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A view of the third phase of the Persian Gulf Star Refinery in Bandar Abbas

Three linked to terror act in southeast Iran arrested

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps released a statement on Monday announcing that three terrorists linked to the last week's deadly attack near Iran's border with Pakistan have been arrested. The statement added that explosives and guns were seized from the arrested militants. "With the grace of God and endeavors of the IRGC ground forces and the IRGC Quds Force, a number of houses

where the terrorists were deployed were identified and they were arrested," the statement said. Late on Wednesday, a car laden with explosives hit a bus of soldiers on Zahedan-Khash road in the border province of Sistan-Balouchestan killing 27 and injuring the remaining 13. Jaish al-Adl group (soldiers of justice), which is based in Pakistan, has taken responsibility for the attack.

Tehran criticizes EU delay in registering INSTEX

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran has criticized the European Union (EU) for its delay in registering INSTEX, a financial channel for trade with Iran in the face of U.S. sanctions. So far Europe has not been very successful in registering INSTEX and this issue has progressed very slowly, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday during his

bi-weekly press conference. He acknowledged that the EU has taken the first step to open up the financial channel, but emphasized that Europe needs to fully implement INSTEX. "They cannot expect Iran to completely fulfil its commitments in these circumstances," he said. "We have repeatedly emphasized that our patience is limited." →2

Meybod celebrates becoming world city for Zilou

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — On Monday, Meybod celebrated becoming a world city for Zilou, a traditional type of floor covering commonly woven across the central Iranian city and its outskirts. The ceremony was attended by Ghada Hijavi, the head of World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region, Ali-Asghar Mounesan, the director of the Cultural Heritage,

Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, as well as clusters of regional officials, artisans and international guests, CHTN reported. The oasis city won the WCC-APR status last October after a delegation of international experts probed the in-house expertise which has been passed down generations to generations. →10

'Timetable for U.S. Afghanistan exit to be decided on Feb. 25'

TEHRAN (MNA) — A former Taliban foreign ministry official, Vahid Mojdeh, told MNA that the timetable for the exit of American troops from Afghanistan will be presented in the next meeting of Taliban and U.S. representatives. Vahid Mojdeh, an expert on Afghanistan's political issues and a former Taliban deputy foreign minister, said in an exclusive interview with Mehr that negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S. have had some achievements which had raised hopes for the exit of American troops from Afghanistan. He maintained that in the next meeting between representatives from the Taliban and the U.S., which is scheduled for February 25, the



two sides will discuss the ways for the exit of American troops from Afghanistan. The Americans have requested that the Tal-

iban ignore the reports in some news outlets that the U.S. is reluctant to leave Afghanistan, he said. They said they are determined to exit Afghanistan, he added. Mojdeh then maintained that the various parties at the Moscow meeting all agreed on the fact that the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan endangers peace in Afghanistan, and the forces must leave the country. He also addressed the rumors about the establishment of a Taliban political office in Iran, saying "the Taliban wanted to establish a political office in Qatar in order to hold negotiations there. There has been no request from the Taliban to establish the office in any other country."

Kashmir attack: Kashmiri students, traders face backlash from Hindu extremists

Syed Zafar Mehdi **TEHRAN** — In the aftermath of the deadly attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir last week, Kashmir Muslims working and studying in different Indian cities are facing a backlash from Hindu extremists. There have been several reports since Thursday pertaining to threats faced by Kashmiri Muslims in Indian states like Haryana, Uttarakhand,

Uttaranchal, New Delhi and West Bengal etc. At least 44 members of India's central reserve police force (CRPF) were killed on Wednesday when a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden car through a convoy of 77 military vehicles in south Kashmir's Pulwama district. The responsibility for the attack was claimed by Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), a militant outfit based in Pakistan, and carried out by a 22-year-

old militant from south Kashmir. The attack drew widespread condemnations cutting across the political lines. Even separatist leaders in Indian-controlled Kashmir denounced the attack. Following the attack, reports of Kashmiris threatened and harassed by Hindu extremists in different Indian cities made it to newspapers, creating a sense of panic among Kashmiris everywhere. →6

New report reveals Saudi minister Jubeir's links with Mossad

A prominent American website has revealed secret links between Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir and Israel's spy agency Mossad that began in the nineties.

Jemma Buckley said in an article on The Odyssey Online that she had begun to collect information about Jubeir's relations with Mossad. She described it as "the most controversial

intelligence news scoop of the past 10 years," coming to light after former Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni rebuked Mossad for Jubeir's dismissal. →13



ARTICLE
Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Europe has not taken action to keep JCPOA

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini recently announced that if there were no European efforts, the nuclear deal with Iran would be eliminated! It is claimed that, basically, the European Union has not yet taken a step towards maintaining a nuclear deal with Iran.

The fact is that the European Union is blamed for a nuclear deal with Iran. Donald Trump stepped at the White House in 2017. Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, was the first European official to travel to Washington to meet with the new president of the United States. During this visit, Trump informed Theresa May mind of his decision on "changing the nuclear deal".

He emphasized that if the nuclear deal is not reviewed and redefined, the United States will no more remain as a part of it. It was during this visit and among American senators that Theresa May called the JCPOA a "controversial deal" for the first time since 2015. In this way, and indirectly, May announced her company with the United States for changing the JCPOA.

Afterwards, it was time for the French President, Emmanuel Macron to take part in the joint game of London and Washington. In July 2017, Macron assured Trump that he would do his best to include Iran's missile capability in the context of the nuclear deal, and thus limit the regional power of Iran.

But Macron never imagined that he had practically turned to Trump's piece in his confrontation with Iran. In September, 2017, and during the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, British and French officials were urged by the United States to attract Germany's positive stance to participate in the "West's joint effort to change the JCPOA." Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, surrendered to her Western counterparts much earlier than expected.

As a result, by mid-2017, talks between American and European diplomats on changing the nuclear deal entered a new phase. A deal in which diplomats from the United States, Germany, France, and Britain, worked on a common goal called "complementary" or "secondary" agreement aimed at achieving Trump's four demands. →7



REPORT
Syed Zafar Mehdi
Journalist
from New Delhi

Iran, India demand answers and action from Pakistan

At a time when Pakistan is hosting the 'butcher of Riyadh', the tornado of anger and outrage has engulfed its neighborhood over two recent incidents of terror, both linked to Pakistan.

Pakistan is facing serious accusations of providing sanctuary to terrorist outfits that target its neighbors. Last week, two deadly bombings rocked India and Iran, claiming more than 70 lives in total.

Both attacks bore striking similarity, had similar targets and were choreographed in a same manner, much to the astonishment of security and intelligence agencies in both the countries.

While India has been more explicit in its diplomatic and military retaliation, Iran issued a veiled threat to the civil and military establishment in Islamabad to take immediate and appropriate action against the perpetrators of the attack in southeastern Sistan-Balochistan province, which killed at least 27 members of the revolutionary corps (IRGC).

While the attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir, which killed at least 44 members of India's central reserve police force (CRPF), was claimed by Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), the responsibility for attack in Sistan-Balochistan was claimed by Jaish ul Adl. Both these militant organizations are based in Pakistan.

Jaish e Mohammad released a video that appeared to show the attacker, a 22-year-old recruit from south Kashmir, condemning India for atrocities against the people of Kashmir and vowing revenge.

Indian military has been accused of using excessive force to crush the freedom movement in the disputed region, often leading to civilian casualties. Thousands of young men and women have been killed and blinded in recent years due to lethal and non-lethal weapons used by Indian forces in Kashmir.

Pakistan has always extended its diplomatic and military support to the independence movement in Indian-controlled Kashmir. However, experts say Pakistan has its own political and strategic interests. →6



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Fajr Festival of Fashion and Costume underway

The 8th edition of Fajr Festival of Fashion and Costume is underway in Boostan Park, Tehran.

The festival aims at promoting the culture of clothing based on Iranian-Islamic lifestyle.

With a variety of tribal cultures Iran enjoys outstanding capacity in fashion and costume, said Vice President for Women's and Family Affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar, at the opening ceremony of the festival.

The 7-day event will wrap up on February 21.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Larijani in China to boost bilateral relations

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Parliament Speaker Ali d e s k Larijani said on Monday his trip to China is aimed to boost political, cultural, scientific and economic relations.

Larijani made the remarks before departing Tehran for Beijing, as head of a high ranking delegation, upon the invitation of Li Zhanshu, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

Iran and China, as two countries with ancient civilizations, have always enjoyed close relations, he said.

"There have been economic and parliamentary cooperation between the two countries in recent years," Larijani said, adding that the two sides held "good talks" about cooperation during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Iran.



Iran to build 6,500-ton destroyer

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Chief of the Iranian Defense d e s k Ministry's Marine Industries Organization said on Sunday that construction of a heavy destroyer weighing 6,500 tons is on the agenda.

Speaking to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari highlighted Iran's progress in manufacturing subsurface vessels, saying the Islamic Republic is among the world's top 11 countries in terms of building submarines, Tasnim reported.

The remarks came after a new domestically made submarine dubbed Fateh (Conqueror) joined the Iranian Navy's fleet on Sunday. The submarine submerged at a ceremony in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas. President Hassan Rouhani and other senior officials and commanders were present at the ceremony.



MP: Officials won't accept EU conditions for implementing INSTEX

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities will in d e s k no way accept the Europeans' conditions for implementing INSTEX, a European financial channel for trade with Iran, a lawmaker has said.

Abolfazl Hassan-Beigi, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, was referring to the European Council's recent statement which asked Iran to join the FATF before INSTEX takes force.

Hassan-Beigi also said Iranian officials should not be optimistic about the European Union's promises. "Instead, we should look for the route to progress within the country,"

"European countries have always been under the Americans' domination and do have a will of their own," he asserted, Tasnim reported.



Envoy lauds historic Iran-Japan ties

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian ambassador to Tokyo d e s k Morteza Rahmani-Movahed has lauded Iran's historical relations with Japan, saying the two nations' ties date back to a thousand years ago.

He made the remarks during a meeting with Tokyo's Governor Yuriko Koike, ILNA reported on Monday.

"Fortunately, we are witnessing an expansion of relations, increased cooperation and [expression of] interest by the two countries' people," Rahmani-Movahed said.

He also offered his congratulations to both countries on the 90th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations.



5 arrested for disrupting forex market

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian intelligence forces d e s k have arrested 5 members of a group for disrupting the foreign currency market.

The individuals were arrested by forces of Mazandaran Province's intelligence office, Mehr reported.

Disrupting economy, illegal foreign currency trading, illegal acquisition of capital, forgery and presenting false documents are among the charges against the individuals.

Intelligence forces also confiscated 21 billion rials (around \$500,000) from them and blocked the transfer of 20 million euros.



Austrian envoy praises Iran's scientific activities

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Austrian ambassador d e s k to Tehran said on Sunday that since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) went into force, Iran's activities in scientific research programs at international and European levels have increased.

Stefan Schulz made the remarks at a conference of universities' vice presidents and directors, according to IRNA.

Schulz added, "Even the horizon 2020 is clear with the present trend in the international arena for Iran. After the JCPOA, the Iran-Austria ministries signed many partnership agreements. Also, dozens of scholarships were granted to Iranian and Austrian students to study at the universities of the two countries."

He further said in 2017, 1,600 Iranian students studied in Austria.

Warsaw meeting won't bear results: Ayatollah Khamenei

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The recent d e s k anti-Iran summit pushed by the U.S. and hosted by Poland won't bear the results that the organizers expected, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Monday.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a Tuesday address to thousands of people from East Azerbaijan Province on the occasion of the anniversary of the uprising of Tabrizis, which started on February 18, 1978.

Ayatollah Khamenei expressed thanks and admiration for the Iranian nation for their massive participation in the rallies marking the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on February 11.

"My gratitude to the people as expressed in the statement is far less than what our nation deserves. The nation realized a great action on Bahman 22nd," khamenei.ir quoted the Leader as saying.

The Leader made a reference to a recent statement he had issued regarding the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution, saying, "Toward the end of the statement, I thanked the people for their participation in the Bahman 22nd rally; however, this was the least I could offer to the people of Iran."

The Leader described the huge turnout in the rallies as an asset that repels enemies' harms.

"The Iranian nation manifested a great action on Bahman 22nd. According to the reports, nearly in all parts of the country, the number of the participants had risen [compared to previous years]. Of course, the enemies seek to disregard that millions of people took to the streets; yet they understand and everyone knows that a nation who is so actively present in the scene cannot be harmed by the enemy."

The Leader also paid homage to the soldiers of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps who lost their lives in a terrorist attack last week, praising the efforts by the corps in protecting the borders.

"May God's peace be upon the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and all



"Do not be deceived by the enemy's smile; the Europeans are plotting against us. I am not going to tell you what to do, but do not bring about troubles for the country in the name of working for it."

those who work to safeguard the country's security. The martyrdom of the young members of the IRGC reminds us at what expense we are provided with security. Those who take advantage of the security and then bite the hands that feed them should be alerted."

He went on to criticize those who ignore the great sacrifices made by various organs of the government to provide security and stability to the nation. "Some individuals who benefit from the country's security, advance their work in sports and other fields, yet, they bite the hands that feed them, should learn that this is the price and the manner in which security is provided. We should not forget how security is provided."

Ayatollah Khamenei prayed for the departed IRGC members and thanked the people who took part in their funeral procession. "The February 11 rally—with such magnificence—was held in security. May God's peace be upon them and upon the martyr-raising people of Isfahan [where the martyrs came from] who engaged in a magnificent funeral."

The Leader also warned Iranian officials of Europe's dishonest gestures, saying, "Do not be deceived by the enemy's smile; the Europeans are plotting against us. I am not going to tell you what to do, but do not bring about troubles for the country in the name of working for it."

Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that the

Tehran criticizes EU delay in registering INSTEX

1 → Qassemi also urged Europe to put more efforts in countering U.S. unilateralism. "We hope they will be able to perform their intrinsic duty and historic role."

Asked about the Foreign Ministry's stance with regard to Iran's accession to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the spokesman said ratification of the FATF-related bills is "beneficial to the country, people and economy."

"We hope the Expediency Council, which is supposed to make a decision on this issue, has a proper assessment and quickly ratifies whatever is expedient for the people and country," he stated.

■ 'Pakistan given warnings on terrorists'

Commenting on a recent attack by the Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group, which is based in Pakistan, Qassemi said Iran has given Pakistan the "necessary warnings" to take immediate actions to prevent terrorist groups based in that country from freely crossing into Iran and conducting attacks.

"It is not tolerable for us that the government and the army of Pakistan cannot prevent such acts of sabotage and terror from inside their soil against Iran," he said.

On Wednesday, an explosives-laden car rammed into a bus carrying members of the Islamic Revolution Guards

Corps (IRGC) on a road in Sistan-Baluchestan Province, killing and injuring dozens of people.

Qassemi said "We hope this matter can be resolved appropriately through strengthened determination."

Qassemi declined to comment on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Pakistan, saying "foreign relations of our neighbors is their own business and we do not interfere in that."

He then advised "our friends" to beware of some misdeeds by certain countries aimed at impacting their relations with Iran.

Iran's military chief: Pakistan has started operations against terrorists

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Major d e s k General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, the Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, said on Monday that Pakistan has started operations against terrorists' hideouts since Sunday.

However, he said, "We have announced that if you are not able to counter [terrorists], we will take action and avenge the blood of our dear ones."

Late on Wednesday, a car laden with explosives hit a bus of soldiers on Zahedan-Khash road in the border province of Sistan-Baluchestan killing 27 and injuring the remaining 13.

Terrorists usually use Pakistan's soil as a safe haven to carry out attacks inside Iran.

Iran has always been complaining that Pakistan fails to fully guard its borders with Iran. Pakistan has rejected repeated calls by Iran for joint operations against

terrorists inside Pakistan.

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the Pakistani government should account for the terrorist attack. Larijani said Pakistan "cannot act irresponsibly", noting that "such behavior will severely damage the level of cooperation" between the neighboring countries.

Speaking at an event in Hormozgan province on Sunday, President Hassan Rouhani also threatened revenge against terrorists, saying he "regrets" the "wrong policies" of Iran's neighbors, without mentioning Pakistan.

On Sunday, Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned Riffat Masood, the Pakistani ambassador to Tehran, over the terrorist attack.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said Iran "explicitly conveyed" to

Ambassador Masoud that Tehran expects Islamabad and its military "to make a serious and decisive action" against the Jaish al-Adl group and its base inside its territory. Qassemi also said the ministry asked Pakistan to take "immediate and necessary measures" to identify and arrest the attackers.

In a phone conversation on Sunday, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif that Pakistan will send a delegation to Iran over the attack.

Qureshi strongly condemned the attack and said Pakistan is ready to "cooperate" in investigating the terrorist act.

Taha Siddiqui, a Pakistani journalist and founder of safenewsrooms.org, has told Al Jazeera that "many of these groups have Saudi funding, but since Pakistan is dependent on Saudi aid, it turns a blind eye," on the exist-

ence of Jaish al-Adl and other armed groups.

Jaish al-Adl was founded after its parent group, the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jundullah, was dissolved following the capture and execution of its leader, Abdolmalek Rigi, by Iran in 2010.

In 2013, the group abducted and killed 14 Iranian forces in an ambush near the Iranian-Pakistani border.

The following year, at least five members of the Iranian security forces were also abducted.

In October 2018, the armed group abducted 12 Iranian security personnel near the city of Zahedan. Pakistani security forces later intervened and secured the release of at least five of the 12 abductees.

In November 2018, the Iranian Interior Ministry warned that Iranian armed forces may launch operations against terrorists inside the Pakistani territory in case Islamabad fails to do its part.

Russian think tank chief: Warsaw meeting showed U.S. failure

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Iran Section d e s k in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences has said that the Warsaw conference showed failure of the U.S. policies in the Middle East.

"Only the U.S. allies in the Middle East participated in this conference while important countries such as Iran, Iraq, Russia, China and Turkey refrained to do so. In fact, I should say that the U.S. efforts to hold such meeting with influential countries were fruitless," Nina Mamedova told IRNA in an interview published on Monday.

She noted that the U.S. has failed to implement its plans in the Middle East.

"They know that it was Iran and Russia who annihilated Daesh and showed the world that terrorism can be countered



without the U.S.," Mamedova noted.

The Warsaw conference was organized by the U.S. in the Polish capital on February 13-14.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini did not attend the conference.

European officials, the main allies of the U.S. in NATO, either boycotted the conference or sent low-ranking officials to Warsaw.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that the two-day conference on Iran and the larger Middle East was "dead on arrival".

Not even Washington had any interest in the conference as a forum for an exchange of views among the 60 participating countries, Zarif remarked.

Iran denies any commitment on Yemen

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi issued a statement on Monday denying any commitment by Iran to any country on Yemen.

The statement was released in response to remarks made by British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt in an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat claiming Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had made certain promises to help end the conflict when they

met in Tehran back in November.

According to Hunt, he was told by Zarif that Iran wants to play its part in finding a solution to the crisis. "We took those commitments at face value but we do now need to see that translated into the Houthis leaving the Port of Hodeidah," Asharq Al-Awsat quoted Hunt as saying.

Qassemi said, "Yemen is an independent country and it is the Yemenis who should decide for it. Iran has no interference in Yemen's internal affairs. What Mr. Hunt

meant is the same commitments made in the Stockholm meeting among the Yemeni groups to secure the ceasefire."

In Stockholm, both Houthis and Saudi-backed groups agreed to a ceasefire and an ultimate retreat from the strategic port city of Hudaydah. Despite the Houthis' commitment to the truce, however, the Riyadh regime and its mercenaries have stepped up their attacks on the port city in a bid to get the upper hand in negotiations, according to Press TV.



U.S. Army says still backing Saudi-led war on Yemen

UN envoy: Truce holding after 184 Saudi-led violations

Despite the dire need for a ceasefire in Yemen, the United States Army says it is still providing support for the war, which Saudi Arabia and its allies are waging against the impoverished country.

The U.S. continues to “provide support to the coalition,” Major General David C. Hill, deputy commander of the U.S. Army Central, told AFP on the sidelines of a military exhibition in the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

Hill was referring to a Saudi regime-led coalition, gathering many of the kingdom’s allies, which have been pounding Yemen since March 2015 to restore its former Riyadh-allied government.

The general alleged that the U.S. assistance was particularly meant “to help them...be discriminative in targeting and to minimize the risk of civilian casualties.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) says some 10,000 people have been killed since the coalition launched the war, but rights groups put the death toll at five times higher.

The U.S. has been generously providing arms support for the kingdom and its allies over the course of the war. It also lends the coalition logistical assistance, including bombing coordinates. A U.S. commando force is, meanwhile, deployed near the Saudi-Yemeni border to seek and destroy the arms caches belonging to Yemen’s popular Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, which defends the country against the invaders.

Last November, Washington stopped providing aerial refueling for the coalition’s warplanes. It only halted the support after the coalition grew independent of it.

The remarks by Hill come at a time when the United Nations is pushing for the implementation of a ceasefire in the western Yemeni province of Hudaydah, whose capital serves as the main point of entry for most of Yemen’s imports.

The world body would be expanding the truce to the rest of the country if the high-stakes agreement holds. The Ansarullah, however, say the coalition has repeatedly violated the truce agreement.

On Wednesday, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to direct President Donald Trump to end within 30 days all participation in hostilities “in or affecting Yemen.”

Trump could use his veto power to strike down the resolution if it clears the Senate too.

■ Yemenis condemn normalization of ties between some Arab states and Israel

Meantime, thousands of Yemenis have



hit the streets nationwide to condemn the normalization of ties between some Arab states and Israel. Mass protests were held in several cities including Sa’ada, Taiz and Hajjah.

■ Warring sides in Yemen agree on ‘Phase 1’ of redeploying forces in Hudaydah: UN

Elsewhere, the Ansarullah movement forces and Saudi-backed militants loyal to the ex-Yemeni government have reached an agreement on “Phase 1” of their mutual redeployment of forces under a UN-sponsored deal for the warring armies to leave the Yemeni port city of Hudaydah, the UN said on Sunday.

“The parties reached an agreement on Phase 1 of the mutual redeployment of forces” after two days of talks in Hudaydah, a statement by the UN spokesman’s office said.

The talks were led by Danish General Michael Lollesgaard as chair of a redeployment coordination committee (RCC) that includes the Saudi-backed forces and the Ansarullah.

“After lengthy but constructive discussions facilitated by the RCC Chair, the parties reached an agreement on Phase 1 of the mutual redeployment of forces,” said the UN statement.

Under Phase 1, the Ansarullah are to withdraw from the ports of Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Isa to be met by a retreat of coalition forces from the eastern outskirts of the city, where battles raged before a ceasefire went into effect on December 18.

The forces are to be withdrawn from parts of the city where there are humanitarian facilities, the statement said.

The sides made “important progress on planning for the redeployment of forces” but no date was given to begin the demilitarization.

“The parties also agreed, in principle, on Phase 2 of the mutual redeployment, pending additional consultations within their respective leadership.”

The redeployment of forces is a critical part of the truce deal reached during UN-mediated peace talks in Sweden in December between representatives from the Ansarullah movement and the Riyadh-sponsored government of ex-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Under the Stockholm agreement, the pull-back was supposed to have taken place two weeks after the ceasefire went into force on December 18, but that deadline was missed.

■ UN envoy: Truce holding after 184 Saudi-led violations

Moreover, the Ansarullah have repeatedly complained that the Saudi regime-led coalition has been violating the ceasefire.

Under the truce deal, the rival parties had agreed to the withdrawal of their troops and the deployment of UN monitors to the port city.

The House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) launched the Hudaydah offensive in June 2018 but have been facing strong resistance from Yemeni armed forces — led by the Ansarullah — as well as the city’s residents.

The city, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis, has seen some of the heaviest fighting in the Saudi-led war, which Riyadh began in March 2015.

The imposed war initially consisted of an aerial campaign but was later compounded by a naval blockade and the deployment of

mercenaries to Yemen.

Yemen is going through the worst humanitarian crisis since Saudi Arabia and some of its regional allies launched the war on the country in March 2015 in a bid to restore its close ally Hadi to power.

The efforts to destroy the Ansarullah and reinstate Hadi have so far failed, forcing the kingdom to push for peace with the Yemeni resistance movement and its allies in the army.

The UN is hoping that the de-escalation in Hudaydah will allow desperately needed food and medical aid to reach millions in need in Yemen.

But according to the World Food Program, the granary has been off-limits to aid organizations for months putting the food at risk of rotting.

Earlier this week, the UN said that four years of war had pushed two-thirds of Yemen to “pre-famine” levels, while one-third faced “acute vulnerabilities”.

“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,” the OCHA statement said.

“Severity of needs is deepening, with the number of people in acute need a staggering 27 percent higher than last year.”

■ Yemen: Mass pro-Palestine rally denounces U.S.-led Warsaw Conference

Separately, tens of thousands of Yemenis took to the streets of Sana’a on Sunday, to voice their support for the Palestinian people and to denounce the U.S.-led Middle East conference in Warsaw, where the leaders of some Arab states held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The protesters exhibited numerous placards and banners supporting Palestine and its people, as well as slogans against the Arab leaders, the U.S., Israel and Netanyahu, with many others holding the Ansarullah movement flag. Similar protests were reportedly held in other cities across the country.

Demonstrators at one point mimed stabbing and punching a banner bearing Netanyahu’s face alongside that of Yemeni Foreign Minister Khlaed Alyemany, presumably in response to the foreign minister sharing a smile with the Israeli prime minister after being seated alongside him in Warsaw.

The two-day Warsaw Conference on “peace and security” in the Middle East started in the Polish capital on Wednesday, with representatives from around 60 countries participating in the event.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi normalization of ties with Israel encourages Tel Aviv to attack Lebanon: Hezbollah official

A senior official of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has strongly condemned the House of Saud regime’s attempts to normalize relations with Israel, warning that such a move would encourage Tel Aviv to launch new military aggression against Lebanon.

“Arab-Israeli ties constitute treason against Palestine ... Saudi Arabia’s normalization of relations with the Israeli enemy is the most treacherous, because the former is home to Islam’s holiest sites,” Deputy Chairman of Hezbollah’s Executive Council Sheikh Nabil Qaouq said.

He added, “This normalization represents a grave threat to Arabs’ national security, and would encourage Israel to attack Lebanon again. There is no room for (the policy of) dissociation vis-à-vis Saudi normalization [of ties] with Israel.”

“Lebanon would suffer substantial losses in the wake of such normalization, because it would affect the country’s security in addition to its fundamental right to tap into its crude oil and gas reserves. The Persian Gulf states’ stance [on Israel] will embolden Israel and encourage it to carry out further aggression against us,” Qaouq pointed out.

■ Israeli PM ‘secretly’ meets with Moroccan FM Meanwhile, there are reports that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a “secret meeting” with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita last September.

According to a report published by Israeli Channel 13 television network, the meeting took place on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where they discussed normalizing of bilateral ties.

Earlier this month, the Israeli regime re-launched a “virtual embassy” in a bid to “promote dialogue” with Persian Gulf Arab states, amid warming relations between the sides

following years of clandestine contacts.

Former chief of staff of the Israeli military, Gadi Eisenkot, secretly traveled twice last November to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he met with senior officials.

The president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Mort Fridman, said the 58-year-old Israeli commander met with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan besides a number of high-ranking Emirati military officials, Israel’s Arabic-language MAKAN 33 public television network reported.

The senior AIPAC official further noted that an agreement on the sale of Israeli military hardware to the UAE was struck during the meeting.

The Israeli side also agreed to make adequate preparations for the visit of top-brass Emirati officers to Israel.

Netanyahu in late November visited Oman, where he met Sultan Sayyid Qaboos bin Said Al Said at the Bait al-Barakah Royal Palace in the coastal city of Seeb near the capital Muscat.

Israel’s English-language daily newspaper The Jerusalem Post reported that the two men had discussed ways to advance the so-called Middle East peace process as well as matters of mutual interest.

Netanyahu was accompanied by senior officials, including the head of the Mossad spy agency and his national security adviser.

Netanyahu’s unpublicized visit to Oman came on the same day that Israeli Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev traveled to the UAE to accompany Israel’s judo team at the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam 2018.

Regev arrived in Abu Dhabi on October 26 last year, and



she participated in the opening ceremony of the international event at the Emirati capital’s Zayed Sports City, the Palestinian Ma’an news agency reported.

Her visit to the UAE marked the first of its kind by an Israeli minister to a Persian Gulf littoral state.

Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi have no diplomatic ties and the UAE does not recognize Israel, but the two sides have increased backchannel cooperation in recent years. There have been numerous reports of growing contacts between Saudi and Israeli officials too.

Among Arab states, Israel has diplomatic relations only with Egypt and Jordan.

The House of Saud regime has hostile ties with resistance movements in the Palestinian territories, including Hamas which is fighting the Israeli occupation.

(Source: Press TV)

Visegrad summit cancelled as Israel and Poland row over Holocaust

Poland has pulled out of a planned trip to Jerusalem and scuppered an international summit the same day officials were due to arrive, after Israel’s foreign minister accused Poles of hatred against Jews and complicity in the Holocaust.

Israel Katz, who was appointed acting foreign minister on Sunday, said Poles “suckle antisemitism with their mother’s milk”. Speaking on another radio show on Monday morning, he accused all Polish people of harbouring “innate” antisemitism.

The Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said the remarks were “unacceptable” and “racist”.

Katz’s comments deepened a diplomatic crisis between the two countries, which began on Thursday when the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said: “Poles cooperated with the Nazis.” His office later said he was misquoted by domestic media as saying “the Poles”, suggesting blame of the entire nation rather than individuals.

The ensuing standoff has overshadowed a summit Netanyahu was due to host on Monday for the V4 group – Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. It also threatens to derail his efforts to draw alliances with central European nations despite national concerns over deepening xenophobic politics in that region.

Israel later conceded that Poland’s absence meant the V4, with only three of the four members attending, would be cancelled. “There will be no full V4 meeting,” Emmanuel Nahshon, a spokesman for Israel’s foreign ministry, said.

Poland’s foreign ministry has summoned the Israeli ambassador twice in three days, and the head of the Polish prime minister’s office, Michal Dworkczyk, said the Israeli foreign minister’s comments were “disgraceful”.

Katz told Israel’s Army Radio on Monday he wanted to maintain good relations with Poland, but went on to criticise all Poles.

He said: “Historical truth cannot be changed. Many Poles collaborated with the Nazis and took part in the destruction of the Jews during the Holocaust ... Antisemitism was innate among the Poles before the Holocaust, during it and after it too.”

Before the second world war, Poland was home to one of the world’s largest Jewish communities, which was almost wiped out by the Nazis.

After Germany occupied the country in 1939, the underground resistance fought the Nazis and tried to warn the world about the Holocaust. Many Poles do not accept research showing thousands also participated in the Holocaust.

Critics accuse the nationalist government in Poland of white-washing instances of collaboration. Israel complained to Warsaw last year when legislation was introduced that would have made the use of phrases such as “Polish death camps” punishable by up to three years in prison.

The legislation was later watered down and prison sentences removed.

Netanyahu had hoped central European countries would act as an ally for Israel against other European nations critical of its occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Danny Danon, Israel’s ambassador to the UN, said these allies had already helped to block a movement to condemn the decision by Donald Trump to recognise the contested city of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

However, Netanyahu has long been criticised by domestic opponents for ignoring historical revisionism and antisemitism in central Europe.

Yair Lapid, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party in Israel and the son of a Holocaust survivor, tweeted that Netanyahu “should have told the Polish prime minister: cancel the plane ticket now, don’t come here, because we don’t grovel over the memory of the Holocaust”.

Lapid had previously condemned the summit, saying its invitees included a prime minister who “publishes antisemitic content” and another who desecrates the memories of Holocaust victims. “It’s a loss for all national pride,” he said.

(Source: The Guardian)

Abe mum on reports he nominated Trump for Nobel Peace Prize

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his chief spokesman declined Monday to say if Abe had nominated President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, though they praised Trump for dealings with North Korea.

Questioned in parliament about reports he had done so, Abe said: “In light of the Nobel Committee’s policy of not disclosing recommenders and nominees for 50 years, I decline to comment.”

Neither the prime minister nor his spokesman denied Trump’s comment to reporters Friday that Abe had nominated him. Trump said Abe had sent him a “beautiful copy” of a letter sent to the Nobel committee.

Trump’s claim could not be immediately verified. Abe praised Trump on Monday in a lower house budget committee meeting.

“President Trump has been decisively responding toward resolving North Korea’s nuclear and missile problems, and last year he held historic U.S.-North Korea summit talks,” he said.

Abe added that Trump had also passed on to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un Japan’s own concerns about abductions of Japanese citizens by Pyongyang, saying “he and the entire White House also actively cooperated in resolving the issue.”

“I highly praise President Trump’s leadership,” Abe said.

The government’s top spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, echoed Abe in telling reporters that Japan highly valued Trump’s efforts on North Korea’s nuclear disarmament, but also refused other comment.

The Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported on Sunday, citing unnamed government sources, that Abe nominated Trump’s at the president’s request.

The deadline each year for nominations is midnight, Jan. 31. According to the website of the Nobel committee, there are 304 candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2019. It said 219 are individuals and 85 are organizations.

The U.S. is Japan’s ally and anchor for national defense and Abe has assiduously cultivated cordial ties with Trump. He was the first foreign leader to meet with Trump after he won the 2016 presidential election.

(Source: AP)

Twin bombings rock Syria’s Idlib

Two bomb blasts in the northwestern city of Idlib killed at least 10 on Monday, according to Syrian opposition activists and paramedics.

They said an explosive device planted in a parked car detonated in a main street in the provincial capital. Many of the casualties were civil defense workers who reached the site moments before a second explosion nearby.

That blast was attributed by some witnesses to a bomb rigged to a motorcycle.

The opposition’s Syrian Civil Defense, a group of volunteer first responders, said however, only one of its members was wounded.

Social media footage showed aid workers carrying away bodies and rescuing wounded civilians amid smouldering wreckage.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blasts in the Qusour neighborhood during rush hour Monday killed 13 people and wounded 25.

The Edlib Media Center, an activist collective, said the bombings killed 10 and wounded dozens.

The city of Idlib is controlled by Al-Qaeda-linked Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, which has

wide influence in northern Syria.

A local office of the “Salvation Government”, an administrative body created by HTS, is located on the street targeted by Monday’s attack.

The city has been hit with bombings in recent months that killed or wounded scores of people.

(Source: Daily Star)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	156705.4
IFX	1947.16

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,520 rials
GBP	54,238 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.42/b
WTI	\$56.53/b
OPEC Basket	\$64.28/b
Gold	\$1,327.15 /oz
Silver	\$15.87/oz
Platinum	\$814.25 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran to host FUELEX 2019 on Feb. 21-24

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The 2nd International Exhibition of Fuel Stations and Related Industries (FUELEX 2019) is due to be held during February 21-24, at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, IRIB reported.

As reported, over 60 domestic companies and 12 foreign exhibitors from various countries including Japan, Malaysia, and Turkey are going to be participating in this year's exhibition.

According to the organizers, the exhibition is aimed at supporting domestic production, resilient economy and linking the country's academic sector with the industry.



Annual conference on resistance economy held in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The fifth annual resistance economy conference started operation at Iran University of Science and Technology on Monday, IRIB reported.

As the science secretary of the conference told IRIB, the event which is the biggest annual one in the field of resistance economy is being run by cooperation between Iranian parliament, administration and resistance economy analysts.

"From among the pool of 50 articles sent to the conference, some 15 have been approved by the jury, abstracts of which will be published in the conference's special issue," Mohammad Sadeq Karimi added.

U.S. agency submits auto tariff probe report to White House

The U.S. Commerce Department sent a report on Sunday to U.S. President Donald Trump that could unleash steep tariffs on imported cars and auto parts, provoking a sharp backlash from the industry even before it is unveiled, the agency confirmed.

Late on Sunday, a department spokeswoman said it would not disclose any details of the "Section 232" national security report submitted to Trump by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. The disclosure of the submission came less than two hours before the end of a 270-day deadline.

Trump has 90 days to decide whether to act upon the recommendations, which auto industry officials expect to include at least some tariffs on fully assembled vehicles or on technologies and components related to electric, automated, connected and shared vehicles.

As the White House received the report, the industry unleashed what is expected to be a massive lobbying campaign against it.

The industry has warned that feared tariffs of up to 25 percent on millions of imported cars and parts would add thousands of dollars to vehicle costs and potentially lead to hundreds of thousands of job losses throughout the U.S. economy.

The Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association, which represents auto parts suppliers, warned that tariffs will shrink investment in the United States at a time when the auto industry is already reeling from declining sales, Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminum, and tariffs on auto parts from China.

"These tariffs, if applied, could move the development and implementation of new automotive technologies offshore, leaving America behind," it said in a statement. "Not a single company in the domestic auto industry requested this investigation."

The Commerce Department started its investigation in May 2018 at Trump's request. Known as a Section 232 investigation, its purpose was to determine the effects of imports on national security and it had to be completed by Sunday.

Automakers and parts suppliers are anticipating its recommendation options will include broad tariffs of up to 20 percent to 25 percent on assembled cars and parts, or narrower tariffs targeting components and technologies related to new energy cars, autonomous, internet-connected and shared vehicles.

The Commerce Department alluded to a focus on emerging vehicle technologies when it opened the investigation.

Administration officials have said tariff threats on autos are a way to win concessions from Japan and the EU. Last year, Trump agreed not to impose tariffs as long as talks with the two trading partners were proceeding in a productive manner.

Trump said on Friday that tariffs protect industry and also help win trade agreements. (Source: Reuters)

Persian Gulf Star Refinery to supply half of Iran's gasoline

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani put 40 major development projects worth 60 trillion rials (about \$1.428 billion) into operation in the southern province of Hormozgan on Sunday and Monday, IRNA reported.

The projects were in energy, roads and urban development, and agriculture sectors and some of them were inaugurated by the president through videoconference.

To boost the Islamic Republic's defense power, Rouhani also unveiled on Sunday a new homegrown submarine armed with cruise missiles.

The president also inaugurated the third phase of Persian Gulf Star Refinery in a ceremony on Monday participated by Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh.

The refinery in Bandar Abbas, the capital city of Hormozgan, is the first of its kind designed based on gas condensate feedstock.

Putting the third phase into operation, the refinery's output will reach 45 million liters of uro-5 gasoline, 12 million liters of gas oil, three million liters of LPG, and two million liters of jet fuel per day, Mohammad-Ally Dadvar the managing director of the refinery, announced in the inaugural ceremony.

Boosting the production capacity and



President Rouhani inaugurated the project for boosting production capacity and improving quality of gasoline and gas oil produced in Bandar Abbas Oil Refining Company on Monday

promoting quality of gasoline and gas oil produced in Bandar Abbas Oil Refining Company was the other project inaugurated by President Rouhani on Monday.

Putting this project into operation, the

refinery's daily Euro-5 gasoline output will hit 12 million liters and its Euro-4 gas oil output will reach 15 million liters per day, Hashem Namvar, the managing director of the company, announced in

Zanganeh leaves for Beijing to discuss deal on South Pars phase 11

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, accompanied by Parliament speaker Ali Larijani, left Tehran for the Chinese capital to negotiate implementation of the phase 11 project of developing South Pars gas field with CNPC.

As Zanganeh lamented on Saturday, although 81 percent of the phase 11 project has been officially handed over to CNPC, the Chinese haven't still done any work on the project.

"We have been negotiating with the Chinese side to determine what measures they are going to take," IRNA quoted Zanganeh as saying.

Total signed a contract in 2017 to develop phase 11 of

South Pars field with an initial investment of \$1 billion, marking the first major Western energy investment in the country after sanctions were lifted in 2016.

The company was pressured to leave Iran after the United States threatened to impose sanctions on companies that do business in the country.

The French company said in August it had told Iranian authorities it would withdraw from the South Pars gas project after it failed to obtain a waiver from U.S. sanctions against Iran.

In May, industry sources said CNPC was ready to take over Total's stake in the project.



Switzerland eager to expand trade with Iran: ambassador

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Swiss ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner said his country is eager for maintaining and even expanding economic relations with Iran, Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry's news portal Shada reported.

The envoy made the remarks during a meeting with Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand on Monday.

In the meeting, the Iranian minister pointed to the long history of the two countries relations and called for further expansion of economic ties.

Mentioning the recent agreements reached between



Swiss ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner (2nd L) held talks with Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand (1st R) in Tehran on Monday.

the two countries during Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit to the European country, Dejjasand expressed hope that these agreements will be realized soon.

The official once again voiced the country's readiness for expanding trade with Europe and in the region.

At the end, Leitner called for the participation of the finance ministry's representatives in the joint economic committee of the two countries, and expressed readiness for taking any necessary measures for developing economic cooperation between the two sides.

Gold at two-week high on trade deal hopes; palladium peaks

Gold prices rose to their strongest level in more than two weeks on Monday as the dollar weakened on hopes the United States and China are nearing a trade deal, while palladium hit a record high.

Spot gold had gained 0.1 percent to \$1,322.41 per ounce as of 0747 GMT. The metal touched \$1,325.30 earlier, just below a 9-month peak of \$1,326.30 an ounce marked on Jan. 31.

U.S. gold futures rose 0.3 percent to \$1,326.1 an ounce.

"Alleviation of risks around the trade talks has certainly benefited the markets," said ANZ analyst Daniel Hynes, adding that signs of progress in the discussions had reduced appetite for the dollar, which has been supporting gold.

The dollar was marginally weaker on Monday, as increasing expectations of a U.S.-Sino trade deal led investors to shift away from the safety of the greenback, which had been the preferred safe-haven during the trade dispute.

The United States and China will resume trade talks this week in Washington with time running short to ease their bruising trade war, but U.S. President Donald Trump repeated on Friday that he may extend a March 1 deadline for a deal and keep tariffs on Chinese goods from rising.

Spot gold prices have risen about 3.3 percent so far this year on hopes that the world's two largest economies will hammer out a truce and on expectations the U.S. Federal Reserve will

pause its cycle of interest rate hikes.

Minutes of the Fed's January policy meeting are due on Wednesday and should provide more guidance on the likelihood or not for rate hikes this year.

"Looser monetary policies are generally favourable to gold, which has benefited since the Fed paused its tightening path," said Nicholas Frappell, global general manager, ABC Bullion. (Source: CNBC)

What ails Europe's economy?



Percentage change between 3Q and 4Q

Source: Bloomberg

more surprising. The bloc's second-largest economy has been jolted by the protests of the gilets jaunes, which shook the political system and dented investor confidence. Yet it expanded by 0.3 percent at the end of last year, in line with the previous quarter and marginally faster than in the first two quarters of the year. Growth for the full-year came in at 1.5 percent, down from 2.3 percent in 2017. But the early signs for 2019 are positive: The Bank of France forecasts the economy will expand by 0.4 percent in the first quarter.

■ **All over the place**

GDP growth in the fourth quarter in some of the euro zone's biggest economies.

Other countries, from north to south, also tell a more positive story. Growth in Finland rebounded from 0.5 percent in the third quarter to 0.9 percent in the final

stretch of the year. Portugal expanded by 0.4 percent, pretty much in line with the other three quarters. The Netherlands also bounced back after a poor third quarter, posting a rate of expansion of 0.5 percent. For all their size as the first and third largest economies, Germany and Italy look like the exception rather than the rule.

Policy makers across Europe will take a very close look at the economic indicators at the start of this year to understand whether the downturn will worsen. In particular, the European Central Bank will be watching like a hawk: In the second half of 2018, it started to scale back its monetary stimulus, stopping its net asset purchases at the start of 2019. There are now questions about whether that was the right decision.

The ECB can take heart from the euro zone

labor market, which continues to strengthen both in terms of employment and of wages. This should offer continuous support to domestic demand. However, the central bank has to balance this with risks from abroad, including a slowdown in China and the trade war between Beijing and Washington. All of this has important knock-on effects on business confidence, with entrepreneurs putting investment on hold as they wait for greater clarity.

Europe's uneven picture suggests that there is a problem with the growth model of some countries as opposed to the bloc as a whole. In Italy, the fiscal plans of the new populist government have pushed up bond yields, contributing to a reduction in the flow of credit. Domestic demand fell in the fourth quarter, showing that consumers and entrepreneurs are being cautious. Meanwhile, Germany's export-driven growth model is facing its biggest test in decades as Berlin discovers it is vulnerable to the global trade outlook and China's economic fortunes. But unlike Italy, the country has scope to boost growth by raising public investment: Such spending would provide short-term relief and help to re-balance the economy towards domestic demand.

The world is right to look at Europe's slowdown and wonder what is going on. But, as often in the past, it's hard to find a single explanation. The strength of Europe is its variety; it can also be its weakness.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil prices hit 2019 highs amid supply cuts, trade talk hopes

Oil prices on Monday hit their highest levels since November last year, lifted by OPEC-led supply cuts, U.S. sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, and hopes that the Sino-U.S. trade dispute may soon end.

International Brent crude futures were at \$66.66 per barrel at 0746 GMT, up 41 cents, or 0.6 percent, from their last close. Brent earlier climbed to its highest since November 2018 at \$66.78 a barrel.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were at \$56.07 per barrel, up 48 cents, or 0.9 percent, from their close. WTI prices also rose to their highest since November, at \$56.13 per barrel, earlier on Monday.

Prices have been bolstered by a tightening market because of supply cuts organized by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some non-affiliated producers like Russia. The group of producer countries agreed late last year to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to prevent a large supply overhang from swelling.

Further supporting crude prices have been U.S. sanctions against oil exporters and OPEC-members Iran and Venezuela.

Financial markets, including crude futures, were also generally supported by hopes that the United States and China would soon resolve



their trade disputes, which have dragged on global economic growth.

"OPEC production cuts and U.S. sanctions on both Iran and Venezuela are limiting supply. Trade tensions which have weighed on global growth are showing signs of easing

boosting sentiment across markets and lifting oil demand prospects," said Jasper Lawler, head of research at futures brokerage London Capital Group.

■ **Slowing down**
Earlier in the trading day, news of a fall

in Chinese car sales in January had raised concerns about how fuel demand in the world's second-largest oil user might fare.

China's vehicle sales last month fell by 15.8 percent versus the same month in 2018, an industry association said on Monday. This continued the 2018 trend, in which China recorded the first annual drop in vehicle sales on record.

So-called new energy vehicle sales in January, which include electric vehicles, registered a 140 percent increase, underlining expectations that oil demand from cars may peak in China in the coming years.

Looming over oil markets in the near term, meanwhile, is the rise in U.S. crude oil production EIA of more than 2 million bpd in 2018, to a record 11.9 million bpd - with signs that U.S. output will rise further.

U.S. energy firms last week increased the number of oil rigs looking for new supply by three, to a total of 857, energy services firm Baker Hughes said in a weekly report last Friday.

That means the U.S. rig count is higher than a year ago when fewer than 800 rigs were active.

(Source: Reuters)

Indian Oil signs first annual deal for U.S. oil

Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, has signed its first annual deal to buy U.S. oil, paying about \$1.5 billion for 60,000 barrels a day in the year to March 2020 to diversify its crude sources, its chairman said on Monday.

IOC is the first Indian state refiner to buy U.S. oil under an annual contract, in a deal that will also help boost trade between New Delhi and Washington.

The company has previously purchased U.S. oil from spot markets and signed a mini-term deal in August to buy 6 million barrels of U.S. oil between November and January.

IOC chairman Sanjiv Singh said the annual contract will begin from April. He declined to give the name of the seller or pricing details, citing confidentiality.

A trade source, who is not authorized to speak to media, said IOC has signed the deal with Norwegian oil company Equinor.

Equinor, which has set up an office in New Delhi to support oil marketing and trading, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Indian Oil buys about 75 percent of its oil needs through long-term deals, mostly with OPEC nations.

The term deal will help cut IOC's dependence on OPEC crude, said Sri Paravaikkarasu, head of east of Suez



oil for consultants FGE in Singapore.

"There is a push for diversification everywhere. South Korea is giving a freight rebate for non-Middle East crude imports," she added.

India and the United States, which have developed close political and security ties, are also looking to develop bilateral trade, which stood at \$126 billion in 2017 but is widely seen to be performing well below its potential.

The two countries have set up seven groups of chief executives with top U.S. and Indian firms to boost bilateral trade in areas including energy.

Last week India's top gas importer Petronet LNG signed an initial deal to invest and buy LNG from Tellurian Inc's proposed Driftwood project in Louisiana in the United States.

(Source: Reuters)

S.Africa seeks to reopen costly renewables deals to help Eskom

South Africa wants to talk to independent power producers (IPPs) about lowering the price Eskom pays for electricity from older renewable energy projects, a senior minister told Reuters, as the state utility struggles to emerge from a financial crisis.

Eskom supplies more than 90 percent of South Africa's power but is drowning in debt after a decade of decline. It implemented power cuts for five consecutive days last week because of breakdowns at its creaking fleet of mainly coal-fired power stations.

Labor unions and some conservative sections of the ruling African National Congress blame Eskom's financial woes on 20-year agreements it signed to purchase power from renewable energy projects launched in 2011 and 2012.

The power prices Eskom pays for later renewables projects are considerably lower because technology and finance costs in the renewable energy sector fell by the time they were agreed.

"The simple assurance is that this is not about scrapping a contract. This is about exploring possibilities that are created by the rapid fall in costs in the renewable sector, whether that's solar or wind," Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan said in an interview.

Gordhan said he wanted to reassure IPPs that the South African government would be careful about how it handled any



negotiations over power prices.

Gordhan, an important ally of President Cyril Ramaphosa, said the government wanted to "balance out" prices agreed during bid windows one and two of the country's renewable energy program - launched in 2011 and 2012 - with lower prices in later bid windows.

Ramaphosa - who is trying to appease critics before a parliamentary election in May - has promised to support Eskom's balance sheet and split the utility to make it more efficient.

But some analysts say bolder steps are needed to rescue the power firm, the largest on the African continent.

Eskom expects to make annual losses of around 20 billion rand (\$1.4 billion) this year and next and does not earn enough to service its 419 billion rand debt mountain.

(Source: CNBC)

The biggest problem behind the U.S. shale boom

U.S. shale production is expected to continue to soar well into the 2020s. And that is a major problem.

Over the past decade, U.S. oil production has more than doubled, surging from 5 million barrels per day (mb/d) to close to 12 mb/d today. Natural gas also rose significantly, rising from 21 trillion cubic feet per year (Tcf/y) in 2008 to 29 Tcf/y in 2017.

Natural gas has been likened to a "bridge

fuel," allowing the U.S. to lower greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) while it transitions to cleaner energy. Cheap shale gas has killed off a lot of coal plants, and with a GHG-profile half that of coal, the switch has been a boon for the fight against climate change.

That narrative, to be sure, remains up for debate. Shale gas operations emit methane, and at some point high volumes of fugitive methane emissions completely offset the ben-

efit that gas has over coal. Various studies, for and against, argue over exactly how much methane is and has been emitted.

But there are other reasons why the coal-to-gas narrative has been oversold. Billions of dollars of investment in gas drilling and gas-fired power plants sucks capital away from renewable energy. Cheap shale gas has also killed off nuclear power, the largest source of carbon-free electricity.

More to the point, new power plants are long-lived investments, and their owners expect to be using them for decades to come. In other words, the U.S. has been locking itself into gas, even though the science dictates a relatively short timetable for the energy transition.

Still, knocking off coal does have its benefits, and the case against gas isn't exactly clear cut.

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The OPEC+ oil deal is standing on one wobbly leg

By Julian Lee

I know a little bit about standing on one leg; my daughter has encouraged me to learn to water ski. It's not easy at my age, in England, in winter. OK, I'm actually on two legs, but they are on one ski. I tend to wobble a lot and to fall over much more than I would like. It sort of reminds me of the current state of the OPEC+ oil deal that was updated in December. That is also standing on a single leg and starting to look a bit shaky.

The deal had two main pillars (let's call them legs) to hold the whole thing up. They were Saudi Arabia and Russia, the leaders, at least in volume terms, of the groups of countries that were party to the production deal. They agreed to take the biggest share of each group's pledged output cuts - Saudi Arabia shouldering 40 percent of the OPEC burden and Russia assuming 60 percent of the non-OPEC contribution.

With the first month's data now published, it is clear that, while one leg is functioning strongly, the other is bearing little of the weight of the deal - and that could spell trouble for the future.

Saudi Arabia cut even more than it promised in January, reducing its output to 10.213 million barrels a day, according to the secondary source data that OPEC uses to monitor its members' compliance. That compares with a target of just over 10.3 million. To be fair, the country's Energy Minister, Khalid Al-Falih, said at the time of the agreement that the kingdom would exceed its goal, so the report doesn't come as a big surprise.

What was a shock, though, was a more recent comment



that Saudi Arabia would go even further next month and slash production to 9.8 million barrels day. That would take it to its lowest level since February 2015.

Russia's performance has been rather different. Oil Minister Alexander Novak said at the time of the deal that the country's promised 230,000 barrel a day cut would be implemented smoothly over the first quarter, with January's output 50,000-60,000 barrels below the October baseline. It didn't even manage to reach that modest target - the cut was just 42,000 barrels, according to Bloomberg calculations.

Russia's slowness in implementing its cut earned it public criticism from the Saudi oil minister and prompted a statement from OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo urging all countries to achieve their obligations "in full and in timely fashion."

The rebuke prompted Novak to say that Russia is

accelerating implementation of its cuts and that "the average February level should be at least 150,000 barrels lower than in December." But Russia's production rose between October and December and the reduction from the October baseline will be 120,000 barrels, or less than half of what the country pledged. It may not reach its target until May, just a month before the current deal expires.

This could make little difference to the broader market - provided Saudi Arabia is willing to bear a greater burden so that the OPEC+ group as a whole still meets its target.

Back to the water skiing. I haven't been out behind the boat for the past couple of weeks because, by putting too much of my weight on my back foot, I strained my left calf muscle. My right leg didn't protest at bearing the extra burden and it got me from one end of the lake to the other. But then it came to the point where it said "no more," and the skiing had to pause.

Well, it looks like the OPEC+ group is going to need to extend its output restraint in the face of soaring U.S. production and weakening global demand growth. The three main forecasting agencies - the International Energy Agency, the U.S. Energy Information Administration and OPEC - all cut their assessments of the world's need for the latter's oil in their latest monthly reports, published last week.

Unless somebody lights a rocket under demand growth - and even a U.S.-China trade deal may not be enough to do that - the OPEC+ output agreement is going to need at least two strong legs to stand on. Without them, like me on my water ski, the group's hopes of buoying oil prices risk collapsing into chilly waters.

(Source: Bloomberg)

The war on plastic will dent oil demand more than anticipated

The oil industry is no stranger to environmental discussions. Its long-term forecasts have focused for years on how global warming and the rise of electric vehicles may reduce the world's appetite for crude oil.

Yet the sector has spent far less time thinking about another change that could have just as large an effect as electric vehicles: the war on plastic. As businesses eliminate plastic straws and bags, and governments act to reduce disposable packaging, this will have profound implications because plastic, of course, is ultimately made of crude oil.

Transportation currently gobbles up more than half of global oil consumption. The petrochemical industry - which takes crude oil as a feedstock and converts it into the chemicals from which plastics are made - absorbs less than 15 percent. Yet it is expected to deliver half of global oil consumption growth to 2040.

The International Energy Agency predicts the contribution of the petrochemical industry to overall oil demand growth will increase by more than 2.5 times to 2040 compared with 2000-17. It is the only major source of oil demand where growth is



expected to accelerate. These forecasts assume a steady, strong demand for plastic will translate into increasing consumption of feedstock. They provide a rare ray of optimism for the oil industry against increasingly dire long-term predictions that growth of other demand sources will slow.

Yet there is a problem. These forecasts assume that, because plastic demand increased significantly faster than global economic growth in the past, it will continue to do so, although the gap between the two may narrow. This assumes that today's emerging markets will replicate prior consumption patterns. Some analysts also claim that "invisible" plastic - components of digital infrastructure, electronic gadgets and smartphones - will become a new source of irreplaceable demand.

These are dubious propositions. About 45 percent of plastic production is for packaging material; electronics account for 7 percent. The EU boasts the highest recycling rates in the world - 30 percent of collected waste - but still has managed to increase its use of recycled plastic from a comparatively high level. Kenya has already banned single-use plastic bags. Why wouldn't other emerging markets leapfrog this hallmark of modern civilization, as they have done with fixed-line telephones.

Roughly 90 percent of oil used by the petrochemical sector is transformed into high-value chemicals. Of these, a high proportion are converted into plastic. This means that about two-thirds of crude oil demand from the petrochemical sector is for plastics.

Governments and consumers are likely to focus on the plastics that leak into the natural environment. Unless new technology is developed, the logical outcomes will be efforts to reduce demand including by substitution and increase recycling.

Reduced use of plastic bags and slowing demand growth of other plastic has the potential to halve the standard assumed growth in plastic demand of 3 percent annually from 2017-40. If the share of recycled plastic displacing virgin product rises from 5 percent to 25 percent by 2040, that would further reduce the need for crude oil.

Using the IEA World Energy Outlook as a benchmark, these two modifications would diminish oil demand from petrochemicals in 2040 by more than 20 percent. It could bring projected peak oil demand forward by a decade and diminish the need for oil-based petrochemical production capacity by 20 percent. The dent in oil demand by 2040 would exceed the one that the IEA predicts would accompany the introduction of electric cars.

This is more than a quirky example of how real life may get in the way of long-term planning. If companies push ahead with investment based on standard forecasts to expand petrochemical operations, stranded assets may lie ahead. On the flip side, a massive need for recycling capacity is likely to emerge. The advice handed out in the 1967 film The Graduate - "plastics" - is about to take on a less positive meaning.

(Source: Financial Times)

StanChart, BNP among banks likely to be added to Saudi Aramco bond

Standard Chartered Plc and BNP Paribas SA are among about a dozen banks likely to be added as co-managers for Saudi Aramco's landmark international bond sale, people with knowledge of the matter said.

Two Japanese lenders -- Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc., Mizuho Financial Group Inc. -- as well as Samba Financial Group and [Persian] Gulf International Bank BSC are among those being appointed, according to the people, who asked not to be identified because the information is private. The banks have yet to be formally notified, they said.

Aramco declined to comment.

Saudi Aramco picked JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Morgan Stanley to manage the sale, its first-ever international dollar-bond offering, to fund the acquisition of petrochemical giant Saudi Basic Industries Corp., people with knowledge of the matter said on Thursday.

The world's largest oil producer could raise about \$10 billion to help fund the Sabic deal, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said last month. The deal would force Aramco to disclose its accounts to investors for the first time since its nationalization about four decades ago.

Aramco is in talks to buy 70 percent of Sabic from the Public Investment Fund, the country's sovereign wealth fund, for about \$70 billion. A bond issue could raise between \$10 billion and \$15 billion, fund managers and analysts said Thursday.

JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley will also act as bookrunners for the offering, along with Citigroup Inc., HSBC Holdings Plc and National Commercial Bank, with a sale expected in the first half, people familiar with the matter said last week.

(Source: Bloomberg)

NEWS IN BRIEF

**India to continue oil imports from Venezuela**

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Showing disdain to the warnings of U.S., India is looking into commercial considerations and related factors to determine the value of oil imports from any country, including Venezuela.

It comes after the Oil Minister of Venezuela toured India to discuss increase in oil supply to India and Trump administration issued warning against buying oil from Venezuela.

Earlier this week, U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton warned countries and companies against buying crude oil from Venezuela, after Venezuela's Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo said during a surprise visit to India that Venezuela wants to sell more oil to India.

However, India seems unfazed by Bolton's threats. "Venezuela is the chair of OPEC and GECF. We don't have any barter system with Venezuela; commercial considerations and related factors will determine the value of trade which we have with any country," said Raveesh Kumar, the spokesman of India's foreign ministry said at a media briefing on Thursday.

Indian refiners are still buying more than 400,000 bpd of oil from the troubled Latin American country, which is sitting on the world's largest crude oil resources.

**Taliban - U.S. meeting in Islamabad postponed**

TEHRAN — The meeting between a delegation of the Afghan Taliban and the U.S. officials, which was scheduled to take place in Islamabad on February 18, has been postponed.

According to a statement issued by Taliban spokesperson, the meeting has been postponed because of travel restrictions imposed on Taliban officials.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the Taliban delegation was scheduled to hold talks with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and Saudi crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman too.

He said that the Taliban officials had finished their preparations for the visit.

On February 13, Taliban announced that a negotiating team will visit Islamabad to hold next round of talks with the U.S. officials. The statement said the team will also meet PM Khan "to hold comprehensive discussions about Pak-Afghan relations and issues pertaining to Afghan refugees and Afghan businessmen".

PM Khan has publicly taken credit for facilitating peace talks between the Taliban and U.S. officials, saying that Pakistan "will do everything within its power" to further the Afghan peace process.

A U.S. team led by special representative Zalmay Khalilzad has been negotiating with the Taliban, however the talks have failed to produce a breakthrough as violence rages on in Afghanistan.

**Pakistan accused of violating Afghanistan's sovereignty**

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani has expressed strong reservations over Pakistan hosting talks between the Afghan Taliban delegation and the U.S. officials.

Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of providing sanctuary to terrorist groups that carry out attacks in Afghanistan, most notably Haqqani Network. Ashraf Ghani government has lodged a strong complaint with the UN Security Council against Pakistan for its role in recent months in facilitating Taliban negotiations, alleging that the process is a violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty.

A strongly-worded complaint was lodged by the Afghan permanent mission in New York with UN Security Council, according to a report in Economic Times.

Afghan government seeks to engage with the Taliban leadership directly in Afghan-led and Afghan-owned negotiations. However, in recent months, U.S. has been unilaterally holding talks with the insurgent group, sidelining the elected government in Kabul. Referring to the Pak move to invite Taliban delegation to meet PM Imran Khan, the Afghan government in its letter regretted that this amounts to official "recognition and legitimization of an armed group that poses serious threat to security and stability of Afghanistan".

The letter further alleged that members of the group are sanctioned by the UN Security Council 1988 Committee's Sanctions Regime.

**India withdraws security of Kashmiri separatists**

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Stung by the deadly attack on its security forces in Indian-controlled Kashmir on Thursday, Indian government has decided to withdraw security cover of separatist leaders in the region.

The security cover of six separatist leaders, including the chairman of Hurriyat Conference and leading cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, was withdrawn Sunday.

The state government in consultation with the center had provided them security cover, keeping in mind the threat to their lives from some militant groups, according to reports.

According to the order, all security and vehicles provided to the separatists will stand withdrawn by Sunday evening.

India's home minister Rajnath Singh, during his visit to Srinagar on Friday, said security given to people "getting funds from Pakistan and its snooping agency ISI" should be reviewed, in an indirect reference to pro-freedom leadership.

"Some elements in Jammu and Kashmir have links with the ISI and terrorist organizations. Their security should be reviewed," he had said after reviewing security in the aftermath of the dastardly terror attack that killed at least 44 military personnel.

Iran, India agree on close cooperation to combat terrorism in the region

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Many developments have taken place in the aftermath of two deadly attacks in Iran and India last week. One of them is the two neighboring countries agreeing to cooperate in combating terrorism.

Iran and India, after being hit by two dastardly attacks last week, have agreed on close cooperation to combat terrorism in the region.

The agreement came during the short meeting between India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and Iran's deputy foreign minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Tehran on Saturday.

The meeting between Swaraj and Araghchi came hours after Iran's top commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, referring to Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-ul-Adl, said the government of Pakistan must "pay a high price" for harbouring terrorist groups.

Iran has accused Pakistan's security and intelligence agencies of supporting the perpetrators of a suicide bombing in Sistan-Balochistan province that killed at least 27 members of IRGC on Wednesday.

The attack came a day before the deadly attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir that killed at least 44 members of India's central reserve police force (CRPF).

India also blamed Pakistan for the attack, which was claimed by Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), a militant group based in Pakistan.

Swaraj, during a brief halt in Tehran on her



way to Bulgari on Saturday, called on Araghchi and discussed bilateral issues, including last week's attacks and their implications on regional peace and stability.

The two countries agreed on close cooperation to combat terrorism in the region, said sources.

"The two officials were clear that pressure needs to be put on Pakistan to take action

against all terrorist groups that seek to foment trouble in Pakistan's neighborhood," said a source.

"Iran and India suffered from two heinous terrorist attacks in the past few days resulted in big casualties. Today in my meeting with Sushma Swaraj the Indian FM, when she had a stopover in Tehran, we agreed on close cooperation to combat terrorism in the region.

Enough is enough!" Araghchi said in a tweet.

In both India and Iran, people have called for 'revenge' for the attacks. While India has already initiated moves to "isolate" Pakistan diplomatically, Iran has also warned Islamabad to take stringent action against the terrorists.

Meanwhile, according to a report in Economic Times newspaper, India has received "widespread support" on the issue of Pakistan's role in cross-border terror attacks at the Munich Security Conference.

Deputy national security adviser Pankaj Saran attended the 55th Munich Security Conference (MSC) from February 15-17, which brought together leaders and security experts from across the world.

The question of international terrorism was one of the important subjects of discussion in the Conference, said the report, quoting sources.

All the countries with whom bilateral meetings were held conveyed their condolences over the terrorist attack in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir, the report stated.

Saran held bilateral meetings on sidelines of MSC with delegates from Germany, US, Russia, NATO, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Armenia, Mongolia and Oman.

"The attack was unequivocally condemned, and there was widespread support for India's concerns over Pakistan sponsored terrorism on Indian soil," the report read.

Iran, India demand answers and action from Pakistan

1 → India blames Pakistan of aiding and abetting terrorist attacks carried out by militant groups like Jaish e Mohammad and Lashkar e Toiba, Hizbul Mujahideen in Kashmir and the country's powerful intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is accused of giving birth to these groups.

Jaish e Mohammad leader Masood Azhar is based in Pakistan and Islamabad has unflinchingly refused India's demands to extradite him. Pakistan's new all-weather ally China has also blocked India's moves to have him designated a 'global terrorist' at the United Nations Security Council.

While tensions have always prevailed between the two countries, following Thursday's attack the situation has turned extremely dreadful. The war drums are beating loudly, with hawks in New Delhi calling for strong diplomatic and military retaliation.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, following the attack on Thursday, said India would give a "befitting reply" to Pakistan, even though Islamabad denied any involvement in the attack.

As part of moves to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, India withdrew its 'most favored nation' status to Pakistan and canceled trade privileges granted to Pakistan under World Trade Organization (WTO).

India's finance minister Arun Jaitley said the diplomatic steps were being taken "to ensure the complete isolation from international community of Pakistan." Pakistan, however, termed it India's "dream".

Times of India, the leading daily of India, reported that military options were also under contemplation and could range from "shallow ground-based attacks and occupation of some heights along the LoC [Line of Control ceasefire line] to restricted but precision airstrikes against non-state targets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir."

While the dark clouds of war are looming large over Pakistan and India, on the other hand, Iran also has echoed its grave concerns over Wednesday's attack that took place close to Iran-Pakistan border in Sistan-Balochistan province claimed by Jaish-ul-Adl.

The attack has been widely condemned in Iran by the political and military leadership.

"How did they [the terrorists] cross the border? And why has this neighboring country become a safe haven for these terrorist groups?" senior IRGC commander Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi was quoted as saying following the attack.

"Pakistani government, which has sheltered these [ter-



rorists] and knows where their hideouts are should be held accountable for the crime that has been committed," IRGC senior commander Maj. Gen. Ali Jafari said, echoing words of Gen. Safavi. "Pakistan will no doubt pay a high price," he added.

Jafari made the remarks during the funeral of martyrs in Isfahan province, where thousands of people turned up to bid them tearful adieu.

Iran alleges that Saudi Arabia and UAE have helped create and nurture Jaish-ul-Adl, which has been involved in several attacks on Iranian security forces in recent years.

Taha Siddiqui, a Pakistani journalist and founder of safe-newsrooms.org, nods in agreement. "Many of these groups have Saudi funding, but since Pakistan is dependent on Saudi aid, it turns a blind eye," he was quoted as saying by AlJazeera on the existence of Jaish al-Adl and other armed groups.

Jaish al-Adl is the offshoot of al-Qaeda-affiliated Jundullah, which went into oblivion after its leader Abdolmalek Rigi was killed by Iranian forces in 2010. Jaish-ul-Adl has been responsible for many attacks on Iranian security forces in recent years.

In 2013, the group kidnapped and killed 14 Iranian forces in an ambush close to Iran-Pakistan border. In 2014, five members of the Iranian security forces were again abducted.

In October 2018, the militant group abducted 12 Iranian security personnel near the city of Zahedan bordering Pakistan, five of whom were later released following the intervention of Pakistani authorities.

The latest attack has generated tremendous anger and outrage in Iran. Social media has been inundated with posts condemning the perpetrators and their backers.

Pakistan's envoy to Tehran was summoned by the foreign ministry on Saturday and a strong protest was conveyed

to the Pakistani government through her, according to a statement issued by foreign ministry.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said Iran "explicitly conveyed" to the Pakistan envoy that Tehran expects Islamabad and its military "to make a serious and decisive action" against the Jaish ul-Adl and its base inside its territory.

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani also issued a strong statement, saying the Pakistani government should be held to account for the incident.

"The Pakistani government should be accountable for this act involving the group orchestrating and conducting the operation from their territory," he said during Sunday's session of parliament.

Larijani said Pakistan "cannot act irresponsibly", adding that "such behavior will severely damage the level of cooperation" between the neighboring countries.

President Hassan Rouhani, speaking at an event in Hormozgan province on Sunday, said he "regrets" the "wrong policies" of Iran's neighbors, without directly mentioning Pakistan.

Earlier, Hassan Rouhani had vowed to "punish the criminal mercenaries". "Without a doubt, all perpetrators and those ordered this vicious, flagrant act will be punished soon with the hard work of the powerful security forces of our country," he said in a statement, following the attack.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei also linked the perpetrators of Wednesday's attack to "the spying agencies of some regional and trans-regional countries".

Meanwhile, on Saturday, India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj called on Iran's deputy foreign minister Seyed Araghchi in Tehran to discuss the two attacks and their repercussions.

"Iran and India suffered from two heinous terrorist attacks in the past few days, resulted in big casualties," Araghchi tweeted. "Today in my meeting with Sushma Swaraj... we agreed on close cooperation to combat terrorism in the region. Enough is enough!"

In response to Iran's protest, Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Sunday that he will send a special delegation to Tehran to hold talks on the matter.

Qureshi said it is "regrettable" that the incident took place, and promised Pakistan's "cooperation" in the investigation.

Iran shares a long border with Pakistan, measuring around 1,000km. Jaish-ul-Adl has often infiltrated through this porous border to carry out attacks in the border region.

Kashmir attack: Kashmiri students, traders face backlash from Hindu extremists

1 → The situation gradually turned so serious that India's interior ministry had to issue an advisory to all states to "ensure their safety and security and maintain communal harmony".

Since Thursday's attack, sources say Kashmiris living outside their state have faced property evictions, job suspensions and attacks on social media, which was the deadliest attack on Indian security forces in Kashmir since the insurgency started in late 1980s.

In Haryana's Ambala district, a video circulated on social media showed a village headman asking people to evict Kashmiri students in the area.

A report in Huffington Post said a Kashmiri student spent Friday hiding in the room he had rented in the city. "I have never been so scared in all my life," the teenager was quoted as saying.

In Uttarakhand's Dehradun city, 12 students from Kashmir were beaten up by the members of radical Hindu groups Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), forcing the Kashmiri students to lock themselves inside their hostel rooms and rented houses.

"We asked the police for help and they



came here, but they are asking us to face the mob and apologize. What should we apologize for? They are calling us traitors, but we haven't done anything to be called that. We can't open the door. We are very scared. We have no one to ask for help," a student was quoted saying by India Today.

To ensure safety and security of Kashmiri students, region's former chief minister Omar Abdullah met India's home minister Rajnath

Singh and sought his intervention.

"I took the opportunity to inform Rajnath Singh Sb of the reports I had received of Kashmiri students & others being threatened/harassed and requested him to appoint a nodal officer in HMO India to ensure the directive issued to states is followed in letter & spirit (sic)," he wrote on Twitter.

Condemning the "xenophobic attacks" on Kashmiri students and traders, All India

Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen President Asaduddin Owaisi said "India cannot let rule of law be replaced by a rule of mobs."

Chairman of Hurriyat Conference, a conglomerate of separatist groups in Indian-controlled Kashmir, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, also denounced the assault on Kashmiri students and traders.

Mirwaiz said that not only students but Kashmiri businessmen and traders staying in various places in India were also targeted and harassed, forcing many to flee.

The top separatist leader further said that the vicious propaganda against Kashmiris projected by certain sections of Indian media and the distorted image of Kashmir and the discourse around its disputed status have made the lives of Kashmiri staying in India all the more vulnerable to attacks by goons.

So far, attacks on Kashmiri students have been reported from Dehradun, Jodhpur, Ambala, Panchkula, Delhi, and Patna among others.

Meanwhile, in a heartening gesture, many Indians opened their homes to Kashmiri students in different Indian cities, especially New Delhi, and strongly condemned the harassment faced by them.

Twitter censors messages, but not if you are Trump

By Lachin Rezaian

TEHRAN (MNA) — Twitter has temporarily banned account of Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, in a politically-motivated move, for posting a message saying “Imam Khomeini’s verdict regarding Salman Rushdie is based on divine verses and just like divine verses, it is solid and irrevocable.”

Twitter says it has banned Leader’s account according to policy against violent threats, while it has acknowledged in 5 emails that there has been no violation of TOS. “We have investigated the reported content and could not identify any violations of the Twitter Rules, or applicable law.”

In the tweet that marked the order’s anniversary and was flagged by Twitter, Ayatollah Khamenei wrote that the “verdict” on Rushdie was “based on divine verses and just like divine verses, it is solid and irrevocable.”

The British Indian novelist and writer Salman Rushdie was sentenced to death by a verdict issued by Imam Khomeini for insulting Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)



in his fourth novel, The Satanic Verses, which was written in 1988 and sparked global protests among Muslims around the world.

Following the move, Managing Director of Mehr News Agency Ali Asgari posted a message on his Twitter account, condemn-

ing the politically-motivated move by the micro-blogging service.

He underlined that “Imam Khomeini’s historic fatwa cannot be censored.”

The social media giant is accused of taking a selective approach to the treatment of messages. The debate has been fueled

by a series of war-mongering statements tweeted by Trump, in which he threatened North Korea with “fire and fury” and Iran with “consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered before” in an all-caps tweet.

Twitter has come under fire from Trump critics for not punishing the president for specific use of the platform.

Twitter’s policy states that threats of violence can get you kicked off; now our common sense says it SHOULD remove this message because it threatens nuclear annihilation upon an entire country. Yes, it is violating Twitter’s policies, but not if you are Trump. Here’s why:

Twitter treats Trump differently than a “regular” user.

Interestingly, Twitter officials deny this, saying President Trump does not have a “blanket exception” from a possible ban by the social media platform.

Elsewhere, justifying its decision to not delete Trump’s tweets, the company also said that blocking world leaders from Twitter would “hide important information people should be able to see and debate.”

Europe has not taken action to keep JCPOA

1 → The EU and, in particular, Germany, Britain and France, have not taken the necessary steps to maintain a nuclear deal with Iran after eight months. Undoubtedly, people like Federica Mogrini, EU foreign policy chief, also believe in this. Now the “deceived Europe” is trying to maintain the nuclear deal with Iran.

It seems that the European authorities don’t intend to confess that they had been tricked by Trump right now. In this way, they’re trying to keep their prestige, but they can’t do it forever, and sooner or later, they will be forced to do so.

Finally, Iran’s patience on the European Union is

coming to an end. The European Union continues to play its ground in the United States. This issue is never acceptable to Iran.

If the European authorities take no serious action to secure Iran’s rights in a nuclear deal, the possibility of our country’s departure from this deal is very high.

The tragedy of drowned refugees and migrants lingers on in the Mediterranean

TEHRAN (FNA) — If you want to know why the Mediterranean Sea continues to drown refugees and migrants, consider the following news headlines that appeared this week first:

- Citizens of Deir Ezzur Call on U.S., French Military to Leave Syria
- More Civilians Killed in U.S. Airstrikes in Deir Ezzur
- Palestinians Campaign to Halt Settler Attacks
- Yemeni Conjoined Twins Die Due to Saudi Siege
- Syrian Army Reinforces Occupied Golan Borders after Israel’s Attack
- Terrorists Launch Chemical Attack on Syrian Army in Idlib
- U.S. after Establishment of Permanent Base at Iraqi-Syrian Borders
- U.S. Focusing on Afghan Peace Accord, Not Withdrawal Agreement
- Pentagon Seeks Massive Increase for War ‘Slush Fund’

All these news headlines and more have one thing in common: They are destined to inevitably create death, despair, destruction and refugees - the main reasons why Fortress Europe has turned the Mediterranean into the sea of death and tragedy.

According to a new data collected through information received from 550 network organizations in 48 countries and from European experts, journalists and researchers in the field of migration, at least 27,000 migrants and refugees died last year in the Mediterranean Sea. These deaths account for 80 percent of all the entries, as there are probably thousands more dead, corpses that were never found and/or not accounted for.

Let us not forget the shadows for this year too. Thanks to the catastrophic policies of the



Trump White House and the cult of regime change on the Capitol Hill, the Mediterranean Sea is set to continue to be this year the scene of greater death and despair as well.

It is doubtless one of Washington’s worst crimes, which has imposed Muslim travel ban and often claims that most refugees and migrants do not provide any benefits for the U.S., that the majority of them are poor, uneducated and criminal. Quite to the opposite, several surveys have already disclosed that a majority of those who manage to land on the European borders are healthy, physically powerful and educated youth, who mostly know a foreign language, and more wealthy people who carry much cash and gold; most of others do not live long to even see the border fences.

Even the small portion of those refugees

and immigrants who are poor or uneducated and head for Western Europe and the United States from places like Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other regions have often been depicted as entrepreneurial, sturdy workers building up those wealthy nations. And if some are not any strong, adventurous men eager to make a living and gain success in the West, that’s because they are mainly desperate and tired people trying to escape America’s wars of attrition and deceit in the Middle East and beyond.

On the same token, Western European governments complaining about the influx of Muslim refugees and migrants easily forget that they are also the ones that equally created Middle Eastern poverty, desperation and conflicts. They are the ones that backed the endless wars of attrition by the United States

and paved the way for human mobility that in the end provided a solution for them and their children: trying to escape the U.S.-backed wars and ultimately cross or drown in the Mediterranean Sea. Which in reality is very tragic just like the Mediterranean per se, on which shore many desperate souls lost their lives and will continue to die this year, while holding their infants in their arms because the word ‘withdrawal’ doesn’t exist in the dictionary of Pentagon regime and the cult of regime change in Washington.

In spite of immense suffering and wars, the tragedy of the drowned refugees and migrants of the Mediterranean will linger on because the United States and its allies have no intention to end their permanent wars and leave the Middle East. They will make sure the Mediterranean will continue to serve as the sea of death for thousands of migrants and refugees.

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, is a United Nations multilateral treaty that defines who is a refugee, and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. On that front, Western governments haven’t done their bit fully yet.

The West European countries should end their support for America’s permanent wars. Instead of turning countries into failed states and instead of drowning their uprooted peoples in deadly waves, per international humanitarian law, Western governments should allow the Mediterranean Sea to be a safe route for migrants and refugees whose only sin has been, and still is, escaping America’s endless wars and atrocities in Muslim heartlands.

Seven killed in Kashmir gun battle days after deadly attack

At least seven people, including two armed rebels and four Indian army soldiers, have been killed in an ongoing gun battle in India-administered Kashmir.

The gun battle on Monday in Pinglan village of Pulwama district comes days after 42 Indian security personnel were killed in a suicide blast - the worst such attack in 30 years of Kashmir conflict, which has raised fears of confrontation with arch-enemy Pakistan.

A senior Indian army official told Al Jazeera that the operation against the rebels was launched early on Monday following intelligence inputs about their presence in a house in Pinglan village.

“In the encounter, two militants and four army soldiers have been killed. The operation is still in progress,” the official said, adding that the identity of the rebels was being ascertained.

“Among the slain soldiers is a top army officer,” he added. Since the beginning of this year, there have been 14 gun battles in Kashmir. In February alone, there have been six such encounters in which 14 rebels have been killed.

The total number of rebels killed so far this year stands at 31, while 49 security forces died in the same period.

Officials said a local civilian named Mushtaq Ahmad, who was critically injured in Monday’s crossfire, also succumbed to his wounds.

Residents in Pinglan village said several houses were



blown up in the ensuing gun battle.

Officials said the gun battle is still on and two more rebels are believed to be trapped in Pinglan village.

On that day, 42 Indian paramilitary personnel were killed when a 20-year-old suicide bomber rammed his explosives-laden car into one of the buses in the convoy carrying the men.

The deadly attack took place on a highway in Pulwama, which connects the disputed territory’s main city of Srinagar with its southern parts.

Pakistan-based rebel group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility for the attack, forcing India to pledge a “strong response” and undertake various measures, including

withdrawing the most-favoured nation (MFN) status from its belligerent neighbor.

The bomber has been identified as a local rebel named Adil Dar, a resident of Pulwama, who had joined the JeM’s suicide squad nearly a year ago, according to police officials.

The deadliest attack so far in the decades-long armed rebellion in Kashmir has triggered a massive tension between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, facing a general election that must be held by May, is under domestic pressure for decisive action against Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the suicide attack in mainland India, there have been multiple “revenge attacks” by right-wing mobs on Kashmiris who have been “threatened to leave or face consequences”.

Dozens of Kashmiri students have fled their colleges across India and headed home.

Many people in the national capital, New Delhi, and other cities offered their homes to the Kashmiris vacating their places following threats to their lives.

On Monday, Aakar Patel, head of Amnesty International India, said in a statement that the central and state governments in India must ensure that “ordinary Kashmiri women and men do not face targeted attacks, harassment and arbitrary arrests following the killing of 42 security personnel.”

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Munich Conference: European leaders should reject U.S. request for Syria troop deployment



TEHRAN (FNA) — Senior U.S. lawmakers and military officials are pressing America’s allies in Europe to commit troops to create a buffer zone on the Syrian side of that country’s border with Turkey as the bulk of U.S. troops there withdraw. If they agree, President Trump says he is open to keeping some U.S. troops there to help them.

Before anything else, this is the same Trump that voided the 2015 Iran nuclear deal ratified by the UN Security Council; threatened and discredited the International Criminal Court; pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council; withdrew from negotiations on the Global Compact for Migration; left UNE-SCO and the Paris Climate Agreement; and defunded the UN Reliefs and Works Agency. There is no guarantee that this time he will do otherwise – keeping some troops in Syria to help their European counterparts when the going gets tough.

However, U.S. government officials still outlined what they called the “post-caliphate strategy” and the U.S. drive to seek European troop deployments in northeastern Syria during public remarks at the Munich Security Conference on Friday, an annual confab of officials, lawmakers and journalists from around the world. Yet the above and many other hugely damaging actions and obnoxious lies by Trump and his administration officials are the reasons why the world is in turmoil now. No world leader at the Munich Security Conference should ever stand by idly in the face of such assault on globalism, multilateralism, human rights, and the international institutions in place to defend them.

And of course, European troop deployment to Syria is going to be a tough sell at a time when the unpopular Trump administration is battling European allies on Iran, trade and burden-sharing. And that’s not all:

This new play is there to help the U.S. to maintain some influence and presence in northeastern Syria. European leaders should never help mitigate Trump’s planned withdrawal as the only way of protecting their own security. Trump despises the EU and the UN and all they represent – multilateralism and the rule of law. A better option for the EU is to help rebuild post-war Syria including lifting of all U.S.-led sanctions and restrictions.

European leaders have already seen the devastating consequences of Trump’s hostility towards the international community, international trade, and international rule of law. He delights in poking the international civil society in the eye on trade, security and diplomacy. The man who doesn’t run away from controversy and favors U.S. “sovereignty” over its commitments to the global community has successfully managed to threaten and weaken multilateralism and international human rights bodies. European leaders should never give the Trump administration officials the impression that everyone agrees with the false claims they made on one of the biggest stages in the world: Munich Security Conference 2019.

The truth is that Trump has stripped away any remaining credit for Washington. He has shaken the foundations of multilateralism by voiding international treaties and escalating trade wars. The world is responding in kind, of course, reaffirming its commitment to international trade, climate and security agreements, and retaliating with levies on thousands of U.S. products, which sadly at the same time “puts the world’s largest economies at each other’s throats.” Any doubters should ask UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

What Trump and his one-man foreign policy has done to the world is not a joke and certainly the Munich Security Conference is not a comedy club for a thunderous recitation of his “America First” policies or go-it-alone views that have strained U.S. relationships with the EU and destabilized the planet. We can still remember vividly how last year Secretary General Guterres issued a stark warning of “growing chaos and confusion as the rules-based global order comes under a threat of breaking down.”

Guterres told the 193-member General Assembly that trust in the global order and among states was “at a breaking point” and that “international cooperation was becoming more difficult” because of Trump’s “America First” policies. There has to be sound minds in the Munich Security Conference to reiterate his concern yet again that “world order is increasingly chaotic” and European leaders need to promote and support a reformed, reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system. In between, no one should ever think for a moment that prolonging the reckless war and occupation in Syria would do that.

By most account, the Munich Security Conference is the place for European leaders to use their time on the stage to list the international security agreements they have made or helped to protect, the protocols agreed and treaties signed. Unlike Trump, they should never delight in telling the participants how many such pieces of paper they have binned.

The prolonged occupation of Syria and war that the Trump administration advocated at the Munich Conference on Friday will only lead to heightened tensions and conflicts in the Middle East and beyond. Standing up for global peace and security, it is now up to European leaders to say no to Washington’s erosion of multilateralism and international law.

They must reject the obsolete manifesto for troop deployment, permanent war and occupation that Trump’s “America First” foreign policy is so eager to spread in Syria and across the region.

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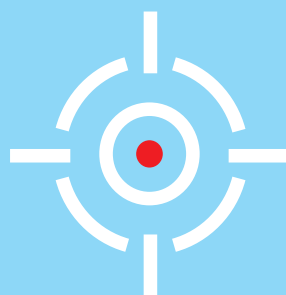
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57% of Iranians insufficiently active: deputy health minister

HEALTH TEHRAN — Prevalence of insufficient physical activity is about 57 percent in Iran, deputy health minister Baqer Larijani has said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) insufficient physical activity is one of the leading risk factors for death worldwide. It is a key risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes. More than 80% of the world's adolescent population is insufficiently physically active.

Some 300,000 Iranians die of NCDs annually in Iran, Larijani regretted, adding that, one-fourth of the country's population (standing at 80 million) are overweight or obese which also results in developing NCDs.

Unfortunately, diabetes, a non-communicable disease, is a serious threat to the people's health and is the fifth leading cause of death in the country, Fars news agency quoted Larijani as saying on Monday.

Diabetes prevalence is 10 percent in Iran, he lamented, saying that prevalence of the disease is high among people aging 50 or more.

He went on to say that 10 percent of the country's health budget is being spent on treating diabetes and its side effects.

Larijani also highlighted that 30 percent of Iranians are suffering high blood pressure and 25 percent have high cholesterol levels.

Director of the Health Ministry's nutrition office Zahra Abdollahi also told IRNA news agency on Sunday that 40 percent of men and 52 percent of women aging 15 to 64 are suffering overweight or obesity.

Cardiovascular diseases (mainly heart disease and stroke), which were the leading cause of death in 2012, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders (especially osteoarthritis – a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints), and some cancers (including endometrial, breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney, and colon) are common health consequences of overweight and obesity, WHO warns.

Abdollahi also explained that 59 percent of women and 36 percent of men aged 45 to 65 years are suffering from high blood pressure.



Unfortunately, diabetes, a non-communicable disease, is a serious threat to the people's health and is the fifth leading cause of death in the country.

Mayo Clinic warns that uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke by damaging and weakening your brain's blood vessels, causing them to narrow, rupture or leak. High blood pressure can also cause blood clots to form in the arteries leading to your brain, blocking blood flow and potentially causing a stroke.

She also noted that 40 percent of women and 33 percent of men aged between 45 and 65 years are diagnosed with high blood sugar.

Having too much sugar in the blood for long periods of time can contribute to serious health problems if it's not treated.

Hyperglycemia can damage the vessels that supply blood to vital organs, which can increase the risk of heart disease and

stroke, kidney disease, vision problems, and nerve problems.

Moreover, 30 percent of men and 36 percent of women aged 25 to 64 years also have high cholesterol due to overweight and obesity, consuming fast food, and insufficient physical activity, she lamented.

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that's found in the fats (lipids) in your blood. While your body needs cholesterol to continue building healthy cells, having high cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease.

Abdollahi further regretted that only 12 percent of men and 14 percent of women consume 5 units of fruits and vegetables on a daily basis, as they can play a key role in prevention and controlling non-com-

municable diseases.

■ Benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are important components of a healthy diet. Reduced fruit and vegetable consumption is linked to poor health and increased risk of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). An estimated 3.9 million deaths worldwide were attributable to inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption in 2017, WHO reported.

WHO recommend including fruits and vegetables as part of the daily diet which may reduce the risk of some NCDs including cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer. More limited evidence suggests that when consumed as part of a healthy diet low in fat, sugars and salt/sodium, fruits and vegetables may also help to prevent weight gain and reduce the risk of obesity, an independent risk-factor for NCDs.

Moreover, fruits and vegetables are rich sources of vitamins and minerals, dietary fiber and a host of beneficial non-nutrient substances including plant sterols, flavonoids and other antioxidants and consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables helps to ensure an adequate intake of many of these essential nutrients.

■ NCDs, global health threats

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally. Each year, 15 million people die from a NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years; over 85% of these "premature" deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.0 million), respiratory diseases (3.9million), and diabetes (1.6 million). These 4 groups of diseases account for over 80% of all premature NCD deaths.

Tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets all increase the risk of dying from a NCD. Detection, screening and treatment of NCDs, as well as palliative care, are key components of the response to NCDs.

Iran exporting radiopharmaceuticals to 15 countries

HEALTH TEHRAN — Iran is exporting radiopharmaceuticals to 15 countries worldwide, Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has said.

Radiopharmaceuticals, or medicinal radiocompounds, are a group of pharmaceutical drugs which have radioactivity. Radiopharmaceuticals can be used as diagnostic and therapeutic agents.

They emit radiation themselves, which is different from contrast media which absorb or alter external electromagnetism or ultrasound. The main group of these compounds are the radiotracers used to diagnose dysfunction in body tissues. While not all medical isotopes are radioactive, radiopharmaceuticals are the oldest and still most common such drugs.

Iran is a pioneer in the field of developing and producing radiopharmaceuticals in western Asia, Salehi said, adding that the compounds are being exported to Egypt, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and some European countries.

Radiopharmaceuticals are being manufactured in Iran, also ongoing research on developing new radiocompounds are carried out continuously, IRNA news agency quoted Salehi as saying on Monday.

"For one, we have conducted research programs on developing a radiopharmaceutical to treat prostate cancer," he added.

The radiopharmaceutical for treating prostate cancer is now being trialed on patients in some medical sciences universities such as Shiraz, Shahid Beheshti and Mashhad, he highlighted.

Salehi went on to say enemies are striving to impose sanctions on exportation of radiopharmaceuticals, however, "we don't give up".

■ How do radiopharmaceuticals work?

According to the Mayo Clinic, radiopharmaceuticals are radioactive agents. However, when small amounts are used, the radiation your body receives from them is very low and is considered safe. When larger amounts of these agents are given to treat disease, there may be different effects on the body.

When radiopharmaceuticals are used to help diagnose medical problems, only small amounts are given to the patient. The radiopharmaceutical then passes through, or is taken up by, an organ of the body (which organ depends on what radiopharmaceutical is used and how it has been given). Then the radioactivity is detected, and pictures are produced, by special imaging equipment. These pictures allow the nuclear medicine doctor to study how the organ is working and to detect cancer or tumors that may be present in the organ.

Some radiopharmaceuticals are used in larger amounts to treat certain kinds of cancer and other diseases. In those cases, the radioactive agent is taken up in the cancerous area and destroys the affected tissue.



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HERITAGE

TEHRAN

Iranian-German team to start archaeological survey in Kerman

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — A joint team of Iranian and German experts is about to start an archaeological exploration across southern regions of Kerman province, southeastern Iran.

The Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Center will conduct the project in close collaboration with the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, CHTN reported.



Nader Alidadi-Soleymani from Iran and Professor Peter Pfalzner from Germany will co-lead the survey, which will cover Kahnouj, Rudbar and Manujan counties, a local official said.

Some 20 researchers, archaeologists, and interdisciplinary specialists will collaborate in the project that is scheduled to be running through early April.

The big and sprawling Kerman province has been a cultural melting pot since antiquity, blending Persians with subcontinental tribe dwellers. It is home to myriad historical sites and scenic landscapes such as Bazaar-e Sartasari, Jabalieh Dome, Ganjali Khan Bathhouse, Malek Jameh Mosque and Shahdad Desert to name a few.

Turkish tourism sector eyes int'l congresses

Turkey is holding high hopes for the future in the field of congress tourism, representatives of the sector said on Feb. 17.

Timur Bayindir, head of the Hotel Association of Turkey (TUROB) told Anadolu Agency in an exclusive interview that the country and its most popular touristic destination Istanbul will reenter the routes to international events this year.

“Congress tourism requires long-term planning, as the proposals for the organizations to be held in 2021 and 2022 have already been received,” Bayindir said.

“Turkey will return to its former world ranking position if we don’t experience any negativity in the next 2-3 years,” he said.

Pointing the development of congress tourism in Turkey in the last decade, Bayindir said: “In 2013, which was a record-year, Turkey hosted 221 international meetings to become the 18th country in the world.”

He noted that the leading countries in this field are the U.S., Germany, and the U.K., while the prominent cities are Barcelona, Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and London.

“Turkey suffered from the cancellation of many approved organizations over the past three years following a fabricated negative security perception.

“As of 2016, the country lost its place in the top 10 and Istanbul couldn’t hold its rank among the first 20 cities in the world,” Bayindir said. (Source: hurriyetdailynews.com)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Centre of Vienna

Vienna, situated on the Danube River in the eastern part of Austria, developed from early Celtic and Roman settlements into a medieval and Baroque city, eventually becoming the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It played an essential role as the leading European music center, hosting major personalities in the development of music from the 16th to the 20th centuries, particularly Viennese Classicism and Romanticism, consolidating Vienna’s reputation as the ‘musical capital’ of Europe.



Vienna is also rich in architectural ensembles, particularly Baroque mansions and gardens as well as the late 19th-century Ringstrasse ensemble lined with grand buildings, monuments, and parks.

The property consists of the city’s medieval core (based on the Roman settlement), the principal Baroque ensembles with their axial layouts, and the Grunderzeit constructions from the beginning of the modern period.

At the beginning of the 12th century the settlement here expanded beyond the Roman defenses, which were demolished. During the Ottoman conflicts in the 16th and 17th centuries, the medieval town’s walls, which surrounded a much larger area, were rebuilt and provided with bastions.

This remained the core of Vienna until the medieval walls were demolished in the second half of the 19th century. The inner city contains a number of medieval-era buildings, including the Schottenkloster, the oldest monastery in Austria, the churches of Maria am Gestade (one of the main Gothic structures), Michaelerkirche, Minoritenkirche and Minoritenkloster from the 13th century, and St Stephen’s Cathedral, which dates from the 14th and 15th centuries.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iran expecting China, Mongolia to join UNESCO-registered Noruz

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — Iran is expecting China and Mongolia to officially join UNESCO-registered Noruz, which marks the beginning of spring and the new year.

In December 2016, Iran and 11 other countries registered Noruz as a common tradition.

The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO in a press release suggested that China and Mongolia may possibly join Noruz that is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, Mehr reported on Monday.

Noruz, which usually falls on March 21st every year, marks the beginning of spring across a vast geographical area encircling Iran. It was registered as a deep-rooted tradition being practiced in Iran, Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Iraq.

Tehran’s Milad Tower is to host an international ceremony in honor of Noruz on February 28, the report said.

Noruz was ratified during the 11th ses-



sion of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The feast was initially registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, as a common tradition for Iran, Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. However, the five other countries put in requests officially to be added to the list during a meeting held in Tehran in January 2014.

According to the UNESCO, Noruz promotes the values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families, as well as reconciliation and neighborliness, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and various communities.

Traditions that are practiced in Noruz vary from place to place, ranging from leaping over fires and streams in Iran to tightrope walking, lighting candles at house doors, traditional games such as horse racing or the traditional wrestling practiced in Kyrgyzstan.

Meybod celebrates becoming world city for Zilou

1 → At that time, the council also granted same titles to the city Abadeh for its art of “Woodcarving” and the village of Khorashad for the craft “Toebafi” (traditional hand woven fabrics).

The country’s handicrafts exports reached \$190 million in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar

year (started March 21, 2018), showing 11 percent growth year on year.

Traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are among Iranian exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and Germany, the U.S., the UK and other countries.



Tehran exhibit features handmade carpets, Tableau rugs



HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — An exhibition of handwoven Persian rugs, carpets and pictorial rugs opened to the public on Monday at the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex in northern Tehran.

A selection of traditional and nomadic floor coverings are also on show at the event, which will be running through February 22, Mehr reported.

Persian carpets are sought after in-

ternationally for their delicate designs and good quality. The country’s official figures show the carpets have a significant share in Iran’s non-oil exports.

According to a customs statistics, Iran’s export of hand-woven carpets increased 10 percent in terms of value during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 21-July 22, 2018), from a year earlier.

Photo exhibit showcasing Tehran’s attractions



TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN — The National Museum of Iran on Sunday kicked off a photo exhibition, showcasing Tehran as a must-see destination for international and foreign travelers, CHTN reported.

“Museums should be connected with cities [they are located in] and with people of the cities. We are very pleased with holding such events in museums which will develop links between various social groups,” the

museum’s director Jebreil Nokandeh said, addressing the opening ceremony.

Organized in collaboration with Tehran Municipality, the exhibition will be running through February 22.

Golestan Palace, Grand Bazaar, Treasury of National Jewels, Glass & Ceramic Museum, Masoudieh Palace, Sarkis Cathedral, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and Carpet Museum of Iran, are amongst top attractions of the Iranian capital.

‘Hidden city’ travel: why airlines are cracking down on a discount trick

Lufthansa is suing a traveler over a loophole that many are using to get cheaper flights to popular destinations

Airlines are cracking down on a ticketing loophole that can knock thousands of pounds off the cost of travel – but the fight back is only giving more publicity to the advantages of “hidden city” travel.

At its most simplistic, hidden city ticketing is when a passenger purchases a ticket to less popular and thus cheaper destination that happens to be routed through a more popular, and thus pricier hub destination, and gets off there, skipping the last leg of their journey. Anyone can do it, providing you travel only with carry-on luggage.

It’s a dodge people have done for years but thanks to renewed publicity – and websites that take the leg work out of finding the best fares – airlines have called in their lawyers.

Proof of the industry’s new willingness to act against the long-established practice came in an Berlin court last week where Lufthansa is redoubling its efforts to sue a European business class traveler who used a hidden city ticket to save thousands on a transatlantic flight.

According to a court document, an unnamed male passenger booked a return flight from Oslo to Seattle, which had a layover in Frankfurt. He skipped the final, Frankfurt to Oslo return flight, flying to Berlin on a separate ticket.

The switch, which sounds innocuous enough, cost Lufthansa around €2,112 (around £1,864 or \$2,385), the amount the airline is now seeking to reclaim from the customer. Whether the scheme was illegal or not is up for debate. Lufthansa’s case – was thrown out of a Berlin court in December and is now under appeal. But the airline’s action reveals the industry’s determination to close the loophole.

Once a practice offered by knowing travel agents, it’s



since been now automated through sites like Skiplagged – to the evident annoyance of airlines who claim they are in effect being deprived both of revenue from travel to the passenger’s intended destination and the ability to sell the seat that’s been skipped.

If previous attempts to challenge “hidden city ticketing” in the U.S. are anything to go by, the German carrier may find the benefit of identifying and pursuing passengers who fail to complete their journeys under the terms of their ticket hardly worth the costs.

According to airline industry analyst Robert Mann, the issue of hidden city ticketing has always been out there but it was only when websites including the US-based Skiplagged began to commercialize the system that the industry took notice.

“Airlines pricing is arcane to say the least, especially when pricing can vary by a factor of 10 for almost the same product, but if a customer chooses to use the ticket or a portion of it that’s inconsistent with the terms of sale, it becomes an issue. If the practice

becomes common knowledge, and attempts to use it increase, it goes from being a tiny hole in a big bucket to a huge hole spilling out revenue.”

In 2015 the booking firm Orbitz and carriers in the U.S. sued Skiplagged, which at the time was claiming one million visitors a month, citing 22-year-old founder Akhtar Zaman for “unfair competition” and “deceptive behavior”, and alleging that the site promoted “strictly prohibited” travel. The case against Zaman was ultimately thrown out over issues of jurisdiction.

Mann believes the Lufthansa’s decision to take action may be one of scale. Gaming the system within the U.S. may cost airlines a few hundred dollars, based on the company’s ability to re-sell the seat that wasn’t used, but with international fares running into the thousands, the stakes for the airlines are significantly raised.

“This is a highly competitive industry so when it comes to international ticketing the numbers become big enough not to ignore very quickly,” Mann says.

The practice of hidden city ticketing also holds dangers for passengers. An airline may not notice that a ticket holder has not shown up for a part of flight, but if the practice is repeated or obvious, customers may find themselves stranded in the wrong city, find that the return portion of their trip has been voided, or that they’ve been removed from loyalty programs.

In some instances, passengers have found themselves met at the gate by airline attorneys and challenged with a demand for additional fees. The law is as yet unclear on these cases.

“It’s a calculated risk,” said Mann, “but the numbers are big enough to make it a felony in some cases.”

As Lufthansa’s decision to appeal the case makes clear, airlines are now willing to put those dueling positions to test again, this time in a Berlin court.

(Source: The Guardian)

New study of fossil plants shows the emergence of the Pacific Northwest's temperate forests

In a recent study scientists described the emergence of these ecosystems about 51-53 million-years-ago — a time with the highest-known global temperatures in the past 66-million-years — when the Pacific Northwest was a subtropical climate similar to today's southern Florida.

So how did temperate forests emerge during a hot, humid climate? The answer lies within the fossil record and is made possible by another icon of the Pacific northwest — volcanic mountain chains.

Alexander Lowe, graduate of Brandon University in Manitoba, Canada, and current graduate student at the University of Washington and Burke Museum, and co-authors analyzed 3,700 fossils from a unique paleontological site called the McAbee Fossil Beds in southern British Columbia, Canada.

The site is an ancient lakebed formed by the surrounding active volcanoes. The ash from multiple eruptions and other sediment washing into the lake preserved an abundance of beautiful plant and insect fossils, and also micro-fossils like pollen and spores.

Different geological layers

The team sampled fossils from two different geological layers, representing two different snapshots in time that are estimated to be only 10,000 – 100,000 years apart. This geologic rarity allowed for the authors to look at forest dynamics operating over thousands to tens of thousands of years of time. More often, paleontologists are drawing comparisons across millions of years of time



and different locations.

Lowe and co-authors found the ancient forests consisted of several plants iconic to today's Pacific Northwest region: cedars, firs, and other conifers, maples, birch and even ferns. A blooming of diversity of many species of both flowering plants and conifers were found in these layers. The most prevalent conifer found was *Metasequoia*

occidentalis, the dawn redwood that is now native to eastern China.

Of the flowering plants, *Ulmus okanaganensis* (a species of elm), *Fagus langevinii* (a species of beech) and *Alnus parvifolia* (a species of alder) were the most abundant broadleaf species at the site.

Ancient forests

"It is interesting that the plants we see

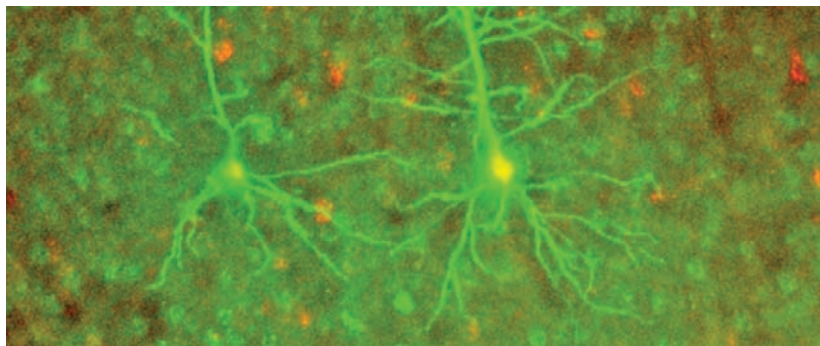
dominating these ancient forests represent a mix of plants we find today in the Pacific Northwest, southeastern U.S., and eastern China. This mixture of plants resulted in a high diversity, probably comparable to that seen in modern tropics, despite these forests having existed then at higher elevations, and the fact there was cold hardy plants around, firs for example," Lowe said. "It is also interesting that despite volcanic eruptions that were frequent and dynamic through time, the forest didn't change much between the two layers we analyzed, so these forests were apparently quite resilient to volcanic eruptions."

The team reconstructed the ancient temperature and precipitation using the shape and size of fossil leaves, and found it to be similar to modern day Seattle, despite then existing at higher elevations. Apparently, some of the iconic temperate plants of the Pacific Northwest thrived in this cooler high elevation pocket, when the rest of the region was a subtropical Florida-like climate.

Volcanic activity that was frequent (but not devastating enough to wipe out all plants with each eruption) provided fertile soil. Also, lower elevations in the foothills of the mountains created zones where the temperate, cooler plants could mingle with the warm-loving plants, providing an environment for both groups of plants to coexist in a highly diverse mix of plant species.

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

Neuroscientists say they've found an entirely new form of neural communication



Scientists think they've identified a previously unknown form of neural communication that self-propagates across brain tissue, and can leap wirelessly from neurons in one section of brain tissue to another — even if they've been surgically severed.

The discovery offers some radical new insights about the way neurons might be talking to one another, via a mysterious process unrelated to conventionally understood mechanisms, such as synaptic transmission, axonal transport, and gap junction connections.

"We don't know yet the 'So what?' part of this discovery entirely," says neural and biomedical engineer Dominique Durand from Case Western Reserve University.

"But we do know that this seems to be an entirely new form of communication in the brain, so we are very excited about this."

Before this, scientists already knew there was more to neural communication than the above-mentioned connections that have been studied in detail, such as synaptic transmission.

Neural oscillations

For example, researchers have been aware for decades that the brain exhibits slow waves of neural oscillations whose purpose we don't understand, but which appear in the cortex and hippocampus when we sleep, and so are hypothesized to play a part in memory consolidation.

The "functional relevance of this input and output decoupled slow network rhythm remains a mystery," explains neuroscientist Clayton Dickinson from the University of Alberta, who wasn't involved in the new research but has discussed it in a perspective article.

"But (it's) one that will probably be solved by an elucidation of both the cellular and the intercellular mechanisms giving rise to it in the first place."

To that end, Durand and his team investigated slow periodic activity *in vitro*, studying the brain waves in hippocampal slices extracted from decapitated mice.

What they found was that slow periodic activity can generate electric fields which in turn activate neighboring cells, constituting a form of neural communication without chemical synaptic transmission or gap junctions.

"We've known about these waves for a long time, but no one knows their exact function and no one believed they could spontaneously propagate," Durand says.

"I've been studying the hippocampus, itself just one small part of the brain, for 40 years and it keeps surprising me."

This neural activity can actually be modulated - strengthened or blocked - by applying weak electrical fields and could be an analogue form of another cell communication method, called ephaptic coupling.

Electric fields

The team's most radical finding was that these electrical fields can activate neurons through a complete gap in severed brain tissue, when the two pieces remain in close physical proximity.

To "ensure that the slice was completely cut, the two pieces of tissue were separated and then rejoined while a clear gap was observed under the surgical microscope," the authors explain in their paper.

The "slow hippocampal periodic activity could indeed generate an event on the other side of a complete cut through the whole slice."

If you think that sounds freaky, you're not the only one. The review committee at The Journal of Physiology — in which the research has been published — insisted the experiments be completed again before agreeing to print the study.

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

Great whites wiped out ancient 50ft sharks: Study



The megalodon may have been a giant predatory sea creature measuring as much as 50ft, but scientists believe it was no match for the competition posed by the great white shark — who they think wiped it out.

An international team of paleontologists arrived at this conclusion as they tried to answer when the *Otodus megalodon* went extinct. They think the biggest ever shark was likely killed off at least a million years prior to current estimates.

To calculate when the massive sea creatures were last seen in Earth's oceans, the researchers studied every megalodon fossil discovered in California and Baja California, Mexico, where the remains of these fish are plentiful. They also studied existing data on fossils, and found inaccuracies. The results led the researchers to conclude that the megalodon went extinct much earlier than previously thought.

This calls into question past research that suggested the great white's hulking cousin went extinct around 2.6 million years ago because of a supernova, believed to have spewed out radiation and caused marine life to mutate and fall ill with diseases such as cancer.

Vetting every fossil occurrence

Dr. Robert Boessenecker, study co-author and a vertebrate paleontologist at the College of Charleston, commented: "We used the same worldwide dataset as earlier researchers but thoroughly vetted every fossil occurrence, and found that most of the dates had several problems — fossils with dates too young or imprecise, fossils that have been misidentified, or old dates that have since been refined by improvements in geology; and we now know the specimens are much younger."

The "extinction of *O. megalodon* was previously thought to be related to this marine mass extinction—but in reality, we now know the two are not immediately related," Boessenecker said.

And as sea mammal fossils dating back between one to two million years are rare, his team wondered whether the mass extinction happened at all. His team put forward an alternative theory. Instead of an "immediate and catastrophic extinction" triggered by an astronomical cataclysm like a supernova, evidence indicates there was more likely a time when species went extinct and others appeared, in what is called a faunal turnover.

The great white shark

The new extinction date gives a window of around 400,000 years for the great white shark to wear away at the megalodon. The paleontologists believe newly evolved great white sharks could have been a similar size to baby megalodons, leading to the depletion of their population.

Boessenecker said: "We propose that this short overlap (3.6 million to 4 million years ago) was sufficient time for great white sharks to spread worldwide and outcompete *O. megalodon* throughout its range, driving it to extinction — rather than radiation from outer space."

More answers regarding the fate of the megalodon are expected from the scientists who were last year awarded a grant to explore why it went extinct.

Sora Kim from the University of California Merced, who was part of the team awarded the money, commented at the time: "There are many ideas about why the megalodon went extinct."

(Source: [Newsweek](#))

Astronomers find a nearby river of stars

Astronomers have found a river of stars, a stellar stream in astronomical parlance, covering most of the southern sky. The stream is relatively nearby and contains at least 4000 stars that have been moving together in space since they formed, about 1 billion years ago.

Night sky centered on the south Galactic pole in a so-called stereographic projection. In this special projection, the Milky Way curves around the entire image in an arc. The stars in the stream are displayed in red and cover almost the entire southern Galactic hemisphere, thereby crossing many well-known constellations.

Astronomy & Astrophysics publishes the work of researchers from the University of Vienna, who have found a river of stars,



a stellar stream in astronomical parlance, covering most of the southern sky. The stream is relatively nearby and contains at least 4000 stars that have been moving together in space since they formed, about 1 billion years ago. Due to its proximity to Earth, this stream is a perfect workbench on which to test the disruption of clusters, measure the gravitational field of the Milky Way, and learn about coeval extrasolar planet populations with upcoming planet-finding missions.

Our own host galaxy, the Milky Way, is home to star clusters of variable sizes and ages. We find many baby clusters within molecular clouds, fewer middle-age and old age clusters in the Galactic disk, and even fewer massive, old globular clusters in the halo. These clusters, regardless of their origin and age, are all subject to tidal forces along their orbits in the Galaxy. Given enough time, the Milky Way gravitational forces relentlessly pull them apart, dispersing their stars into the collection of stars we know as the Milky Way.

"Most star clusters in the Galactic disk disperse rapidly after their birth as they do not contain enough stars to create a deep gravitational potential well, or in other words, they do not have enough glue to keep them together."

Thanks to the precision of the Gaia measurements, the authors could measure the 3D motion of stars in space. When carefully looking at the distribution of nearby stars moving together, one particular group of stars, as yet unknown and unstudied, immediately caught the eye of the researchers.

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

Researchers first to show hinge morphology of click beetle's latch mechanism

Aimy Wissa, assistant professor of mechanical science and engineering (MechSE) at Illinois, leads an interdisciplinary research team to study click beetles to inspire more agile robots. The team, which includes MechSE Assistant Professor Alison Dunn and Dr. Marianne Alleyne, a research scientist in the Department of Entomology, recently presented their ongoing and novel work on the quick release mechanism of click beetles at the 2019 Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology (SICB) Annual Meeting.

Ophelia Bolmin, a graduate student in Wissa's Bio-inspired Adaptive Morphology (BAM) Lab, presented novel synchrotron X-ray footage that showed the internal latch mechanism of the click beetle, and demonstrated for the first time to the scientific community how the hinge morphology and mechanics enable this unique clicking mechanism. The presentation, the "click beetle latch mechanism: An in-vivo study using synchrotron X-rays," was part of an invited symposium on mechanisms of energy flow in organismal movement.

This work builds on research that was initiated by the Illinois team nearly two years ago, detailing the click beetles' legless self-righting jumping mechanism. The team already built prototypes of a hinge-like spring-loaded device that are being incorporated into a robot.

Rather minimal research had been performed on the click beetle's click mechanism in the past, and the Illinois team is the first to explore the insect within the field of bio-inspired - using inspiration from nature for innovative engineered designs. They continue to be at the forefront of this research, and further studies are scheduled to be published in coming months.

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

Artificial intelligence to boost Earth system science, new study suggests

A study by German scientists from Jena and Hamburg, published today in the journal *Nature*, shows that artificial intelligence (AI) can substantially improve our understanding of the climate and the Earth system. Especially the potential of deep learning has only partially been exhausted so far. In particular, complex dynamic processes such as hurricanes, fire propagation, and vegetation dynamics can be better described with the help of AI. As a result, climate and Earth system models will be improved, with new models combining artificial intelligence and physical modeling.

In the past decades mainly static attributes have been investigated using machine learning approaches, such as the distribution of soil properties from the local to the global scale. For some time now, it has been possible to tackle more dynamic processes by using more sophisticated deep learning techniques. This allows for example to quantify the global photosynthesis on land with simultaneous consideration of seasonal and short term variations.

"From a plethora of sensors, a deluge of Earth system data has become available, but so far we've been lagging behind in analysis and interpretation", explains Markus Reichstein, managing director of the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry in Jena, directory board member of the Michael-Stifel-Center Jena (MSCJ) and first author of the publication.

"This is where deep learning techniques become a promising tool, beyond the classical machine learning applications such as image recognition, natural language processing or AlphaGo", adds co-author Joachim Denzler from the Computer Vision Group of the Friedrich Schiller University Jena (FSU) and member of MSCJ. Examples for application are extreme events such as fire spreads or hurricanes, which are very complex processes influenced by local conditions but also by their temporal and spatial context.

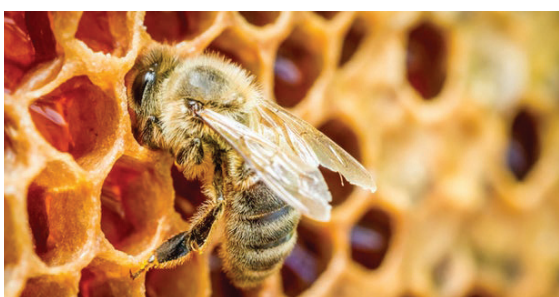
(Source: [techtimes.com](#))

Breeding bees with "clean genes" could help prevent colony collapse

Researchers have identified genes associated with cleanliness behaviors in bees, which could ultimately help protect colonies from collapse.

Honeybees are increasingly under threat, even recently making it onto the endangered species list in the U.S. for the first time. In a development that could help save these vital creatures from extinction, researchers from York University have identified a group of genes that appear to be related to how hygienic a particular colony of bees is, and selective breeding for these genes could help fight colony collapse.

In the last few years, populations of bees have drastically fallen across much of the world. No single cause has been agreed upon yet, but plenty of possible explanations have been proposed, including infections of parasites or our overzealous use of pesticides. Whatever the reason, the serious problem is that bees are one of the bottom blocks in the Jenga tower of natural ecosystems. Once they're gone, plants that rely on bees for pollination will follow, and so will the animals that eat those plants, and so on.



Higher chances of survival

For the new study, the York researchers investigated a positive trait that certain colonies seem to have. Some beehives seem to be generally "cleaner" than others, and worker bees in these colonies have been observed removing the sick and the dead from the hive. These hygienic behaviors have been linked with higher chances of survival for the colony as a whole, since the

pathogens are likely being taken out too.

Ideally, breeding colonies to be cleaner could make for hardier bees, offsetting some of the rapid decline of several species. So the York team sequenced the genomes of three populations of honeybees — two of which had been bred to be highly hygienic, while the third colony had more normal levels of cleanliness.

When they compared the three genomes, the team was able to identify at least 73 genes that seemed to be related to hygiene behaviors. With those candidates found, the researchers plan to develop tools that help beekeepers breed cleaner bees, which ultimately may help reduce the number of colonies that go on to collapse.

"Social immunity is a really important trait that beekeepers try to select in order to breed healthier colonies," says Professor Amro Zayed, corresponding author of the study. "Instead of spending a lot of time in the field measuring the hygienic behavior of colonies, we can now try breeding bees with these genetic mutations that predict hygienic behavior."

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

Women, environmental innovation, and green jobs festival to be held

WOMEN desk **TEHRAN** — A festival on women, environmental innovation and green jobs will be held at the Department of Environment (DOE).



The event is to be held on the occasion of birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (SA), which marks the national women's day, February 26, 2019, Mehr reported.

The festival is to be held with the cooperation of women's committee and public participation office of the DOE.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Leek and cheese quiche

"A fairly fast, surprisingly good quiche -- even quiche-doubters will like it!"

Ingredients:



2 tablespoons butter
2 cups sliced leeks
1 (9 inch) frozen pie crust, thawed
1 cup shredded Swiss cheese
1/4 cup grated Romano cheese
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
4 eggs
1 3/4 cups heavy cream
1 tomato, thinly sliced
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F (230 degrees C).
Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat, and saute the leeks until tender. Spread evenly over the bottom of the pie crust.
In a bowl, toss together the Swiss cheese, Romano cheese, and flour. Spread over the leeks.
In a separate bowl, beat together the eggs and heavy cream. Pour over the cheese layer in the pie crust. Top with the tomato slices, and season with salt and pepper.
Bake 15 minutes in the preheated oven. Reduce heat to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C), and continue baking 30 minutes, until the crust is lightly browned and a knife inserted in the center of the quiche comes out clean.

Tip

Aluminum foil can be used to keep food moist, cook it evenly, and make clean-up easier.

LEARN ENGLISH

Homeschooling

A: I think we should **home school** our children when we decide to have kids.
B: What? Why?
A: Well, our public schools here are not very good and private school are just too expensive. I have been **reading up** on home schooling and it has a lot of advantages.
B: Like what? I think that by doing something like that we would be **isolating** our children from **social interaction**.
A: Well, **first of all**, I would be able to teach them everything they learn in school in a more relaxed and fun way. I also think that having a **one-on-one** class is much better since you can focus more on his or her **strengths** or **weaknesses**.
B: I think neither your parents nor mine would agree to such an idea.
A: I will **bring it up** over Sunday brunch.
B: Good luck with that!
■ **Key vocabulary**
home school: to educate kids at home by a parent or tutor
read up: to do research or instruct yourself on a topic
isolate: to set apart from others; place alone
social interaction: meeting, talking, doing activities with people
first of all: firstly
one-on-one: a meeting or class between only two people
strengths: a quality that makes someone effective or useful
weakness: the quality or state of being weak
bring something up: to mention or open for discussion
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
GED: general education diploma which is the equivalent of a high school diploma
SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test is a test which is taken throughout the U.S. as an admission test to U.S. colleges
tutor: a person employed in the education of others, either individually or in groups.
recess: a short period of free time between school classes
quiz: a short quick test

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Esfandgan respects dignity of women, mothers and earth

By Naghmeh Mizanian

TEHRAN — Esfandgan is the day that people in ancient Iran praised the dignity of women, earth and mothers, all enjoying the quality of fertility.

The annual feast of Esfandgan, traditionally, is a day during which the Earth is praised and women are venerated. It is celebrated on the 29th of Bahman in the Iranian calendar, which falls on February 18.

Women, as the symbol of love and devotion, illustrated earth with its fertility and fruitfulness in ancient Iran.

The dignity of women or mothers in old Iran was commemorated on the 59th day of winter under the name Esfandgan, also called Sepandarmazdgan.

Esfand or Sepandarmazd (ancient pronunciation) means the mother of creation, love, piety or holy perfect-thinking and it is one of the qualities of God.

The earth is the worldly symbol of Esfand and it is the source of life, birth, piety and purity.

The qualities of earth such as love, piety, generosity, purity, and birth are undoubtedly hidden in women and mothers. Both women and the earth are symbols of birth and creation in many cultures because seeds grow in them.

Esfandgan is a celebration for honoring the dignity of Izad Sepandarmazd whose materialistic symbols are women and the earth.

In ancient Iran, Izads were symbols of

the qualities of God, and each day of a month was named after an Izad.

According to the ancient Iranian calendar, every day of the month had a name -- instead of a number. Currently, in Iranian calendar, each month has a name which is the name of one of the ancient Iran's Izads.

February 18, the fifth day of the ancient month of Esfand, according to the old Iranian calendar, is the day of the Esfandgan celebration.

It is a day in which the name of the day and the name of the month are the same, Sepandarmazd or Esfand.

In ancient Iran, every month, a coincidence happened between the name of the month and the name of the day, and that day was a monthly celebration. Esfandgan is the coincidence of the day of Esfand with the month of Esfand.

Abooreyhan Birooni (937-1408), a great Iranian scholar of the medieval Islamic era, in his book Asarolbaghiye explains about Esfandgan as a celebration to value honest, pious and husband-lover women. He introduces Esfandgan as the celebration of women or women's day in which men granted presents to their wives.

According to Asarolbaghiye, on this day people tried to make the earth clean or cultivate a plant.

Currently, Esfandgan is celebrated in different parts of Iran with different ceremonies. In the village of Afoos in Isfahan Province, a similar celebration named "Gol-



bahar" is held at the beginning of spring. On this day all men leave the village during the day and women take all responsibilities, and at the evening when men return home, they present their wives a gift.

Another similar celebration is held in Javaherdeh village, northern Iran, which is like a harvesting festival and at the end of the day husbands give presents to their wives.

Although the time of Esfandgan and Valentine's Day is very close, they have no correspondence. "Despite the fact that women are one of the most important representations of love and friendship, love can exist between friends, parents and children or countrymen."

In ancient Iran, like many other countries, women's day or mother's day was a unique issue not being mixed with the day of lovers.

Fashion and costume houses to be established

WOMEN desk **TEHRAN** — Houses of fashion and costume are to be established all around the country, Hamid Qobadi, head of the 8th edition of Fajr International Festival of Fashion and Costume, said here on Monday.

The first house of fashion and costume is to be opened in Shiraz, Qobadi said, hoping every province would have a fashion and costume house in the future.

The houses of fashion and costume are to be formed in retrofitted old buildings, said the official. The houses of costume do not merely look at the history of cloths but it has a view on the contemporary growth of costumes and fashion, he explained.

The 8th edition of the Fajr International Festival of Fashion and Costume was held February 14-17, 2019 for the first time in Chabahar, southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, to display Iranian art at international level.



The eighth edition of the international festival of fashion and costume hosted twenty countries.

Tunisia, Singapore, Canada, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Italy, Syria, Oman, France, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Spain and Indonesia attended the festival.

The organizers had opened a space of competition to encourage international participation and facilitate direct contacts between Iranian and foreign companies.

Lebanese women hail first female Arab interior minister

Lebanon has appointed the Arab world's first female interior minister in its new government, prizing open a wider foothold for women in its overwhelmingly male political scene.

Raya al-Hassan is one of four women to take cabinet jobs in the new coalition, more than ever before in Lebanon and three more than in the last government, in which even the minister for women was a man.

Though Hassan has already held top jobs - including finance minister in 2009-2011 - her appointment to a portfolio managing security was hailed as a step forward for women in Lebanese politics.

"This is a point of pride for all women and all the people who believe in women's capabilities," Hassan said.

"There are a lot of female interior and defense ministers in the world and they have proved their efficiency. It might

be a new phenomenon for Lebanon and Arab countries, but hopefully it will be repeated and not be unique," she added.

The three other women in the 30-strong cabinet are in charge of energy, administrative development and the economic empowerment of women and young people.

Though Lebanon is widely held to be liberal by regional standards, with women playing a prominent role in public life, some of its laws continue to uphold a patriarchal social code.

Much Lebanese civil law, including personal status matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, is applied according to religious sect and in some cases treats women differently to men. Lebanon has 17 recognized Muslim and Christian sects.

In 2017 the parliament abolished an old law that absolved rapists if they married their victims. But marital rape and child marriage are still legal.

Women make up 24 percent of faculty members

WOMEN desk **TEHRAN** — The 16-fold increase in the number of female faculty members in universities during the Iranian year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018) proves that 24 percent of the total faculty members are women.

Statistics released by workgroup of women and family affairs related to the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution shows that during the one year period of 1395-1396 (March 2016-2018), out of the total number of 1.87 million female students, 232 thousand were perusing an associate degree, 1.17 million bachelor's degree, 353 thousand master's degree, 46 thousand doctorate of medicine and of philosophy (MD-PhD), and 59 thousand PhD.

The statistics prove that the number of female university students has doubled during the period of 20 years, IRNA reported.



In 1396, the number of higher education centers for associate degree and bachelor's degree in the fields of women and family affairs including psychology, education of special children and especial education has reached to 64 centers.

According to statistics provided by the National Elite Foundation, the number of women being employed as members of faculty for undergraduate, Master's degree, and PhD levels have reached to 164 members over the past two years.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A < > >

Marriage rates falling by 5% annually, says health official

The rate of marriage is dropping by 5 percent annually in Iran, director general for population health and family office at the Ministry of Health has said. Currently both marriage rate and fertility rate are dropping in the country, Hamed Barakati said, adding that annually marriage rate is decreasing by 5 to 7 percent.

In the year 1389 (March 2010-March 2011) 890,000 marriages were registered while in 1396 (March 2017-March 2018) 670,000 marriages were reported, IRNA news agency quoted Barakati as saying on Saturday.

In the year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017) some 1.04 children were born while in the 1360s (1980s) the number of children born in some years reached 2 million, he added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ene”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates an unsaturated organic compound

■ **For example:** **Benzene** is used in the manufacture of a large number of chemicals that contribute to the production of plastics.

PHRASAL VERB

Wipe somebody out

■ **Meaning:** to make you feel extremely tired

■ **For example:** The heat had wiped us out.

IDIOM

When it rains, it pours

■ **Explanation:** when something good or bad happens, similarly good or bad things tend to follow

■ **For example:** After months of looking for a job, I suddenly have three job interviews this week. When it rains, it pours.

مدیرکل دفتر سلامت جمعیت و خانواده وزارت

بهداشت: میزان ازدواج هر سال ۵ درصد کم می شود

مدیرکل دفتر سلامت جمعیت و خانواده وزارت بهداشت گفت: میزان ازدواج هر سال ۵ درصد در کشور کم می شود.

حامد برکاتی گفت: در شرایط فعلی هم میزان ازدواج‌ها و هم میزان فرزندآوری در کشور کاهش یافته، سالانه بین ۵ تا ۷ درصد از میزان ازدواج‌ها کم شده است.

برکاتی روز شنبه در گفت و گو با خبرگزاری افزود: در سال ۸۹ حدود ۸۹۰ هزار و در سال ۹۶ حدود ۶۷۰ هزار ازدواج انجام شده است.

وی ادامه داد: متولدان سال ۹۵ حدود یک میلیون و ۴۰ هزار نفر بودند در حالی که در دهه ۶۰ در برخی سال‌ها حدود ۲ میلیون تولد اتفاق افتاد.

Cash-strapped Pakistan gives scandal-hit Saudi crown prince lavish welcome

Amid much fanfare, the House of Saud regime crown prince is visiting cash-strapped Pakistan on the first leg of an Asia tour in what analysts view as a charm offensive aimed at seeking allies and repairing his image, which has been badly tarnished on the world stage over the gruesome murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at Riyadh's consulate in Turkey as well as the war crimes the kingdom has been committing in Yemen.

Escorted by Pakistan's fighter jets, the fleet of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and his 1,000-strong entourage touched down in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Sunday evening for a two-day visit.

Pakistani Prime Imran Khan and army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa greeted the crown prince upon his arrival at the Nour Khan air base where he was welcomed with a 21-gun salute.

Khan personally drove bin Salman to the official residence of the prime minister, where he does not actually stay.

Security has been tightened in Islamabad, with 1,000 new checkpoints erected around the capital and the adjoining garrison city of Rawalpindi.

The fortified diplomatic zone in Islamabad was sealed off, and the airspace over the city shut down.

Saudi and Pakistani flags were displayed throughout the capital, alongside portraits of MBS and Khan.

Pakistani authorities also blocked mobile phone and internet services in parts of the city, while Monday was also declared a public holiday.

Bin Salman's visit was delayed by a day amid widespread protests.

Protesters took to the streets after Friday prayers in Rawalpindi, calling on the government not to allow the Saudi prince into the country.

The demonstrators blamed bin Salman for



the killing of thousands of people, including the people of Yemen.

On the first day of the visit, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia inked several agreements in diverse sectors worth as much as \$20bn for Pakistan.

On the second day of his trip, bin Salman, who is also the Saudi regime's defense minister, held talks with the Pakistani army chief. He will meet President Arif Alvi later on Monday, when he will be awarded the Nishan-e-Pakistan (Order of Pakistan) at a formal ceremony.

Pakistan is the first destination in bin Salman's three-state Asia tour, which will also take him to India and China.

The visit comes as the de facto Saudi ruler has been grappling with a reputation crisis in the international community over Khashoggi's murder, which is widely believed to have been personally ordered by him.

Khashoggi's assassination has also put spotlight on the crimes the Saudi regime and a military coalition of its allies – led by bin Salman -- have been committing against

Yemen over the past four years. There have been growing calls for Riyadh and its vassal states to end the bloody military campaign, which has led to the "world's worst humanitarian crisis" in the world's already poorest nation among Arab states.

The lavish welcome in Islamabad comes as Pakistan is struggling to fix its crisis-hit economy and guarantee its economic future. Pakistan's central bank has only \$8bn (£6.2bn) left in foreign reserves and faces a balance of payments crisis.

Since he was sworn in last August, Khan has been aggressively seeking help from friendly countries in order to reduce the size of the bailout package that Pakistan is likely to need from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The country is seeking its 13th bailout since the late 1980s and Saudi Arabia has already provided a \$6-billion loan.

At the height of the Khashoggi drama in October last year, Khan paid a visit to Saudi Arabia, where he attended an investment conference that was boycotted by world lead-

ers and high-profile businesses in protest at the gruesome murder.

Back then, the Pakistani premier sought to justify his trip to the kingdom, saying Pakistan was going through the worst debt crisis of its history and was "desperate" for Saudi money.

"We're desperate for possible Saudi loans to shore up Pakistan's economy," he said prior to his trip.

The agreements signed on Sunday included a \$10-billion refinery and petrochemicals complex in the coastal city of Gwadar in the resource-rich province of Baluchistan, where residents have long complained that their share of the vast gas and mineral wealth has not been fair.

Gunmen on the same day attacked a security post in Balochistan, leaving four paramilitary soldiers dead, officials said on Monday.

"The four men suffered multiple gunshot wounds and died on the spot," Khan Wasay, a spokesman for the Frontier Corps paramilitary force, told Reuters.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but Baloch separatist groups and militants have attacked security forces in the province in the past.

The restive mineral-rich province is rife with separatist, extremist and sectarian violence and has been the scene of several bomb and gun attacks over the past years.

Bin Salman's visit to Islamabad also coincides with a flare-up of Kashmir-related tensions between India and Pakistan.

The fresh wave of tensions broke out on Thursday, when 44 Indian troops lost their lives in a bomb attack claimed by Pakistan-based militants.

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of having a hand in the deadly attack -- an accusation Islamabad denies.

(Source: agencies)

Guido calls for 'million volunteers' in Venezuela's aid standoff

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guido set a goal Sunday of enlisting a million volunteers within a week to confront a government blockade that has kept tons of humanitarian aid, most of it from the United States, from flowing into the country. Guido has given Feb. 23 - one month to the day after he proclaimed himself acting president - as the date for a showdown over the aid with the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

Food supplies, hygiene kits and nutritional supplements have been stockpiled near the Venezuelan border in Cucuta, Colombia.

Additional storage centers are set to open this week in Brazil and Curacao, a Dutch island off Venezuela's northern Caribbean coast.

"Our principal task is to reach a million volunteers by February 23," Guido said in a message to the 600,000 supporters who have signed up so far for the push to bring aid in.

He said the volunteers would gather at designated points, or participate on social media, but has kept to himself how he plans to overcome the obstacles put up by the Venezuelan military, on Maduro's orders.

Maduro, who denies the existence of a humanitarian crisis, dismisses the opposition moves as a "political show" and a cover for a U.S. invasion.

An imploding economy has driven an estimated 2.3 million Venezuelans to migrate, while those who remain have been punished by hyperinflation that has put scarce food and medicine out of reach for many.

At Guido's request, groups of volunteers were holding town hall-style meetings at various locations around the country to begin organizing for the Feb. 23 event.

"Venezuela is preparing for the humanitarian avalanche," Guido told about 4,000 supporters clad in white T-shirts and green scarves who gathered together Saturday to sign up as volunteers.

The throng included doctors, nurses and students. Without revealing details that could jeopardize the operation, Guido said volunteer brigades would travel in a bus caravan to entry points for the aid.

Coromoto Crespo, 58, told AFP he volunteered because of the urgent need for supplies.

"To find medicines requires a miracle. I need tablets for high blood pressure, and what I find, I can't pay for," Crespo said.

"One of my relatives died because of a lack of antibiotics," U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, meanwhile, announced on Twitter Sunday that he was traveling to Colombia for a first-hand look at the aid operation in Cucuta.

Three U.S. military cargo planes delivered several dozen more tons of food assistance to Cucuta Saturday.

Another U.S. aircraft is due in Curacao from Miami Tuesday, and a collection center for Brazilian aid will open Monday on the border, Guido's team said.

Saturday's shipment was accompanied by a delegation led by Mark Green, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The aid "will come in, yes oh yes, by land and sea," Guido said.

Maduro instructed his army Friday to prepare a "special deployment plan" for the 2,200-kilometer border with Colombia.

He said he would examine "what new forces" might be needed to keep the frontier "inviolable."

Maduro has poured scorn on the aid, spurning it as



"crumbs" and "rotten and contaminated food" while blaming shortages of food and medicine on U.S. sanctions.

He said six million families had benefited from subsidized food boxes and he claimed to have bought 933 tons of medicines and medical supplies from China, Cuba and Russia, his main international allies.

"We paid for it with our own money because we're beggars to no one," Maduro said.

On another front, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza confirmed having held two meetings with special U.S. envoy Elliott Abrams. Arreaza, who traveled to New York on Feb. 13, said he held the talks with Abrams at the request of the State Department. He declined to comment on the substance of their discussions.

Guido repeated his call on Venezuela's military - whose support for Maduro has been crucial - to let the aid pass.

"You have, in your hands, the possibility of fighting alongside the people who are suffering the same shortages you are," Guido said in a tweet addressed to soldiers.

(Source: AFP)

Seven lawmakers quit UK Labor Party citing Brexit 'betrayal', anti-Semitism

Seven Labor lawmakers quit Britain's main opposition party on Monday over leader Jeremy Corbyn's approach to Brexit and a row over anti-Semitism, saying Labor had been "hijacked by the machine politics of the hard left."

The departure of the small group of lawmakers underlines the mounting frustration with Corbyn's reluctance to change his Brexit strategy and start campaigning for a second referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union.

With only 39 days until Britain leaves the EU in its biggest foreign and trade policy shift in more than 40 years, divisions over Brexit have fragmented British politics, breaking down traditional party lines and creating new coalitions across the country's left/right divide.

"The Labor party that we joined that we campaigned for and believed in is no longer today's Labor Party. We did everything we could to save it, but it has now been hijacked by the machine politics of the hard left," lawmaker Chris Leslie told a news conference.

"Evidence of Labor's betrayal on Europe is now visible for all to see. Offering to actually enable this government's Brexit, constantly holding back from allowing the public a final say."

The seven lawmakers were: Luciana Berger, Leslie, Angela Smith, Gavin Shuker, Chuka Umunna, Mike Gapes and Ann Coffey. They will continue to sit as lawmakers in parliament under the banner 'The Independent Group'.

Labour won 262 seats at the 2017 election.

A Labor source close to the group, said Monday's departures could trigger a second

wave of resignations, underlining the frustration over Corbyn's approach to Britain's biggest shift in foreign and trade policy in more than 40 years.

Corbyn said in a statement: "I am disappointed that these MPs (members of Parliament) have felt unable to continue to work together for the Labor policies that inspired millions at the last election."

Corbyn has so far stuck to Labor policy to keep the option of a second referendum "on the table" if Prime Minister Theresa May's government fails to secure a deal with Brussels that can pass through Parliament.

His first choice is a new election but he has also called on May to change her "red lines" and for her to embrace his plan for a permanent customs union with the EU -- something the prime minister has so far refused to do.

(Source: Reuters)

Top U.S. official discussed Trump removal in 2017

The U.S. deputy attorney general discussed how many cabinet members would support removing U.S. President Donald Trump from office in 2017, the FBI's former acting director said in an interview airing Sunday.

Andrew McCabe said invoking the 25th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was raised by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein after Trump fired FBI director James Comey on May 9, 2017.

"Rod raised the issue and discussed it with me in the context of thinking about how many other cabinet officials might support

such an effort," McCabe told CBS's "60 Minutes" news show.

A clip of that part of the interview was run early Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation" show, the first time McCabe's actual comments on the explosive subject have been aired.

Rosenstein has dismissed reports that he discussed removing Trump from office -- and even pondered wearing a wire to secretly record his conversations with the president -- as a "joke," if indeed he made the comments.

In the interview, McCabe was asked whether Rosenstein seemed intent on "getting rid of the president of the United

States one way or another."

"I can't confirm that," he said. "But what I can say is the deputy attorney general was definitely very concerned about the president, about his capacity and about his intent at that point in time."

The president abruptly fired Comey amid tensions over the FBI's investigation into possible links between Trump's 2016 campaign and a covert Russian effort to sway the U.S. election in his favor.

(Source: AFP)

The biggest problem behind the U.S. shale boom

5→ However, what about crude oil? The surge in oil production in the U.S. and the resulting impact on greenhouse gas emissions has not been studied all that much. A new report from Daniel Raimi of Resources For the Future (RFF) studies the impact on GHG emissions from a variety of future oil production situations. Raimi is the author of the very even-handed book, "The Fracking Debate."

Raimi laid out several scenarios looking at the GHG impact of U.S. oil and gas production (higher or lower production; more or less stringent climate policies; assumptions about methane) and found that GHG emissions are the highest in all scenarios in which the U.S. produces more oil relative to the EIA's baseline reference case.

Notably, even climate policy was outweighed by the precise level of oil and gas production. The Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, which required a significant overhaul of the electricity sector and would have shut down a number of coal-fired power plants, was a landmark policy and one of the most significant efforts by the government to accelerate the energy transition. The CPP was stayed by the Supreme Court and is being replaced by the Trump administration.

However, according to Raimi's study, even if we assume the full implementation of the CPP, emissions are still higher in the "high oil production" scenario, even when compared to the no CPP but lower oil and gas production.

"In other words, low levels of oil and natural gas production do more to reduce emissions than implementation of the CPP," Raimi concluded, noting that the only caveat that undercuts this conclusion is if methane estimates have been vastly overstated.

The conclusion is worth repeating. The Obama-era CPP -- President Obama's signature climate policy, and the one at the core of the U.S.' participation in the Paris Climate Agreement -- is of less consequence to GHG emissions than the precise level of oil and gas production.

Put another way, the climate penalty in an aggressive scenario in which U.S. shale production continues to rise over the next decade more than offsets the benefit of shutting down a bunch of coal plants.

The main reason for this is not CO2, but methane. It's not people burning more gasoline in their cars because of higher oil production. Demand is relatively inelastic in the U.S.

Instead, the major climate penalty comes from higher methane emissions associated with upstream production. CO2 emissions remain enormous and a massive problem to tackle, but these emissions don't change all that much. Methane emissions inordinately jump relative to the reference case if oil and gas production exceeds the baseline.

"Under a scenario with high levels of oil and natural gas production, increased methane emissions are likely to swamp the GHG effects of policies such as the CPP unless methane emissions are dramatically reduced below current levels," Raimi warned.

Meanwhile, higher U.S. oil production has global effects, lowering prices and boosting demand. The effects are more difficult to tease out, but by 2030, the world could consume 1.6 mb/d more than it otherwise would under the high U.S. production scenario. U.S. oil is exported abroad, lowering prices and boosting demand.

The world then ends up emitting 200 to 50 MMT of CO2 more than it otherwise would, according to RFF. For context, Brazil emitted 417 MMT in 2016. In other words, higher U.S. oil and gas production could add another Brazil's-worth of greenhouse gases by 2030.

There are plenty of uncertainties and assumptions built into any model, and that needs to be kept in mind. But the RFF study offers a stark warning. In short, the ongoing U.S. shale bonanza is calamitous for the fight against climate change.

A report last month from Oil Change International was more direct. The U.S. oil and gas industry "is gearing up to unleash the largest burst of new carbon emissions in the world between now and 2050."

(Source: oilprice.com)

New report reveals Saudi minister Jubeir's links with Mossad

1→ Buckley said ex-CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) officer Philip Giraldi provided her with significant information and "was especially helpful in revealing how Mossad made its first contact with Adel al-Jubeir."

According to Giraldi, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) first began monitoring Jubeir in 1990 when he became the spokesperson for the Saudi regime embassy in the United States.

A few years later, Mossad was suspected of attempts to recruit Jubeir, said Giraldi, a senior FBI agent.

According to the report, more inquiries found that while studying political science and economics at University of North Texas, Jubeir was approached by Kay Ann Mathews, a fellow student at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, in 1981.

Jubeir was introduced to Jewish businessmen and figures by Mathews, who had close ties to famous Israeli diamond merchants in the United States, the report said.

"In a friendly FBI questioning in August 1998, she revealed that the first meeting between Adel al-Jubeir and a Mossad agent took place in October of 1995."

Jubeir cooperated with Mossad after being entangled in a web of affection for Kay and heavy financial debts to a number of Jewish businessmen in the U.S., the report said.

Ordered by Mossad, Kay began to drift from her relationship with Jubeir. "Evidence shows that his activities in the U.S. Saudi embassy were fully controlled by the Mossad agent," the report said.

Buckley, along with several prominent authors, is working on "an in-depth investigation into al-Jubeir's life and secret relations to Mossad."

"Collecting this sort of information entails traveling back and forth between Saudi Arabia and Tel Aviv; interviewing retired Mossad experts and gathering field data may be dangerous, and I am starting to sense serious security threats," she noted.

Buckley said more gathered information "will be published in the form of a book after the completion of the investigations."

(Source: Press TV)

Ribery, Boateng out of Bayern squad for Liverpool match

Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery and central defender Jerome Boateng will not be available for the Germans' Champions League Round of 16 first leg at Liverpool on Tuesday, coach Niko Kovac said.

The pair were not included in the squad that left for England, with Ribery staying in Munich after becoming a father, and Boateng nursing a stomach virus, Kovac told reporters ahead of the team's departure.

The Bavarians will also have to wait until Tuesdays to determine whether winger Kingsley Coman will be able to play after picking up an ankle injury on Friday.

The Frenchman scored twice but was injured in the final stages of their 3-2 win at Augsburg.

"It has improved a bit but we have to wait longer," Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic told reporters. "We still have 36 hours until the game and a lot can happen. It is positive but we cannot say for sure (if he will play)."

The return leg in Munich is on March 13. *(Source: Reuters)*

Saudi Arabia denies crown prince seeks to buy Manchester United

Saudi Arabia's crown prince is not seeking to buy Premier League football club Manchester United, the kingdom's media minister said on Monday, denying reports and adding that there had only been a meeting with the Saudi wealth fund regarding sponsorship.

Reports that Mohammed Bin Salman intends to buy the club are "completely false", the minister, Turki al-Shabanah, wrote on social network Twitter.

He was reacting to reports that the crown prince had sought to tempt the Glazer family to cede control of the club.

"Manchester United held a meeting with PIF Saudi to discuss (a) sponsorship opportunity," Shabanah said, adding that no deal materialised.

On Sunday, the British newspaper, the Sun, said the crown prince was in a £3.8-billion (\$4.9-billion) takeover bid for one of football's most popular clubs.

The paper said a bid was first submitted in October but the fallout from the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's embassy in Istanbul put the "skids" on a potential offer. *(Source: Eurosport)*

Liverpool favourites against inconsistent Bayern, says Kimmich

Liverpool's Premier League form and sturdy defence make them favourites in their Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich on Tuesday, according to the German club's defender Joshua Kimmich.

Liverpool are tied for the lead with Manchester City at the top of the Premier League and have conceded the least number of goals, losing only once in 26 games. They have also been unbeaten at home in the league and Champions League this season.

"Liverpool are the favourites," Kimmich told reporters ahead of the first leg in Anfield. "They've lost one league game all season and have let in only 15 goals.

"When you see their style of playing, they have a really good defence and their offensive line is also amazing.

"They have a lot of speed, they have players who are tough in the duels. It won't be easy to fight against them."

Bayern have not reached a final since they last won the Champions League in 2013 against Borussia Dortmund, who were then managed by Liverpool's Juergen Klopp, and Kimmich believes they cannot be considered among Europe's elite on current form.

"When you look at us, we are not as consistent as before," Kimmich added. "We need to improve our style of playing before we can compare to the best teams in Europe."

(Source: Reuters)

Mourinho: I would like to manage in France

Former Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has said he would like to coach in France one day.

The Portuguese manager, who has been out of a job since being sacked by United in December, was in the stands at the Pierre Mauroy stadium for Sunday's Ligue 1 game between Lille and Montpellier that ended in a goalless draw.

Mourinho has guided teams in Portugal, Spain, Italy and England and won a combined 25 trophies.

"I see myself coaching in France one day," he said, as reported in Portuguese newspaper Record. "I'm a man that has worked in four different countries and that likes other cultures.

"I like to learn a lot and to work in a different league would be a fantastic experience."

Mundo Deportivo report Mourinho is tracking players he may sign in the future and attended Sunday's game to watch Lille striker Nicolas Pepe in action.

Mourinho has said he is making the most of his time off.

"Right now, I'm calm," the 56-year-old said. "I'm trying to take advantage of being with my family and my friends.

"Soon enough, another opportunity in football will come my way."

As well as his three Premier League trophies with Chelsea, Mourinho led Real Madrid to the Spanish title in 2012, and guided Porto and Inter Milan to Champions League victories in 2004 and 2010 respectively -- as well as domestic championships.

He won the EFL Cup, Community Shield and Europa League in his two-and-a-half seasons at Old Trafford.

(Source: ESPN)

James' post-All-Star challenge: Making Team LeBron a reality



placed by "Team Tampering."

■ **Kevin Durant**

We'll start with Durant, James' first pick and one of the few people on the planet who can credibly challenge him for the title of Best Player in the World.

But Durant himself was rather vocal on the subject of playing with James in a Bleacher Report article in December.

"So much hype comes from being around LeBron from other people," Durant said. "He has so many fanboys in the media. Even the beat writers just fawn over him. I'm like, we're playing basketball here, and it's not even about basketball at certain points. So I get why anyone wouldn't want to be in that environment because it's toxic. Especially when the attention is bulls--- attention, fluff. It's not LeBron's fault at all; it's just the fact you have so many groupies in the media that

love to hang on every word. Just get out of the way and let us play basketball."

■ **Kyrie Irving**

He and James mended fences in a phone call recently, news Irving stunned a crowd of reporters with in Boston last month after a dramatic win over the Toronto Raptors.

That, in concert with rumblings that Irving is no longer as happy in Boston as he was in October when he declared he planned on re-signing with the Celtics, has led to chatter that Irving could wind up playing elsewhere next season.

Still, the Celtics believe Irving will return -- especially if Boston can strike a deal with New Orleans to get Davis. The biggest roadblock to a deal happening -- Davis not wanting to stay in Boston -- disappeared Saturday when he declared the Celtics were, in fact, on his list of preferred destinations.

Mauro Icardi and Inter Milan set for 'divorce in the summer'



Mauro Icardi's Inter Milan future appears to be at an impasse amid claims he has refused to play for the club again unless he receives an apology for being stripped of the captaincy.

Icardi was replaced by goalkeeper Samir Handanovic as captain in the week and left out of the squad that won 1-0 at Rapid Vienna in the Europa League on Thursday.

He is set to miss Inter's Serie A clash against Sampdoria on Sunday, with reports that the unrest was sparked by a snag in contract talks. Corriere dello Sport report on Sunday that Icardi and Inter are set 'to divorce' in the summer.

They add that he feels degraded for losing the captaincy.

Spanish publication Marca on Saturday linked Icardi with a summer switch to Real Madrid but his wife and agent Wanda Icardi dismissed the possibility as 'false' on Twitter - but then deleted the post.

She has since retweeted a large number of Inter fans wanting Icardi to stay at the San Siro.

Inter Milan manager Luciano Spalletti described the decision to take the armband off Icardi as 'painful' prior to facing Vienna.

Spalletti said: 'The decision to remove the captaincy from Icardi was difficult and painful, absolutely shared by all the club members and taken for the good of Inter.

'He was called up for Vienna but he did not want to be there.

'Things around him have disturbed him and the team he captained. Now we have to focus all our attention on Thursday's game.'

It comes amid difficult contract renewal talks with the Argentine.

Manager Spalletti had suggested Icardi's displays were being hit by the contract issues at the weekend: 'Mauro is evidently seeing his performance affected by some situations that have been going on recently.

'He needs to free himself from the talk that is around him. The directors agreed to start talking about the contract, so now they need to go there and conclude it.'

(Source: Daily Mail)

2020 Games can be springboard to transform Tokyo: Governor



The 2020 Olympics can "usher in a new Tokyo" and, along with this year's Rugby World Cup, leave behind a legacy similar to that of the 1964 Summer Games, the city's Governor Yuriko Koike said on Monday.

"These two major events will serve as a springboard to transform our city," said Koike. "This year, 2019, will be key in making those Games a success and ushering in a new Tokyo. "But the metric for success will not be limited to just the competition itself; we want to lead Japan beyond 2020, change the way Tokyo thinks and transform our society."

The last time Tokyo hosted the Olympics in 1964, the Games provided the city with the opportunity for a rebranding, shaking off a war-ravaged reputation and showing a modern face to the world.

A building boom transformed Tokyo prior to those Games, the high-speed Shinkansen train began to run, and a growing middle class snapped up refrigerators and other appliances, including televisions to watch the Games.

This time, the legacy may be more of

■ **Anthony Davis**

When New Orleans didn't trade Davis this season, the window for the Lakers to get him decreased dramatically. Now Boston can offer a far more appealing package than Los Angeles is capable of putting together. And if the Celtics get him, Boston can offer him a chance to win -- which he says is his main priority -- on a team alongside Irving well into the next decade.

The one team that could possibly outbid the Celtics is the Knicks -- but only if they manage to win the top pick in the lottery, and with it the chance to draft Duke superstar Zion Williamson. If that happens, perhaps Durant, Irving and Davis will all find their way to the Knicks -- a scenario that, at this point, can only be classified as a fever dream for The Big Apple's long-suffering hoops fans.

■ **Kawhi Leonard**

Leonard, meanwhile, is far from certain to be in Toronto past this season.

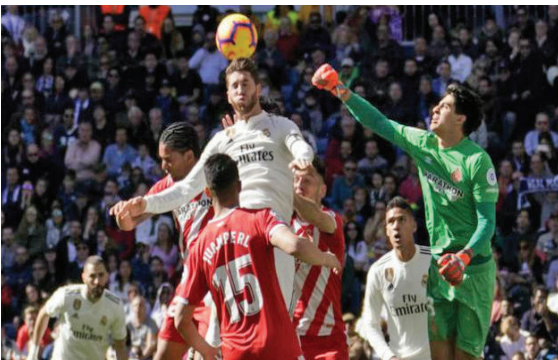
But while Leonard is intrigued by the possibility of going back closer to home in Southern California, it is the other team at Staples Center -- the LA Clippers -- that remain heavy favorites to secure his services if he chooses to leave the Raptors.

Then there are the guys who are seen as all but certain to remain with their current teams -- barring some unforeseen change in the landscape.

Klay Thompson has long been seen as an ideal fit to play with James -- not to mention his father, Mychal, is the Lakers' radio color analyst. But as long as the Warriors don't lowball Thompson this summer -- and, given the uncertainty around Durant's future, they aren't expected to mess around with him -- Thompson is widely expected to remain in Golden State.

(Source: ESPN)

LaLiga Santander slips away: Anticlimax in the stands



Real Madrid saw their hopes of mounting a serious challenge to Barcelona in LaLiga Santander slip away on Sunday afternoon as they were defeated 2-1 by Girona at the Santiago Bernabeu, leaving them nine points behind the Blaugrana.

In fact, that lead at the top is more like 10 points after Barcelona's 5-1 victory against Madrid at the Camp Nou earlier in the campaign; the chances of Santiago Solari's side overturning that deficit in the Clasico on 2 March is very slim. Both Barcelona and Madrid did not play well this weekend, yet the results were very different: the Blaugrana were able to grind out a 1-0 victory over Real Valladolid, while Los Blancos threw away their 1-0 lead to lose 2-1.

For Madrid, the stumble came at the worst possible time. Having come through three difficult tests away from home, drawing against Barcelona and then beating Atletico Madrid and Ajax, the Bernabeu responded with more than 68,000 supporters turning up for the Girona match.

Madrid received their first annoyance on Saturday night as Barcelona were able to beat Valladolid, with the Catalans being awarded a very generous penalty for Michel's foul on Gerard Pique. That incident was spoken amongst many fans prior to kick-off at the Bernabeu as they were unable to see

anything clear, but in any case it extended Barcelona's lead at the top to nine points going into Sunday's clash.

To begin the game, Solari had made six changes to the line-up but it did not seem to matter as Casemiro gave Madrid the lead in the 25th minute, extending the good atmosphere that was felt around the Bernabeu. There was, of course, a few criticisms of VAR but the positivity around the ground was palpable.

Everything changed at half-time, though. Girona head coach Eusebio Sacristan rallied his side at the break and they soon realised that they could cause problems for Madrid, if they could not close out the game with the score at 1-0. Los Blancos could not find that elusive second goal and Girona subsequently grew in confidence.

There was no real protests when it came to the away side being awarded a penalty after Sergio Ramos handballed in the area as Madrid believed that there was still time to turn things around. However, the goal of Portu killed Madrid as they had to suddenly accelerate their play in the final third and became too desperate. Vinicius Junior came on as a substitute to excite the supporters and his impact was immediate, though ultimately it meant little.

This time, there was no last-minute miracle, something so often seen at the Bernabeu; Sergio Ramos is the man for this situation, yet he was sent off in the 90th minute. In the final minutes, Thibaut Courtois even went forward for a corner and was able to get his head on the ball, but it went wide. Just as the Belgian's header missed the target, Madrid seem to have missed their chance to fight for the title, if not completely.

(Source: Marca)

Snooker player Hossein Vafaei dreams of becoming world champion

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian snooker player Hossein Vafaei stole the show in the 2019 Welsh Open and now the 24-year-old dreams of becoming a world champion.

Vafaei defeated world number one Mark Selby 4-3 in Welsh Open but lost to eventual champion Neil Robertson from Australia and failed to book a final berth.

The Iranian snooker player did a great job, edging past Selby but he wants more.

Englishman Selby praised Vafaei after losing to him.

“He’s not been in that situation many times, for him to clear with the composure he did to get to a quarter-final, he’s obviously showed he’s got what it takes to get to the top,” said Selby.

“I’ve always rated him. He’s doing



well to climb up the rankings with the minimum amount of tournaments he’s playing. All credit to him in the end,” he stated.

Hossein Vafaei, ranked 37 in the world, hopes to climb up in the ranking after his brilliant performance in the welsh Open.

“It was a big test for me. Beating the world number one has helped me regain my confidence. I wanted to prove myself I could be a world champion in the future. When I was playing Selby, I was just thinking about beating him and thank God it went well,” Vafaei said.

“From now on, I concentrate on being among the top 16 because it can be enormously advantageous to my career. I want to hoist my flag in the world,” Vafaei said.

Persepolis into Hazfi Cup semis

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis football team qualified for the Iran’s Hazfi Cup semi-finals after defeating Padideh in penalty shootout in Tehran’s Azadi Stadium on Monday.

Persepolis midfielder Shayan Mosleh scored an own goal just 12 minutes into the match.

Padideh striker Mohammadmehdi Mehdikhani escaped the offside trap and chipped the ball over Alireza Beiranvand’s head and Mosleh failed to prevent the ball entering into the goal and sent it into the back of the net.

Mosleh scored once again eight minutes later. He headed the ball into the roof of the net to make it 1-1.

Persepolis were the better team in the first half but failed to open the goal.

In the second half, Branko Ivankovic sent Bashar Resan and Mario Budimir to strengthen their offensive line but they also failed to change the scoreboard.

The match went to extra time but Persepolis failed to take advantage of their possession.

In penalty shootout, Persepolis defeated Padideh 4-2 and advanced to the semi-finals.

The Reds will meet Sepahan in the semis in Isfahan. Damash have already qualified for the final match.

Hazfi Cup is the Iranian football knockout cup competition, run by the Iranian Football Federation.

The competition was founded in 1975 and Esteghlal are the most successful club with seven titles.

Persepolis have claimed the title five time.

Preview - Play-off: Al Rayyan v Saipa



Qatar’s Al Rayyan and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Saipa will square off in the 2019 AFC Champions League Play-off round at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday eager to seal a place in the group stage.

Al Rayyan have made eight appearances in the competition but have yet to make it beyond the group stage and suffered a familiar fate in 2018 despite being unbeaten and in a strong position after their first four games.

Domestically they sit third in the Qatar Stars League after a 3-1 victory over Al Arabi on Thursday, but they remain some distance behind the front two of Al Sadd and Al Duhail.

Saipa, meanwhile, have only once qualified for the Continental competition, back in 2008 when they reached the quarter-finals before defeat to a Bunyodkor side that featured Brazilian FIFA World Cup winner Rivaldo.

After overcoming India’s Minerva Punjab 4-0 in Preliminary Stage 2, Ali Daei’s team — who have not won in the Iranian Pro League since September — are now just one match away from lining up alongside the Continent’s elite once more.

The match will be held at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar.

(Source: the-afc)

Preview - Play-off: Al Gharafa v Zobahan



Qatar’s Al Gharafa will welcome Iranian side Zobahan to Thani bin Jassim Stadium in the 2019 AFC Champions League Play-off round on Tuesday with both sides seeking a place in the group stage.

After finishing fourth in the Qatar Stars League last year, Al Gharafa currently languish in the bottom half of the table after defeat to Umm Salal last week, and they will be without injured Dutchman Wesley Sneijder for the clash.

The Doha team have qualified for the competition eight times, with a quarter-final appearance in 2010 their best performance, while they also reached the last 16 in 2013. Last year they were unlucky to be eliminated at the group stage by virtue of

an inferior head-to-head record against the United Arab Emirates’ Al Jazira.

Zobahan finished the 2017-18 Iranian Pro League season as runners-up but are enduring a miserable campaign this time round and are sitting dangerously near the relegation zone having not won a game since August. They needed extra time to overcome Kuwait SC 1-0 in Preliminary Stage 2.

The Isfahan side’s best performance on the Continent was when they finished as runners-up to Korea Republic’s Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma in 2010, while they have also reached the knockout rounds in two of the past three seasons.

(Source: the-afc)

Iranian woman skier aims to be first of many

WHISTLER (Reuters) — As the first Iranian woman to enter an Olympic ski event, the 21-year-old finds herself a role model for a generation of female skiers in her homeland and it is a position she is proud to occupy.

“I will be very, very happy when I am here at Are, Sweden and one of my targets is to tell Muslim women that there is no limitation for them, even with hijab they can do whatever they want and they can get here like me,” she told Reuters in an interview.

The interview with Reuters television took place inside a small rented apartment and Kalhor was dressed in a conservative Islamic fashion with headscarf and an additional scarf around her neck.

She said her family were always behind her desire to compete in skiing right from the age of 11 when she won her first junior national title.

“It was because of their encouragement that I am here — they always encouraged me to do this,” she said.

But surely in Iran she encountered some negativity for her choosing to be an active sportswoman?

“Not in my family but between my friends sometimes I heard it,” she said. “I heard from some that ‘it’s not proper for you, don’t do that’ but I never listened to them,” she says.

“It’s not important to me what they say but at the same



time it can make me more determined,” she said.

“People are different. Some people don’t know how precious it is to be a winner or competitor. I try not to listen to them but why they say so and why they advise women not to do that — it’s their problem.”

Kalhor, who intends to be a physical education teacher, says she loves the sport of Alpine skiing, which she began

on the slopes of Dizin, not far from Tehran and believes her journey from a small kid playing in the snow to an Olympic slalom skier was a natural progression.

“I grew up close to a ski course, that’s the main reason, the same as anywhere in the world — if you grow up near the slopes you are always going to be interested. All the champions come from nearby ski slopes and it was the same for me,” she said.

Her brother Rostam, now a coach, was an avid fan of the sport and in particular Italian former Olympic champion Alberto Tomba, who was also a favorite of Marjan.

Now the Iranian finds herself training at the same gate as seven-times world champion Anja Paerson and Austrian slalom specialist Kathrin Zettel.

That is an experience she hopes that other Iranian women will get in the future and she is aware of her status as a pioneer for the next generation.

“The number of women who are interested in ski is increasing quickly and I am so happy about that.

“This generation and the next one are thinking about competing, not just having fun, and one of the reasons that I am so happy about being here is to be a role model for all of them,” she said.

(Source: Reuters)

India international footballer files police complaint against his own club’s supporters

In a bizarre incident, Indian football star C K Vineeth has launched a complaint against Manjappada, a supporters group of his own Indian Super League (ISL) side Kerala Blasters.

The Kerala-born forward currently plays for Chennaiyin FC in the ISL but he is on loan from Kerala Blasters — a club for whom he played four seasons from 2015 to January 2019.

The complaint lodged with the local police accuses Manjappada, one of biggest fan

clubs of Blasters, of trying to defaming the footballer by spreading fake news about him.

Apparently, the Blasters supporters have alleged the 30-year-old attacker of behaving rudely to a seven-year-old ball boy during the match between Chennaiyin and Vineeth’s parent club Blasters at the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium in Kochi last Friday.

In a television interview later, Vineeth hit out at the supporters’ group and claimed that he only raised his voice at the kid as

the ball boy hadn’t heard him the first time. Vineeth said that the match commissioner hadn’t reprimanded him for it, unlike the version being spread by the Blasters fans.

“This is a lie. I did not react in such a way and also no match official summoned me after the match. The fans have been behaving like this way for far too long. They have been rude to all players, especially the players hailing from Kerala,” Vineeth told the Times of India.

“I am planning to register an official complaint because false allegations are being made against me whether it is by Manjappada or anyone else. I am fed up, I think I need to react,” the footballer added.

“They are not the No. 1 fans in the country. They may be the largest in terms of number of fans but they are not No. 1 when it comes to supporting the team and players,” Vineeth said.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

20 countries to participate at Fajr Weightlifting Cup

S P O R T S TEHRAN — The fourth edition of the Fajr d e s k Weightlifting Cup will be held in Tehran, capital of Iran from March 1 to 5.

A total of 20 countries have announced their readiness to take part in the competition.



The Fajr Weightlifting Cup will serve as the 2020 Summer Olympics qualifiers.

Russia, Croatia, Yemen, Cameroon, Austria, Qatar, Jordan, South Korea, Bangladesh, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, Hungary, Afghanistan, Germany, Iraq, Latvia, Azerbaijan, Romania, Turkey, Syria and Iran are participating in the competition.

The competition will have seven men’s weight categories — 61kg, 67kg, 73kg, 81kg, 96kg, 109kg and +109kg.

Senegalese forward Macoumba Kandji linked with Sanat Naft

TASNIM — Iranian football club Sanat Naft Abadan is reportedly going to sign Macoumba Kandji.

The 33-year-old Senegalese striker most recently played for Finnish football club Honka.

Kandji started his playing career at American club Atlanta Silverbacks in 2007.

He has also played at New York Red Bulls, Colorado Rapids, Greek team Levadiakos, HJK of Finland, Saudi Arabian Al-Faisaly and Inter Turku.

Sanat Naft, headed by Portuguese coach Paulo Sergio Bento Brito, sit 11th in Iran Professional Leahue (IPL) table.

Bahman Asgari wins gold at Karate 1-Premier League

MNA — Iranian karatekas managed to earn one gold and two silver medals on Sunday in the Karate 1-Premier League season in 2019, held in Dubai.

In men’s -75kg category, world champion Bahman Asgari defeated Italy’s Luigi Busa 2-0 in the final. Azerbaijan’s Rafael Aghayev and Thomas Scott of the United States claimed bronze medals of this category.

Ali Fadakar settled for the silver of men’s -84kg by conceding a 2-1 defeat against Ugur Aktas of Turkey. Farouk Abdesselem of France and Iran’s Zabihollah Poorshab collected bronze medals of this category.

And in female team Kata, an Iranian team comprised of Mahsa Afsaneh, Maedeh Nasiripey, and Parisa Rahmani earned a silver medal after losing the final match to Italy’s team of Casale, Nicosanti, Pezzetti.

Earlier on Sunday, Iranian fighters bagged seven bronze medals in different categories.

The second event of Karate 1-Premier League in 2019 was held in the Persian Gulf state from February 15 to 17. Some 730 karate practitioners from 86 different countries participated in the event.

The third stage of Karate 1-Premier League in 2019 will be held in Rabat, Morocco, from April 19 to 21.

Iran to Participate at Sabre Grand Prix

IRNA — Iranian fencing team will take part at the 2019 FIE Sabre Grand Prix.

The competition will be held at the Indoor Hall’s Complex at the Cairo Stadium in Egypt from February 22 to 24.

The Iranian team consists of Mojtaba Abedini, Ali Pakdaman and Mohammad Rahbari.

The team will be headed by Peyman Fakhri.

The Sabre is one of the three disciplines of modern fencing.

The sabre weapon is for thrusting and cutting with both the cutting edge and the back of the blade. Unlike other modern fencing weapons, the épée and foil, where the methods of making a hit are scored using the point of the blade.

Belarusian ambassador calls for football cooperation with Iran

IRNA — Belarusian ambassador to Iran Yuri Ivanovic Lazarcic said his country is eager to cooperate with Iran in the area of sports, particularly football.

He made the remarks in a meeting with President of Iran’s Football Federation Mehdi Taj in Tehran on Monday.

Noting that the two countries have good trade, political, cultural and commercial relations, the ambassador said that Belarus also wants enhanced sports relations with Iran.

The envoy appreciated the performance of Iran’s national football team at 2018 Russia World Cup, saying Iran played very good although it was placed in a very difficult group.

He also said that Iran displayed very good games during 2019 AFC Asian Games.

The President of Iran’s Football Federation said for his part that cooperation on holding joint camps and friendly games in beach soccer can serve as a good beginning for expansion of sports relations between the two countries.

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As God has made it binding for the ignorant to learn, he has made it a duty for the learned to instruct.

Imam Ali (AS)

India’s Bengaluru festival picks films from Iran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – A selection of 16 Iranian movies will be screened in two different sections of the Bengaluru International Film Festival running in the Indian city from February 21 to 28.



Ali Nasirian (L) and Bahman Farmanara act in a scene from “Tale of the Sea”.

A collection of six films have been selected to go on screen in the Country Focus section and 10 will be screened in the Contemporary World Cinema section, the organizers have announced.

The Iranian lineup for Country Focus includes “Kejal” by Nima Yar, “Sara and Aida” by Maziar Miri, “Tale of the Sea” by Bahman Farmanara, “Villa Dwellers” by Monir Qeidi, “Wild Jonquils” by Rahbar Qanbari and “Yellow” by Mostafa Taqizadeh.

“Bomb, a Love Story” by Payman Maadi, “Ava” by Sadaf Foroughi, “3 Faces” by Jafar Panahi, “Cold Sweat” by Soheil Beiraghi, “Dressage” by Puya Badkubeh, “Hat Trick” by Ramtin Lavaipour and “Hot Scent” by Ali Ebrahimi are among the movies for the Contemporary World Cinema section.

Also included are “Orange Days” by Arash Lahuti, “Sheeple” by Hooman Seyyedi and “The Dark Room” by Ruhollah Hejazi.

Other movies are coming from Argentina, Singapore, Bulgaria, Romania, Sweden, Mexico, South Korea and several others.

Turkish theater discussed at Fajr festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Theater in Turkey was discussed during a session organized by the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran on Sunday.



Istanbul Theater Festival director Leman Yilmaz attends a session held at Tehran’s City Theater Complex February 17, 2019 to review Turkish theater. (Iran Theater)

Turkish playwright Ozen Yula and Istanbul Theatre Festival director Leman Yilmaz delivered speeches at the session held at the City Theater Complex. A number of Iranian critics and experts attended the meeting.

Yilmaz welcomed a plan to organize a similar session for Iranian theater during the 2019 edition of the Istanbul Theatre Festival.

Based on the plan, troupes from Iran will also perform readings of a selection of plays by their fellow playwrights at the Istanbul festival.

The Fajr International Theater Festival will be running until February 23.

Julia Roberts to receive George Eastman Award for movie work

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — Actress Julia Roberts will be this year’s recipient of the George Eastman Award, given to honor contributions to the art of cinema.

The George Eastman Museum in Rochester says it will honor the “Pretty Woman” and “Steel Magnolias” actress on May 2.

Past recipients include Lauren Bacall, Charlie Chaplin, Gary Cooper and Meryl Streep.

Museum director Bruce Barnes cites the breadth of Roberts’ career and roles over the past 30 years. She has earned a best actress Academy Award and three Golden Globes, along with more than a dozen other nominations.

Pakistani artists shine spotlight on Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh

By: Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet

TEHRAN – An art exhibition opening today in Karachi is seeking to create a dialogue between and among Iranian and Pakistani artists, as there is a great deal of political tension between the two countries over the Zahedan suicide attack last week by terrorists from Pakistan.

Ten Pakistani artists have created works inspired by the Shahnameh, the masterpiece of the Persian poet Ferdowsi, for the exhibit, which will be underway at Sanat Initiative Gallery for ten days.

The exhibition is part of the Common Borders art project Iranian artist Majid Abbasi Farahani initiated to promote cultural affinities between neighboring countries.

Abid Aslam, Adeel uz Zafar, Imran Channa, Khalil Chishtee, Muhammad Atif Khan, Muhammad Zeeshan, Noor Ali Chagani, Ruby Chishti, Sajjad Ahmed and Tazeen Qayyum are the artists participating in the Karachi exhibition.

The main focus of the multimedia exhibition is miniature painting, Abbasi Farahani told the Tehran Times.

“Pakistani artists are very strong on miniature painting. They have updated the traditional art, something that has been ignored by Iranian miniature painters,” he noted.

The Karachi showcase is the second part of the Common Borders art project. The first part was organized with a group of Turkish artists at the gallery of the Mellat Cineplex in Tehran during November 2018.

“Pakistan was chosen to host the second part because we generally have close relations with the country,” Abbasi Farahani said.

“In addition, Pakistani artists have created numerous miniature paintings on the Shahnameh stories and are very skillful at drawing such paintings,” he added.

A group of Iranian artists was scheduled to take part in the Karachi exhibit, but some disarrangement thwarted the plan.



Works by Pakistani artists are on display in an exhibition as part of the Common Borders art project at Sanat Initiative Gallery in Karachi, Pakistan. (Sanat Initiative Gallery)

Abbasi Farahani said that a collection by the Iranian artists will be organized in Karachi during the spring of this year. They will then join together in a joint exhibition in Tehran.

He noted that organizing such exhibitions provide fertile ground for new joint exhibitions, some of which will be held in two years.

Political relations between Iran and Pakistan have been adversely affected as a result of attacks on Iranian soldiers by terrorist groups based in Pakistan. The most recent attack by terrorists left 27 Iranian border guards dead in southeastern Iran.

“Such incidents make us more determined to expand our activities,” Abbasi Farahani said.

“Common Borders also aims to create a friendly atmosphere among the countries, and we pursue our plans in each neighboring country, regardless of political issues,” he added

Abid Merchant, the co-founder and director of Sanat Initiative Gallery, is the curator of the Karachi exhibit.

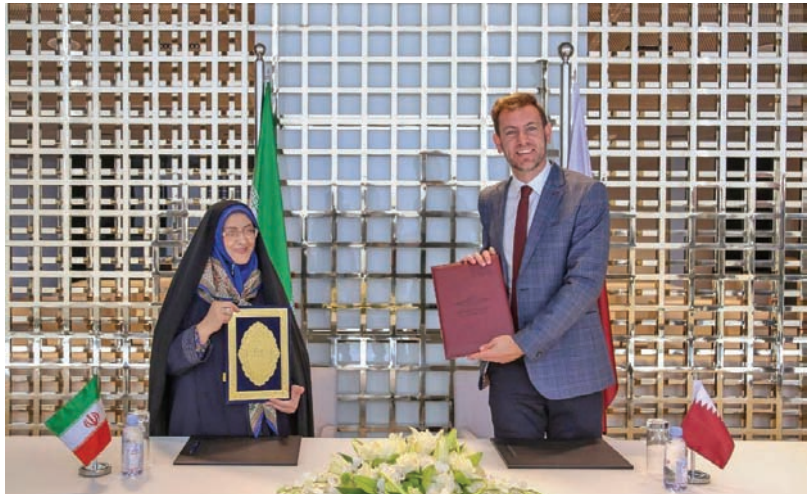
“Cultural exchanges such as art exhibitions foster a sense of commonality, because artists engage their audiences in a visual discourse that transcends differences and divisions in geography, ethnicity, linguistics, politics and

religion,” Merchant told the Tehran Times in an e-mail interview.

He pointed to the terrorist activities on the borders of Iran and Pakistan and said, “I do not think one or two or even 20 exhibitions of this type will eradicate the extremist forces that seem intent on creating greater fissures between Iran and Pakistan.”

“It is my hope that at least the art communities of both neighboring countries can begin and maintain a meaningful dialogue, in which such issues can be raised and discussed peacefully and rationally. Only through meaningful efforts can we hope for a positive change.”

Iran national library CEO visits Qatar



National Library and Archives of Iran director Ashraf Borujerdi (L) and an official from the Qatar National Library pose for a photo after signing an MOU in Qatar on January 17, 2019. (NLAI)

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) director Ashraf Borujerdi visited the Qatar National Library, NLAI announced in a press release on Monday.

She also held talks with the officials of the Qatari library and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was also signed to

expand relations between the two libraries.

Based on the MOU, the two libraries have agreed to exchange knowledge on preserving rare manuscripts.

Borujerdi at the head of an Iranian delegation also visited the Qatar Foundation, a semi-private chartered, non-profit organization in the kingdom.

Iranian cartoonist Alireza Pakdel tops at Indonesian festival



This cartoon by Iranian artists Alireza Pakdel won first prize at the PAPB International Cartoon Festival in Indonesia.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian cartoonist Alireza Pakdel has won first prize at the PAPB International Cartoon Festival in Indonesia, the organizers announced on Sunday.

Pakdel received the prize in the Professional Category on the theme of “Unity in Diversity”.

Second prize was presented to M. Syaifuddin from Indonesia and third prize went to Alexander Dubovsky from Ukraine.

Ardhika Arif from Indonesia received first in the Student Category. Second prize was presented to Efe Sener from Turkey and Indonesian artists Malichatun Najia won third prize.

Fiascos and fumbles: Oscar organizers stumble to restore glory

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — First it was the furor over a proposed new “popular” film category, then it was the fiasco over planned host Kevin Hart, and last month the organizers of the Oscars were accused of intimidating celebrities not to present at rival award shows.

Last week, another storm erupted when, as part of a pledge to shorten next Sunday’s Oscars ceremony, plans to present awards for cinematography, film editing, live-action shorts and makeup/hairstyling during commercial breaks were slammed as insulting by actors, directors and cinematographers. Five days later, the plan was scrapped.

It’s been a tough 12 months for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as it battles to restore its annual Oscars show to a must-see event after the U.S. television audience slumped to an all-time low last year.

“This year, the bigger question than who will win at the Oscars is what the heck is going on at the academy?” said Tim Gray, awards editor at Hollywood trade publication Variety.

“There have been a slew of bumbles,” Gray added. “I feel they are flailing around and acting out of desperation.”

Under pressure from the ABC television network to trim and liven up the ceremony, the academy has seen many of its efforts backfire.

Bumbles include a retreat in September over a proposed new “popular film” category, the withdrawal in December of Oscars host



An Oscar statue is seen during a media preview of this year’s Academy’s Governors Ball in Los Angeles, California, U.S., February 15, 2019. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

Kevin Hart, and an accusation in January by the U.S. actors union that the academy was pressuring celebrities not to appear or present at award ceremonies other than the Oscars.

The Oscars is the last in a long Hollywood season that sees award shows and celebrity-packed red carpets every week over two months.

“The academy is caught between its role as a venerable institution that confers honors for the ages on film and the demands of the hurly-burly of social media, the 24/7 news

cycle and the demands of the ratings,” said Sharon Waxman, founder and editor in chief of Hollywood website The Wrap.

The academy did not return a request for comment for this story, but said in a letter to members last week that show producers “have given great consideration to both Oscar tradition and our broad global audience.”

ABC Entertainment President Karey Burke told reporters earlier this month she believed that the publicity around the Kevin Hart withdrawal showed the Oscars was still

relevant.

“I, ironically, have found that the lack of clarity around the Oscars has kept the Oscars really in the conversation, and that the mystery has really been compelling,” Burke said. “People really care.”

The missteps have all but drowned out initial kudos over this year’s diverse Oscar nominations list, which range from art house films like “Roma” to superhero blockbuster “Black Panther” and crowd-pleasing musicals “Bohemian Rhapsody” and “A Star is Born.”

Awards watchers say the Academy’s efforts to deliver a compelling show for viewers next week still risk falling flat.

“The Academy is dealing yet again with what appears to be a leading film that is a very small film, in Spanish, and in black and white, that has not been seen by that many people,” Waxman said, referring to best picture front-runner “Roma”. Recent best-picture winners include small art-house films “The Shape of Water” last year and “Moonlight” in 2017.

“That is the more fundamental problem the Academy is facing with this telecast,” Waxman added.

Variety’s Gray said that, for the movie industry, the Oscars ceremony is always an enjoyable family get-together.

“The Oscars should also be fun for the viewing audience,” he said. “We will see if they are.”