings near London's Gatwick Airport.

Police and airport authorities believed that the drones, which were spotted near the airfield more than 50 times over a 24-hour period, were being flown in a deliberate act to disrupt the airport.

In the UAE, drone owners are required to register with the General Civil Aviation Authority.

Authorities also ban hobbyists from putting cameras or lasers on their drones and flying in certain areas.

(Source: agencies)



## Barcelona extend Valverde contract until 2020



Barcelona have extended coach Ernesto Valverde's contract by another year until the end of the 2019-20 season with an option for one more year, the La Liga champions said on Friday.

"FC Barcelona and Ernesto Valverde, the first team coach, have reached an agreement to extend the contract between the two parties for another season (2019/20) with the option for one more (2020/21)," the club said in a statement on their website.

The announcement is a huge vote of confidence in Valverde, whose future with the club looked uncertain after he said last December that he did not know what he would be doing the following year.

Valverde, 55, succeeded Luis Enrique as coach in 2017, earning the job after sustained success with Athletic Bilbao.

He guided Barca to a La Liga and Copa del Rey double in his debut campaign and almost led them to an unbeaten season in the league, losing only their penultimate game to Levante.

He, however, faced strong criticism for the team's failure in the Champions League, exiting the tournament on away goals to AS Roma, throwing away a 4-1 lead from the first leg by losing 3-0 in the away leg. The collapse in Europe's elite competition, which Barca have not won since 2015 while Real Madrid have lifted the trophy for the last three years, seriously damaged the coach's reputation and cast doubt on his long term future.

Last month, Valverde said his stay at the club would depend on his achievements this season, and there was a feeling he would not be given an extra year if the club did not make serious progress in the Champions League.

(Source: Reuters)

## Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay to present joint 2030 World Cup bid

Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay are to submit a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup, Chile's President Sebastian Pinera announced on Thursday.

Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay had already submitted a joint bid to host the centenary edition of football's most prestigious tournament, but Pinera said on Twitter that those countries' presidents had agreed to Chile's participation in the "joint candidacy".

Argentina and Uruguay originally announced their intention to submit a joint bid in 2017 before Paraguay joined the coalition later that year.

In December last year, Bolivia's football-mad president Evo Morales offered those three countries help in their bid, proposing "two or three departments as sub-seats" for the competition.

Had his offer been accepted, it would have meant the Hernando Siles Reyes stadium in La Paz potentially included as a host venue. Pinera said he had been touting his idea to the presidents of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay for several months.

Uruguay hosted and won the inaugural World Cup in 1930, Chile was the venue in 1962 and Argentina emulated its neighbor's achievement by lifting the trophy on home soil in 1978.

Like Morales, Mauricio Macri of Argentina, Uruguay's Tabare Vazquez and Paraguayan Mario Abdo Benitez are all passionate about football having all been president of a club in their countries.

Pinera is a billionaire businessman who started out as a teacher and has no previous connection to football.

(Source: AFP)

## Second Australian trainer charged over electric shocks to horses

Australian trainer Ben Currie has been charged with several "serious welfare breaches" including giving electric shocks to horses.

It follows compatriot Darren Weir being banned for four years for possessing Taser-type devices, known as "jiggers".

Currie is accused of using a jigger on two occasions and unauthorised "shockwave" treatments.

He is also charged with failing to report bleeding horses to stewards and race-day treatment breaches.

Currie, who trains at Toowoomba, 80 miles west of Brisbane, is one of Queensland's leading trainers.

Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner Ross Barnett said an investigation into him began on 7 April last year.

Jiggers can cause horses to run faster in conjunction with a jockey using their whip.

"The very serious nature of the animal welfare allegations that have surfaced as a result of this investigation have left us with no choice but to act now in the interests of the Queensland racing industry," Mr Barnett said.

Currie has been called to a stewards' inquiry on Monday where he will be asked to give reasons why he should not be suspended.

Barnett said the latest allegations were in addition to the 28 alleged rule breaches which stewards issued to Currie in July last year and four alleged illegal substance breaches issued in November and December.

Currie has continued to train horses in Queensland. Inquiries into the earlier matters are delayed until the outcome of a Supreme Court hearing on 22 February.

(Source: BBC)

# Messi backing Pique in new Davis Cup venture



said: "I think people who use this name, it is because they didn't understand the change of the competition and why we are doing this. I think we have to prove that they are wrong."

"Obviously I will not be the one organizing the competition and we will not be changing any laws of tennis. What we are trying to do is helping the ITF (International Tennis Federation) create a much better event."

■ **Could men and women play in one event?**

The Davis Cup, which was founded in

1900, is one of the world's largest international team competitions with 132 nations taking part in 2018.

Sixteen nations previously competed in the World Group in a straight knockout, with one of the nations hosting the tie.

An increasing number of top players have skipped matches in recent years to ease their schedule.

There may be more change coming with Pique also suggesting the Davis Cup and women's Fed Cup finals could become a combined

event "in the close future".

"For sure, it's an option that can be a reality," he said.

"It's something we were discussing (with the ATP) in November and they were open to hearing about it."

The Finals are likely to move to Indian Wells in California from 2021, and a switch to April is also being considered.

Several players, including Alexander Zverev and Tomas Berdych, have criticized the new-look Davis Cup's November staging but Pique is confident he can win them over.

"I'm positive about it. It will be very difficult to convince everyone the first year, but our idea is that this is a long way to go," he said.

"We understand that we are new in this tennis world, and we want to respect everyone and how the calendar is structured right now."

"We don't want to have any conflict whatsoever with any other part of tennis. We are proud that we are in November. We know that the players will be very tired. We pray that they will be fit."

Further conflicts could arise with the new ATP Cup event set to take place in January 2020. World number one Novak Djokovic said in November that he thought two rival team events within six weeks would not be "good for the sport".

The Federer-backed Laver Cup will also take place again this September.

(Source: BBC)

## Ferrari unveil new Formula One car for new era



Ferrari turned a page on their recent past on Friday as they unveiled the Formula One car designed to end an era of Mercedes domination and shatter Lewis Hamilton's dreams of a sixth championship this season.

The sport's oldest and most successful team, who last won a title more than a decade ago and finished runners-up last year, presented the SF90 with plenty of fanfare at their Maranello factory.

"I'm looking forward to this year. I think the team is on the right path and hopefully we can continue improving," four times world champion Sebastian Vettel, winner of five races in 2018, assured the audience.

The German has a new team mate in Charles Leclerc, replacing 2007 champion Kimi Raikkonen, and a new principal following the departure of Maurizio Arrivabene and appointment of Mattia Binotto.

"I'm extremely excited to start this new adventure," said Leclerc. "It's a dream since childhood. I've always been looking at the red cars, hoping to be one day in this car, so it's a very emotional day for me."

Ferrari chief executive Louis Camilleri said Raikkonen, now at Alfa Romeo, and Arrivabene would always be part of Ferrari's history but made clear the team was entering a new era.

Noting that Ferrari had enjoyed their best season in 10 years, he said they had still fallen short of their objectives in a setback that was "never easy to swallow."

"I can assure you that we look ahead with strong commitment and determination," he added.

Camilleri said Vettel was as hungry as ever, and Leclerc a youngster with a great future.

He hailed Binotto as a "team player, decisive, talented and determined to make a huge difference at all levels."

"Despite all the obvious pressure that exists, the atmosphere in the team from top to bottom will be one in which serenity will prevail," said Camilleri.

"It is a precondition to a tightly-knit team where creativity, talent and transparency will flourish."

Ferrari were far from serene under Arrivabene, adopting something of a siege mentality with the media often shut out and insiders talking of a climate of fear at Maranello.

Binotto said there were a lot of positives to take from 2018 but the new car was a step up.

"We simply tried to raise the bar, raise the level, tried to be as extreme as we could," he added. "Certainly we tried to push very hard, being innovative. The roll hoop is very narrow and very slim. The bodywork from the back, very slim."

"In terms of engine installation, power unit installation, packaging, a lot of effort has been done and I think the final shape is the result of all these efforts."

(Source: Eurosport)

## North, South Korea eye joint march, teams for Tokyo 2020



North Korea and South Korea want a joint march at the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and have requested to have some unified teams in different sports, the president of the International Olympic Committee said on Friday.

South and North Korean sports and government officials met with the IOC in Lausanne, buoyed by the role the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics played in easing tensions between the two countries, amid initial planning for a joint bid for the 2032 Olympics.

The two nations had marched together at the opening ceremony in Pyeongchang for the first time since the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin. They had also fielded a unified women's ice hockey team.

"We are taking note that both are very much interested in having some joined actions in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 with a joined march and some unified teams in different sports," IOC President Thomas Bach said.

The IOC said the two countries had officially requested to enter joint teams in the qualifying process for four sports — women's basketball, women's hockey, the judo mixed team event and some men's and women's rowing teams.

Among the points of discussion at the Lausanne meeting was also a potential 2032 Summer Olympics joint bid by North and South Korea, and Bach praised them for proceeding with it.

"We think this is a great symbol of the Olympic spirit. It is a great symbol again of the unifying power of the Olympic Games," Bach said.

"Sport will continue to build bridges and demonstrate the unifying power of the Olympic Games. Therefore, we warmly welcome the historic initiative of the two Koreas to put forward a joint Korean candidature for the Olympic Games 2032," he added.

Relations between the nations greatly improved last year, with South Korean President Moon Jae-in meeting his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Un at three different summits.

North Korea has for years pursued nuclear and missile programs in defiance of U.N. sanctions but the neighbours moved to thaw relations in 2018.

"South Korea greatly hopes to jointly host the Olympic Games 2032 with North Korea, and will work to successfully bid for the Games together," Do Jong-hwan, South Korean sports and culture minister said.

North Korean Olympic Committee chief and sports minister Kim Il-guk confirmed Pyongyang's Olympic aspirations.

"The leaders of the two Koreas agreed that they intended to host the Olympic Games in 2032. I am very moved and excited by the prospect of bidding together with South Korea," he said.

The IOC usually awards the Olympics seven years in advance.

(Source: AP)

## Qatar's real estate market faces reality check ahead of World Cup

Qatar's Doha Tower, a spike-tipped cylinder that glows orange at night, won an award when finished in 2012 amid a Gulf-wide real estate boom, but today about half of its 46 floors are empty.

The office tower, now a familiar part of the capital's high-rise skyline, has run foul of what real estate brokers, bankers and analysts say is an oversupplied Qatar property market ahead of the 2022 World Cup that mirrors a real estate downturn in the wider Gulf region after a drop in oil prices.

Qatar has the added challenge of a diplomatic, trade and transport boycott imposed on the Gulf Arab state by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt over allegations that Doha supports Islamist militants, a charge Qatar denies.

The protracted row has made it tough to lure would-be foreign buyers of residential or commercial space.

Residential prices are down about 10 percent from June 2017, when the boycott began, and office prices have fallen by a similar rate, according to analysts and economists. Rents are down 20 percent from three years ago, they say.

"Qatar's property sector has been one of the main casualties from the blockade that was imposed in mid-2017," Jason Tuvey, an economist at Capital Economics, said.

The property downturn has so far not translated into bad loans, as bankers say borrowers holding sluggish real estate assets tend to be among the country's wealthiest.

"They have capacity to withstand the market ... I don't see a major threat," Doha Bank CEO Raghavan Setharaman said, when asked about his view of the real estate market.

A banker at Al-Khalij Commercial Bank said banks like his have been restructuring many property loans in recent months, extending them to 20-year payment periods from 10 in some cases, to keep business moving for developers hit by slow demand.

But with the World Cup edging closer, real estate experts say long-planned projects are now set to flood the market, even as buildings in prime locations, like Doha Tower, sit idle.

"It'll be interesting to see what happens when they (real estate prices) are really put under pressure in a year's time, when a lot of new supply hits the market," Johnny Archer,

Associate Director of DTZ, a Doha-based real estate firm, said.

Tiny but wealthy Qatar, the world's top liquefied natural gas exporter, plans to increase residential space by about 50 percent and office space by 40 percent in the next three years, partly on expected demand from the World Cup, according to a report published last week by real estate company DTZ.

The lion's share of construction underway is for high-end residential towers, white-collar office space, and luxury hotels and shopping malls.

FIFA requires Qatar have at least 60,000 hotel rooms in place for the month-long World Cup tournament, which Qatar estimates will draw about 1.5 million fans - more than half of its roughly 2.6 million population.

Qatar has about 26,500 rooms and will add another 15,000 by 2022, DTZ's report estimated. The rest will be met by rooms aboard cruise ships and in desert camps, according to the local World Cup organising committee. These camps are expected to be bedouin-style accommodation to give visitors a taste of desert life.

(Source: Reuters)



# Sepahan edge Paykan, Tractor Sazi beat Esteghlal

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Sepahan football team defeated Paykan 1-0 to return to top of the Iran Professional League (IPL), while Esteghlal lost to Tractor Sazi 1-0 in Tabriz on Friday.

Amir Ghalenoei's side beat Paykan 1-0 thanks to Siavash Yazdani's goal in the 11th minute at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium.

Sepahan now sit top of the IPL with 38 points, one point ahead of Persepolis.

In Tabriz's Yadegar-e Emam Stadium, Tractor Sazi defeated Esteghlal 1-0 courtesy of a goal from Ashkan Dejagah in the 53rd minute.

Esteghlal made several chances in the last minutes of the match but their strikers failed to find the back of the net.

"I am satisfied with my team's performance but I think Dejagah should have been sent off in the first half for his foul on our player," Esteghlal coach Winfried Schaefer said in the post-match news conference.

"The referee came to me after the final whistle and apologized for his mistake," the German coach added.

Furthermore, struggling Sepidrood were held by Machine Sazi 1-1 in Rasht.

Machine Sazi forward Ehsan Taeidi scored in the 78th minute but Meysam Tohidast canceled the goal in the 90th minute.

On Thursday, Persepolis had defeated Esteghlal Khuzestan 2-0 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium and Padideh were held to a 0-0 draw by Sanat Naft Abadan.



## Will Iran book their World Cup tickets with a win over Japan?



Will Iran keep finally make their FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 qualification official, especially with Hamed Haddadi and Samad Nikkhab Bahrami back on the squad?

### ■ Key matchup:

Iran will likely heavily lean on center Hamed Haddadi to carry the load on both ends of the floor. He has actually been Iran's most efficient player so far, averaging 13.4 points, 9.6 rebounds and 1.2 blocks per game, though he'll have to contend with Japan's naturalized slotman, Nick Fazekas, who has been on a tear, putting up 29.3 points and 12.0 boards per contest. With these two behemoths battling in the paint, it'll be interesting to see which one will be able to carry his team to the all-important W.

### ■ X-factor:

Prior to Bahrami's return, Mohammad Jamshidi and Behnam Yakhchali were carrying the load in terms of Iran's wing production. Bahrami, however, brings a ton of experience and offensive explosiveness, averaging 14.4 points, 6.2 assists and 4.8 rebounds per game. If Bahrami's production approaches those numbers in this game against Japan, Team Melli will be in very good shape to notch their eighth win in the Asian Qualifiers.

### ■ Iran outlook:

Iran have the size, athleticism and explosiveness needed to deal Japan a

crushing defeat, and since coach Mehran Shahintab's wards are coming off a rousing win in Manila, they have all the momentum they need to beat the Akatsuki Five. Team Melli have a really deep well of talent, and it'll be interesting to see if a relatively depleted Japan can match up. Aside from Haddadi and Bahrami, of course, Iran have the aforementioned Jamshidi and Bahrami along with playmaker Sajjad Mashayekhi and frontliners Rouzbeh Arghavan, Mohammad Hassanzadeh and Meisam Mirzaei. Add to that the fact that Iran are playing at home, and they have all the makings of a winner on 21 February.

### ■ Japan outlook:

On the other end of the floor, Japan will be in must-win mode. With 6 wins in 10 games, the Akatsuki Five still aren't sure to make it to the World Cup. They will need at least one win to have the inside track and two victories to put qualification beyond doubt. It's not impossible to spring an upset in Tehran, but it will certainly be very difficult, given how coach Julio Lamas will be without Rui Hachimura and probably without Yuta Watanabe as well. If guys like Makoto Hiejima, Daiki Tanaka, Yudai Baba and Yuki Togashi can step up, though, then anything can happen. Still, they won't be favored to emerge triumphant in this crucial encounter.

(Source: FIBA)

## Iranian basketball players will play with heart: Mehran Shahintab



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran basketball coach Mehran Shahintab says his players are determined to book a place at the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

Team Melli will host Japan and Australia on February 21 and 24 in Tehran's Azadi Hall.

Iran is at solo second spot in Group F with 7 wins against 3 losses. Australia, the group's top team, has already booked its tickets to China, and Iran is aiming to follow suit.

To do so, Team Melli needs to win at least one of its next games at home. They first face Japan before ending their Asian Qualifiers against the Australians. If Iran win at least one game, they'll finish with 8 wins and 4 losses, which will be good enough to get them through to the World Cup.

If Iran lose both of their sixth window games, however, it could potentially place them in a three-way tie with Japan and the Philippines if all of them finish at 7 wins and 5 losses. In that unlikely scenario, there's still a slight chance Iran will slip out of the World Cup race.

Coach Mehran Shahintab's boys have a strong chance to win, though, given how Japan will be without big star Rui Hachimura and the fact that

the Iranians will be playing at home.

Coach Mehran doesn't want to leave anything to chance for the final window, especially with their World Cup berths at stake. He knows his players are motivated, but he also wants to keep pushing them and ensure their passage to the biggest event in international hoops.

"Our players have made a decision to play hard and play with heart," he said. "I think the players are motivated, and I expect they will do their jobs very well. We'll give some more responsibilities to some players, especially the bigs because we will play Japan and Australia."

One guy whom coach Mehran hopes will be able to step up is newcomer Mike Rostampour. The 6ft 8in (2.03m) forward was born in the United States but has finally heeded the call of Team Melli.

He last saw action for Slovakian club BC Prievdza and could see some significant minutes in the final window.

"I feel extremely proud to be an Iranian-American," he said. "Iran is a great country and the people are very proud. Win or lose, Iranian fans always show more love and support to their teams than any other country in the world."

(Source: FIBA)

## Dashti, Mazaheri among Ones to Watch at ACL West Asia play-offs

Saipa midfielder Ali Dashti and Zob Ahan goalkeeper Rashid Mazaheri are among the eight players to watch at the 2019 AFC Champions League West Asia play-offs.

Iran's Saipa returns to the AFC Champions League 12 years since their historic debut campaign that saw the team reach the quarter-finals under the management of Iran legend Ali Daei.

One of the key men behind its highest league finish in over a decade is versatile midfielder Ali Dashti. The 25-year-old brings flair and agility to the Tehran-based side and his ability to exploit spaces down either flank has seen him become ever more important to Saipa's attacking game.

Dashti joined Saipa in the summer of 2018 after a breakthrough season with Pars Jonoubi Jam in the second division and was key to the Iranian side as it brushed aside India's Minerva Punjab to progress to the play-off stage of the 2019 AFC Champions League where it will



face Qatar's Al Rayyan.

And Mazaheri, who is entering his fifth year at the club,

has helped Zob Ahan reach the AFC Champions League Round of 16 twice, in 2016 and 2018.

He helped the Isfahan-based football team beat Kuwait SC on Tuesday.

Testament to the 29-year-old's abilities is his selection by coach Carlos Queiroz to be a part of the Team Melli squad in the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Competition from Alireza Beiranvand and Amir Abedzadeh meant Mazaheri has only won three caps so far, although he has constantly been part of the national team setup.

The 192-cm-tall custodian narrowly missed out on an Asian Games medal, finishing fourth in the 2010 edition as Iran lost to Korea Republic 4-3 in the third-place decider. Mazaheri's skills will be crucial for Zob Ahan as the team attempts to stop fellow Iranian international Mehdi Taremi and his Al Gharafa teammates.

(Source: the-afc)

## Playing football as a woman in Iran is an achievement in itself: Maryam Azmoun

Iran's women's national football team head coach Maryam Azmoun says situations are definitely improving but there's still a lot to be done.

Iran recently took part at the four-nation Gold Cup in India, where Team Melli suffered three defeats against India, Myanmar and Nepal.

"Playing football as a woman in Iran is in itself an achievement. Situations are definitely improving but there's still a lot to be done to take women's football to somewhere close to where our men's football is," said Azmoun.

"They (men) are playing at the top level professionally for long. Some even play outside the country, in many European leagues, so they are up there. But for women, even though we have

a senior football league we don't have any age-group domestic league. So it's really difficult to scout players for the national side. And sometimes even the senior league is stopped because of many issues. So we are happy to be where we are now (with FIFA ranking of 60)."

No talk about Iranian women's football is complete without the mention of American-born-Iranian Katayoun Khosrowyar, the current under-19 women's coach.

Azmoun explained the importance of Kat (as they call her in Iran) in changing the fate of the women's game.

"We owe a lot to Kat, actually she is the person mostly responsible for wherever we are and whatever we

have right now. She has acted like a catalyst to women's football in Iran. She is young (barely in her early 30s), had the education and came to Iran for the love of motherland. She played for the country first and then took up the cause of women's football. She led the movement to overturn FIFA's ban on hijab and now coaches the U-19 side," Azmoun declared.

"Kat (only woman from the middle-east to have a FIFA A license) shares her knowledge with us constantly and helps all the age group teams, be it U-14, U-16 or the senior side. For sure our women's football wouldn't have been the same without Kat," Maryam signed off.

(Source: Times of India)



## Branko Ivankovic to be named Team Melli coach?

**PLDC** — Persepolis current coach Branko Ivankovic will reportedly be named as new head coach of Iran national football team.

Team Melli is without coach after Carlos Queiroz parted company with Iran at the end of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

Local media reports suggest that, ex-Iran captain Javad Nekounam will be named as Team Melli interim coach until June. Nekounam, who has worked at Iranian football clubs Khooneh Be Khooneh and Nassaji, has good relationship with Team Melli players.

Ivankovic, will reportedly take charge of Iran football team at the end of the Iran Pro League current season and Nekounam will work as his assistant.

Nekounam has already worked with Ivankovic in Team Melli, when Neku was a member of Iran national football team in the 2006 World Cup.

## Iran, Asian Ski Federation discuss 2020 junior Championship

**IRNA** — Asian Ski Federation president has held talks with Iranian ski authorities in a bid to coordinate efforts to hold an Asian Alpine Ski Championship in Iran.

Aki Murasato met with Abdi Eftekhari, president of the Iranian Ski Federation, in Tehran on Wednesday.

The two sides discussed preparations for Iran to host the 29th Junior Asian Alpine Ski Championships in 2020.

Among other topics, the officials also touched upon holding snowboard ski competitions in the country.

The Iranian Ski Federation president also informed the Japanese official about the federation's efforts to discover young ski talents.

Abdi Eftekhari stressed the need that Iranian skiers hold some preparatory practices in South Korea before the 28th Children Asian Alpine Ski Championships in that country.

## Napoli's Hamsik completes Dalian move

Napoli captain Marek Hamsik has reportedly sealed his move to Chinese Super League (CSL) club Dalian Yifang, the Serie A side's lawyer told Italian radio on Wednesday.

"Hamsik is a Italian player from this evening," Napoli lawyer Mattia Grassani said.

The Slovakian, who is currently in the city where he was born, Banska Bystrica, arrived in China PR on Friday.

Hamsik, 31, capped 111 times for Slovakia, has played for Napoli since 2007.

He scored 121 goals in 520 appearances and last season overtook legend Diego Maradona (115) as the club's record goalscorer.

Hamsik helped the club win two Coppa Italia titles, in 2012 and 2014, and the 2014 Supercoppa Italiana.

The 2019 CSL season kicks off on March 1.

(Source: AFP)

## Friendly: Iran basketball team beat Jordan

**TASNIM** — Iran national basketball team defeated Jordan in a friendly match on Thursday.

In the match held in Tehran's Azadi Hall, Mehran Shahintab's team defeated Jordan 99-54.

Team melli had defeated the west Asian team 117-96 on Tuesday as part of preparation for the final Asian Qualifiers window.

Standing in Iran's way in the final Asian Qualifiers window are Japan and Australia.

Team Melli will face Japan on February 21 and then finish its Asian Qualifiers campaign against Australia on February 24.

## Vietnam's Cong Phuong joins Incheon

Vietnamese forward Nguyen Cong Phuong has joined Korea Republic club Incheon United on loan.

The K League 1 club said Cong Phuong agreed to a one-year loan deal and will join Incheon from Vietnamese side Hoang Anh Gia Lai.



Cong Phuong has been one of the key players for the Vietnamese national football team led by head coach Park Hang-seo.

The 24-year-old helped Vietnam win the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF) Cup and reach the quarter-finals at the recent AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019. He scored two goals in five matches at the AFC Asian Cup.

Cong Phuong will be the second Vietnamese to play in the K League 1 after Luong Xuan Truong, who had loan stints with Incheon and Gangwon FC from 2016 to 2017.

Incheon said their head coach, Jorn Andersen, has been following Cong Phuong since their practice match with the Vietnamese national football team in October. After Cong Phuong played well at the AFC Asian Cup, Andersen requested Incheon to sign him.

"I'm happy and feel proud to join the K League 1," Cong Phuong said. "I already heard from Truong that the level of the K League is very high. I will do my best to help Incheon."

Incheon finished ninth in the 12-team K League 1 last year. The 2019 season kicks off on March 1.

(Source: Yonhap)



INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari  
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895  
editor@tehrantimes.com  
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000  
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450  
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807  
» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.  
Tel: 88911433  
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
» Printed at: Hamshahri No. 3 - ISSN: 1017-94

Tehrantimes79

Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
Zip Code: 1599814713



## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Fortitude and forbearance are the twins created by lofty endeavor.

Imam Ali (AS)

## WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

### Multimedia

■ An exhibition of paintings by Azarakhsh Farahani and video arts by Paniz Rafeimehr is underway at Ariana Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until February 26 at the gallery located at 9 Fereshteh St., off East Maryam St., in the Elahieh neighborhood.

■ Artworks created in various media by Hani Najm, Maryam Farhang, Shahriar Sirus, Parisa Pegah, Morteza Asadi, Vahid Amin and dozens of other artists are on view in an exhibition at Artland Gallery. The exhibit will run until April 5 at the gallery located at 4 Safa Alley, Kachui St. in the Evin neighborhood.

### Painting

■ Saye Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Zoheir Hossein-Javaheri.

The exhibit entitled "Galaxy of Life, Death and Birth" will run until February 20 at the gallery located at No. 21, 13th Alley, Sanai St. off Karim Khan Ave.

■ Paintings by Behruz Boluri are currently on display in an exhibition at Idea Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until February 21 at the gallery that can be found at No. 26, 18th Alley, Sanai St., off Karim Khan Ave.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Mohsen Iranmanesh is currently underway at Rezaian Gallery.

The exhibit will run until February 26 at the gallery located at 14 Taban St., Afria Ave.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Shadi Mahmudzadeh is underway at Negar Gallery.

The exhibit named "Fifteen Nights" runs until February 20 at the gallery, which can be found at 33 Delaram Alley, Roshanai St. in the Qeitarieh neighborhood.

■ A collection of paintings by Mohsen Naraqi is on display in an exhibition at Sherveh Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Untold" runs until February 20 at the gallery located at 9 Khojasteh Alley, Daemi St. off Fatemi St.

■ Elaheh Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Nazanin Bakhshandeh.

The exhibition will run until February 25 at the gallery located at 47 Golfam St., off Afria Ave.

### Sculpture

■ Golestan Gallery is hosting an exhibition of sculptures by Farnaz Behzadi.

The exhibit will continue until February 20 at the gallery located at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.

### Photo

■ Photos by Puya Shahjani are on display in an exhibition at Negah Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Sajedah" will run until February 27 at the gallery located at 64 Ghaffari St., Jam St., Motahhari Ave.

■ A collection by a number of photographers, including Bita Ahmadzadeh, Kamyar Majid, Elaheh Namdar, Sina Jahanpur, Fatemeh Pezeshki and Somayyeh Akbari, is on display in an exhibition at Dena Gallery.

The exhibition will run until February 20 at the gallery that can be found at 4 Sussan Alley off Qarani St.

# Danish Athelas takes Carl Nielsen's "Beautiful Square" to Fajr

**A R T TEHRAN** — "A d e s k Beautiful Square in Isfahan", Danish composer Carl Nielsen's composition inspired by Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Square, was performed by Danish ensemble Athelas at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Thursday during the 34th Fajr Music Festival.

Before the performance, Athelas artistic director Jesper Lützhøft said that the piece features the square's beauty, hustle and bustle, and its silence.

The ensemble also performed pieces by Iranian composers Shahin Farhat, Hormoz Farhat and Amir-Mahyar Tafreshipur, and French composer Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc.

Bahareh Safai, Asu Kuhzadi and Nazanin Ahmadzadeh were the three Iranian musicians who accompanied the ensemble in its first performance. The group also gave a second performance on Friday.

The 34th Fajr Music Festival opened on Wednesday and will run until February 19.

Also on Thursday, the Orchestra of National Instruments conducted by Ali-Akbar Qorbani and vocalist Vahid Taaj dedicated one of their performances to Iranian music icon Mohammadreza Shajarian who is battling kidney cancer.

The orchestra also observed a moment of silence in remembrance of the 27 Iranian border guards who were killed on a suicide attack in southeastern Iran on Wednesday.

Also on the opening night on



Danish ensemble Athelas performs during the 34th Fajr Music Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 14, 2019. (Honaronline/Mojtaba Arabzadeh)

Wednesday, Vahdat Hall hosted several concerts including a performance by

the Amael Trio from Slovenia.

They performed compositions by

Shahin Farhat and German composer Johannes Brahms.

## Iranian movies line up for Athens Animfest

**A R T TEHRAN** — Thirteen d e s k Iranian short movies will compete in the Athens Animfest, which will take place in the Greek capital from March 14 to 17.

"Am I a Wolf?" by Amir-Hushang Moein is a highlight of the Iranian lineup.

The animation is about a group of students that is performing a play called "The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats". Meanwhile, the child, who is playing the role of the wolf and is doomed to be defeated, feels lonely and irritated. He takes his role very seriously.

Another highlight is "Bystander" by Sheida Kashi. The movie tells the story of an old man who is living with a window in front of his eyes. He sees a cold, black and white and fragile world from behind the window. But the window was not always there when he was a young active participant in a big revolution.

"Flight 655" by Hamid Jamali about the tragedy of the downing by the U.S. of Iran



"Mr. Deer" by Mojtaba Musavi.

Air Flight 655 in 1988 will also go on screen at the festival.

Mojtaba Musavi's acclaimed movie "Mr. Deer" is also another contender for the Grand Prix Athena. The story of the short movie is set in a modern but ruined subway in an unknown time. People in this society have animal faces, they have forgotten humanity and ethics, and they do not avoid sins. Meanwhile, someone with a deer face is trying to reform the society.

"Mother" by Mohammad Qanefard, "Pet Man" by Marzieh Abrarpaydar, "Starvation" by Zahra Rostampur, "Tangle" by Maliheh Gholamzadeh and "The Damn Junk" by Amir-puya Afzalipur and Ruhollah Saadatmand will also compete in the event.

The lineup also includes "The Fox" by Sadeq Javadi Nikjeh, "The Last Fish" by Mahmud Saemin, "The Stranger and the Wind" by Hamed and Hamidreza Ahmadi, and "Till the Following Morning" by Makan Mansurian.

## Italian ambassador donates sculpture to Music Museum of Iran

**A R T TEHRAN** — Italian Ambassador Mauro d e s k Conciatori donated an artwork made by Iranian sculptor Bijan Basiri to the Music Museum of Iran in Tehran on Thursday.

The sculpture is from Basiri's series "Hermes" that he previously had presented to the Embassy of Italy, the Persian service of MNA reported on Friday.

The sculptures in the series have been made of metal, lava and graphite between 1994 and 2015. The sculptures, each resembling the heads of monsters and animals like dinosaurs, have been fixed on 2-meter-high metal poles.

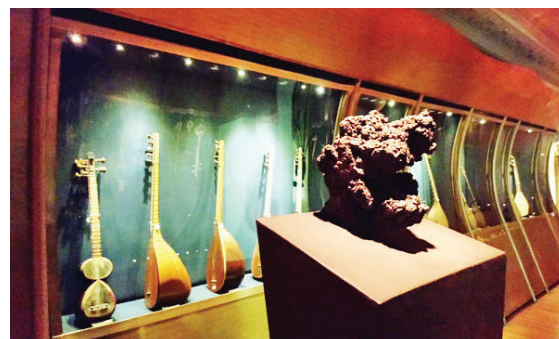
Speaking at the unveiling ceremony of the sculpture,

Conciatori called the museum the best location to preserve the artwork, and said that the sculpture was born from within the heart of history and can draw the attention of every visitor.

He said that he believes what master Basiri has made is both audio and visual, and when it is mixed with music, it can make a powerful impact on the mind of every visitor.

The managing director of the museum, Ali Moradkhani, also expressed his happiness over this cultural act and praised Conciatori for his cultural activities in Iran.

"I hope the museum would be hosting more works by master Basiri in the future," Moradkhani added.



This picture shows a sculpture from Iranian artist Bijan Basiri's series "Hermes" donated by Italian Ambassador Mauro Conciatori to the Music Museum of Iran in Tehran on February 14, 2019. (MNA)

## Fajr festival tells story of "White Nights" director's failure to stage in Saint Petersburg

**A R T TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k director Ali-Asghar Dashti recounted on Thursday the story of his failure to direct a stage adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "White Nights" at a theater festival in Saint Petersburg, Russia in a play during the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival.

Veteran actor and director Atila Pesyani starred as Mikhail Gorbachev, the seventh and last leader of the Soviet



Atila Pesyani (L) and Ali-Asghar Dashti act in a scene from "The Above-Named Person".

Union, in the play titled "The Above-Named Person".

Negar Javaherian and Pantea Panahiha are the other main members of the cast for the play that was performed at the Samandarian Hall of the Iranshahr Theater Complex.

The story of the play is set during a theater festival in Saint Petersburg, where a director plans to stage an open-air performance of "White Nights" based

on an agreement with the festival's president. However, he fails to stage the play due to a financial problem. During his sojourn in the Russian city, he is engaged in a dialogue with Mikhail Gorbachev during a meeting with the seventh and last leader of the Soviet Union.

The play is an entry to the international competition of the Fajr festival, which will run in Tehran until February 23.

## Chinese sci-fi movie "The Wandering Earth" pulls in \$440 million in 10 days

**BEIJING (Reuters)** — China's first science fiction blockbuster, "The Wandering Earth", has raked in 3 billion yuan (\$443 million) in ticket sales in less than 10 days, putting it on track to become the country's highest-grossing film.

Based on a story by author Liu Cixin, the movie about a group of Chinese astronauts trying to save the world from the orbit of an unstable sun premiered on Feb. 5, the first day of the Lunar New Year holiday.

"It's a genre that most Chinese people have never seen, and it really touched people," said Wu Jian, a Beijing-based film analyst with Alibaba Pictures, adding that the film drew families into cinemas during the traditional reunion period.

Figures posted on Thursday on the film's official account on China's Twitter-like Weibo show the sales were reached in 9 days and 16 hours, which analysts and media said broke



A poster of Chinese film "The Wandering Earth" is pictured at a cinema in Zhengzhou, Henan province, China February 11, 2019. (Reuters/Stringer)

a record of 10 days and 15 hours set by "Wolf Warrior 2".

The patriotic Rambo-style "Wolf Warrior 2" is China's highest-grossing movie, hitting 5.7 billion yuan in box office sales last year.

Analysts forecast ticket sales of "The Wandering Earth" could hit 5 billion yuan or more, with Wu saying it had grabbed eyeballs from comedies such as Ning Hao's "Crazy Alien", Stephen Chow's "The New King of Comedy", and Han Han's "Pegasus".

The film also figured in China's foreign ministry briefing this week.

"I know the hottest movie now is 'The Wandering Earth'. I don't know if you have watched or not, I'd recommend it," spokeswoman Hua Chunying said, while replying to a query about a film whose premiere was canceled.