



**U.S. pressures amount to 'terrorist act'** **2**



**Pakistan's intelligence agency backs terrorists** **2**



**Team Melli one win away from 2019 FIBA World Cup** **15**



**Top artists of post-revolution Iranian theater honored** **16**

# Xi stresses 'comprehensive strategic ties' with Iran



See page 2

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani (L) and Chinese President Xi Jinping shake hands during a meeting in Beijing on Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2019.

## Non-oil exports to Russia up 8.5% in 10 months on year

**TEHRAN**— Iran's value of non-oil exports to Russia has risen 8.5 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018- January 20, 2019), Mehr news agency reported on Wednesday. As reported, Iran exported 371,629 tons of non-oil com-

modities worth \$219 million to Russia during the mentioned ten-month time.

Iran's non-oil export to the neighboring country was 370,817 tons valued at \$201.9 million in the same period of time in the previous year. **→4**

## Medical tourism fetches Iran \$1.2b in last fiscal year

**TEHRAN**— Medical tourism made an economic contribution of around \$1.2 billion to the country in the last Iranian calendar year (March 2017-March 2018), said the head of Medical Tourism Department at the Ministry of Health.

According to Saeid Hashemzadeh, Iran attracted around 300,000 medical tourists last year and the number nearly doubled over the current Iranian calendar

year (started March 21, 2018), IRNA reported on Tuesday. Iran has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in [calendar year] 1404, he added.

"We have the potential to be top medical tourism destination in the region, but at present we are among the top three leading destinations of such tourists in West Asia," he further noted. **→9**

## Zarif slams U.S. hypocrisy in Saudi-related issues

**TEHRAN** – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has slammed U.S. hypocrisy in dealing with Saudi Arabia's human rights and nuclear program, saying neither human rights nor a nuclear program have been the real concern of the U.S.

"Day by day it becomes clearer to the world what was always clear to us: neither human rights nor a nuclear program have

been the real concern of the U.S. First a dismembered journalist; now illicit sale of nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia fully expose #USHypocrisy," Zarif tweeted on Wednesday.

According to a new report, the Trump administration sought to rush the transfer of American nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia in potential violation of the law.



### ARTICLE

**Hanif Ghaffari**  
Political analyst

## Complicated puzzle in the UK!

Britain's withdrawal from the European Union has become a major riddle in the country. Many English citizens do not have a complete understanding of the EU, the British government and the UK Parliament's move to leave the European Union. However, the British authorities seem to have planned a tentative game.

Recently, some western news sources are speaking of an issue called "repeating the Brexit referendum", and name it as a possible option! An option that had been previously denied by British authorities, including Theresa May, the Prime Minister of the country. According to the France news agency, regarding the increasing doubt about the British Prime Minister's efforts to conclude an agreement with the United Europe, the possibility of holding a second referendum on Brexit has multiplied.

However, one of the goals of the English authorities is to complicate the exit process of the European Union. Accordingly, "Brexit" continues to be an implicit term in the Britain's political equations. The British government, with its widespread negative propaganda against the Brexit, is seeking to re-arrange a referendum. In other words, the European authorities are trying to direct the public opinion about the Brexit.

It should not be forgotten that both Labor and Conservative parties in the UK in the 2016 referendum were opposed to withdrawal from the European Union. The negative propaganda of the Theresa May's government against the Brexit since 2016 is known to everyone. After the British citizens voted to leave the European Union in 2016, the two Labor and Conservative parties (as UK's two traditional parties) tried their best to change the general vote on this issue.

The active role played by people like former British Prime Minister Tony Blair can well indicate the dissatisfaction among British authorities over the Brexit. Although it seems that Theresa May is trying to convince legislators to give a positive vote to this agreement, but not only members of the Labor Party, but also some members of the Conservative Party are opposing it. The MPs argue that the Brexit is basically contrary to the interests of the UK. **→13**

## An odyssey of Iranian-American Islamic scholar Laleh Bakhtiar

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Maryam Qarehgozlou

**TEHRAN** — Laleh Bakhtiar is an Iranian-American Muslim author, translator and clinical psychologist. She is also the first American woman to present a critical translation of holy Quran in English.

Born on July 29, 1938, in Tehran, Iran, to an Iranian father and American mother, she grew up in Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

Bakhtiar has a BA in History from Chatham College, MA in Philosophy and Counseling Psychology and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of New Mexico.

Bakhtiar is a Licensed Professional Psychotherapist in the State of Illinois. She also taught courses on Islam at the University of Chicago.

She is co-author of A Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture (University of Chicago Press) and author of SUFI Expressions of the Mystic Quest (Thames and Hudson), as well as a three volume work, God's Will Be Done, on Moral Healing and some 15 other books on various aspects of Islam. She is the leading authority on spiritual chivalry, most clearly expressed in the Sufi Enneagram, also known as the Greater Struggle. She has also translated over 30 books on Islam and the Islamic movement into English.

Bakhtiar is presently Director of the Institute of Traditional Psychology and Resident Scholar at Kazi Publication.

Coming from a prominent family and a mixed Iranian-American background as well as her true desire to learn and her pure natural genius have

given Bakhtiar the enormous privilege to become a well-known author.

### Abol Ghassem of Tus

Her father, Abol Ghassem Bakhtiar (1872-1971), was the first Iranian who obtained a degree in medicine from a university in the United States, Syracuse University, 1926.

Abol Ghassem was born to a poor family in Borujen, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, and learned how to read and write by attending Maktab (old-fashioned elementary schools primarily used for teaching children in reading, writing, grammar and Islamic studies) from the age of 5 to 10, however, despite his deep fondness for acquiring education and becoming a doctor he failed to attend school or university until he became a middle-aged man. **→12**

## Pakistan PM offers cooperation, demands 'actionable evidence' from India

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

**TEHRAN** — Almost a week after a deadly attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir killed at least 44 members of India's central reserve police force, Pakistan's premier finally broke his silence on Tuesday.

The deadliest attack in the disputed Himalayan region since the insurgency broke out in late 1980s sparked widespread outrage and protests in India, with some politicians calling for 'retaliation'.

The responsibility for the attack was claimed by Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), headed by Masood Azhar, which reportedly has bases in Pakistan.

Following the attack, India accused Pakistan's

intelligence agency of sponsoring the attack and providing sanctuary to anti-India militant groups like JeM.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed a "befitting reply" and federal minister Arun Jaitley said New Delhi would take all diplomatic steps to ensure "complete isolation of Pakistan" in the international community.

Responding to the tirade, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said the threat to diplomatically isolate Pakistan was "a dream which will never come true".

Amidst this hullabaloo, one important voice was silent, that of Prime Minister Imran Khan. He was busy with his guest from Riyadh who came with investment worth billions of dollars.

On Tuesday morning, PM Khan, in a 10-minute video message addressed to the Indian government, said Islamabad will take action if Delhi shares any "actionable evidence" linking Pakistan with last week's suicide bombing in south Kashmir.

He said he wanted to respond to India's allegations earlier, "but we had a very important visit from the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, we had an investment conference happening that we had been preparing for a long time," said the cricketer-turned-politician.

Khan offered to cooperate with India and again extended an olive branch over Kashmir issue, but he also warned India against any act of aggression, saying Pakistan will not hesitate in retaliating. **→6**



© Tehran Times/ Asghar Khanseh

## 3 music industry elites receive lifetime honors at Fajr festival

**ART** **TEHRAN** — Vocalist d e s k Karim Saleh Azimi, pianist Fakhri Malekpur and instrument maker Ramin Jazayeri were honored with lifetime achievement awards during the closing ceremony of the 34th Fajr Music Festival on Tuesday.

The ceremony attended by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi was held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall. **→16**



### ARTICLE

**Syed Zafar Mehdi**  
Journalist  
from New Delhi

## MBS tours South Asia, seeks to improve his battered image with petrodollars

Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman is touring South Asia these days to brush up his battered image following the global outcry over diabolical murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The famously infamous 'butcher of Riyadh', who has faced blistering criticism over Khashoggi's cold-blooded murder and the ongoing genocide in Yemen, is doling out billions of petrodollars to keep his friends and foes in good humor.

His first stop on the three-nation tour was understandably Pakistan, the cash-strapped South Asian ally of Riyadh. With a massive entourage and billions of dollars, MBS was given red carpet welcome in Islamabad and driven from the airport by the prime minister himself.

While the Pakistan government left no stone unturned to appease its guest, even conferring him the highest civilian award of the country, people in the streets protested against the visit of the 'murderer' and denounced the government for putting the country's sovereignty at stake in lieu of petrodollars.

News reports said almost 750 hotels rooms and luxury cars had been hooked for the royal visit and about 3,500 pigeons were bought for release to mark the prince's maiden visit to Pakistan.

During his two-day visit to Pakistan, MBS signed \$20 billion in investment deals, according to news reports. The biggest project is \$10 billion refinery and oil complex in Gwadar, a port city in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province close to Iran border.

According to analysts, the project will give Saudi firm foothold in the restive Balochistan province of Pakistan and it could be used as a launch pad for efforts to destabilize neighboring Iran.

"The investments would further enhance Saudi influence in Pakistan as well as the kingdom's foothold in Baluchistan," James Dorsey of Singapore-based S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies wrote in a blog last week. **→6**



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Salehi calls for interreligious unity

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, has called for religious unity, saying regardless of being a Christian, Muslim or follower of other religions, "we are all Iranians and belong to the same family."

Salehi made the remarks in a meeting with the Armenian Orthodox primate of the diocese of Tehran, Archbishop Sebuhr Sarkisian, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

"We have many commonalities and there's no need to talk about the differences," he said.

For his part, Sarkisian said, "We regard ourselves as a part of Iran."



Iran determined to reconstruct Iraq: envoy

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iraj Masjedi, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, has voiced Iran's readiness to reconstruct Iraq, saying cooperation in reconstruction of the Arab country is already happening, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"Iran is determined to reconstruct the Daesh-stricken Iraqi towns and cities in a similar way that it supported the friendly and brotherly government and people of the country during the fight against Daesh," Masjedi said during a meeting with officials of the Council of Balad in Iraq's Salaheddin Province.

The ambassador added no one can create a rift between the two nations of Iran and Iraq. "Iranian companies initiated reconstructing and strengthening infrastructures in Iraq and this trend would continue."



Iran, Belarus seeking to expand cooperation

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's ambassador to Minsk met on Tuesday with Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister to discuss ways to expand cooperation between the two countries.

During the meeting, Ambassador Mustafa Oveysi conferred with Andre Dapk Yonous on the most important issues and cooperation in areas of politics and economy, IRNA reported.

Plans to schedule exchange of high-level and expert delegations and holding a meeting between foreign ministries of the two countries were also among other issues discussed.

The Belarusian official also voiced his congratulation on the anniversary of National Day of the Islamic Republic and wished for peace, progress and success for the Iranian government and nation.



INSTEX won't resolve Iran's economic issues: ex-envoy

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A former Iranian ambassador to Germany says INSTEX, a European financial channel for trade with Iran, will not resolve Iran's economic problems.

"It is a mistake to think our problems will be resolved through this mechanism, because most of our economic problems are rooted in domestic mismanagement," Alireza Sheikh-Attar said, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

He also said European countries' efforts to become independent of the United States in fields of politics and defense have never been successful.

The only success they have had was their objection to U.S. policies toward Iran after it withdrew from the nuclear deal, Sheikh-Attar added.



Iraq says close to strike deal with Iran to trade in euro

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iraq is close to finalizing a deal that will allow it to import Iranian energy despite American sanctions by avoiding the U.S. dollar, an Iraqi official said on Tuesday, BNN Bloomberg reported.

"A big delegation came from the Iranian central bank and the idea was proposed to trade with Iran in euros," Abdulkarim Hashim Mustafa, special adviser to Iraq's prime minister, said in an interview in Moscow.

"These are American sanctions and we have the right to protect our national interests," Mustafa said. "We tell them always: we are your friends but we are not part of your policies in the region. The Americans are well aware of this -- it isn't news for them."



Envoy: U.S. JCPOA exit won't reduce Iran-S. Africa co-op

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — South African Ambassador to Tehran Vika Mazwi Khumalo said on Tuesday that U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA will not reduce his country's economic, trade and cultural cooperation with Iran.

In a meeting with Isfahan Governor General Abbas Rezaei, the ambassador added promoting tourism is one of the effective areas for economic growth, IRNA reported.

Stressing the need for establishing direct flight between the two countries, he said, "Although there are economic and international limits in the field, we are seeking to solve the problems."

Rezaei, for his part, said both sides have the capacities for scientific and technological exchanges.

# Rouhani: U.S. pressures amount to 'terrorist act'



country, many important European countries sent lower-level officials," the Iranian president remarked.

"Today, there's an all-out sparring match between Iran and America, meaning that they're using all of their power against the

Iranian nation and the Iranian nation is also using all of its willpower, hope and confidence against them," he said.

Rouhani pointed to U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's calls on European states to exit the JCPOA, saying Pence's efforts failed because Europeans responded decisively that they will remain in the deal.

In the meantime, he continued, the U.S. house speaker has also described U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA as "completely wrong".

**■ 'No doubt nation's willpower will defeat America'**

The president further argued that there's a "war of willpowers" between the two countries, saying, "We have no doubt about the victory of the Iranian nation's willpower against America."

He stressed that the Iranian nation will never succumb to pressure and bullying.

The Iranian nation and government are banded together and "our alliance and unity can drive us to success against their pressure," Rouhani noted.

## Larijani urges remaining parties to fulfil their obligations under nuclear deal

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday that the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal should fulfil their obligations under the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"The parties to the JCPOA have avoided to accept the U.S. illegitimate demands and have made efforts to preserve the JCPOA, however, we expect them to respect multilateralism and fulfil their obligations to keep the deal alive," Larijani said during a speech at Renmin University of China.

He noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency has confirmed Iran's commitment to the nuclear deal for 13 times, but the U.S. refused to remain committed to its obligations under the agreement the agreement and is encouraging others to violate it.

In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the JCPOA and ordered reimposition of sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6 and the second round, which targets

Iran's oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

The U.S. has threatened to punish any company that do business with Iran.

In a speech to a security conference in Munich on February 16, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said Europe should follow Washington's lead in pulling out of the nuclear deal.

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

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

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

## Xi stresses 'comprehensive strategic ties' with Iran

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Chinese President Xi Jinping insisted on Wednesday that his country is seeking to develop "comprehensive strategic ties" with Iran.

The Chinese leader made the statement in a meeting with the visiting Iranian Parliament speaker Ali Larijani in Beijing on Wednesday. During the meeting, Larijani called China "one of Iran's reliable partners", calling for the expansion of mutual relationship.

A day earlier, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing, said, "Our relationship with China is very valuable to us." Zarif added, "We consider the comprehensive strategic partnership between Iran and China as one of our most important relations."

Also on Wednesday, Larijani held talks with Lee Shoe Young, chairman of Iran-China parliamentary friendship group.

During the meeting, he said that friendly ties between the two states date back more than 2,000 years.

"No country can damage the Iran-China relations," added Larijani who started a tour of China on Monday accompanied by Zarif, Oil

Minister Bijan Zanganeh, Economy Minister Farhad Dejpasand, central bank governor Abdolnasser Hamati and some parliamentarians.

Larijani on Tuesday said that Iran is ready to boost ties with China in various areas. "Relations between Iran and China have always been based on friendship," he said during a meeting with Li Zhanshu, Chinese chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, in Beijing.

Li said that the two countries are determined to expand relations.

Both Iran and China have been the target of Washington's stepped-up economic pressure tactics under President Donald Trump.

The Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, to which China is also a signatory, last May and unleashed the "toughest ever" sanctions against Tehran.

China, along with other parties to the deal, has repeatedly defended the nuclear deal and expressed its resolve to keep the accord in place.

Washington has also been engaged in economic tensions with Beijing over the past months, in what observers fear could turn into an all-out trade war between the world's two largest economies.

## General: Pakistan's intelligence agency backs terrorists

Rahim Safavi tells Pakistan not to pin hope on Saudi Arabia which will collapse by 2030

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader, said on Wednesday that Pakistan's intelligence agency supports terrorists.

Major General Rahim Safavi did not give any details.

The general also called on neighboring Pakistan not to link the country to Saudi Arabia which its system will not survive beyond 2030.

"We are neighbor to Pakistani. The Pakistanis should know that the Saudi government will not last," Safavi remarked.

Safavi, a former IRGC chief who now teaches geopolitics at Shahid Beheshti University, said, "16 European research centers have released a document titled 'world in 2030' predicting that the Al Saud regime will not exist by 2030 and



Iran will be the most powerful country in the region." The remarks by the top military advisor came a few

days after the Jaish al-Adl terrorist group, which is based in Pakistan, carried out a suicide attack on February 13 near Iran's border with Pakistan killing 27 servicemen and injuring 13 others.

Some political and military officials in Iran believe that these terrorist groups are armed and financed by Saudi Arabia but Pakistan is turning a blind eye to this issue because it receives economic help from Saudi Arabia.

Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, the IRGC ground force commander, announced on Tuesday that the person who carried out the suicide on February 13 in the border province of Sistan-Balouchestan was a Pakistani national.

He said some other members of the terrorist team were Pakistani nationals as well.

## Iran: Pakistan has not met expectations in fighting terrorism

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Hossein Zolfaghari has said that the Pakistani government has not met Iran's expectations in countering terrorism.

"Pakistan's actions in countering terrorists have not fulfilled our expectations," ISNA quoted him as saying on Wednesday.

Zolfaghari said Pakistanis have taken some actions, however, they are not enough.

On February 13, a car laden with explosives hit a bus of IRGC soldiers on Zahedan-Khash road in the border province of Sistan-Balouchestan, killing 27 and injuring the remaining 13.

Iran has strongly criticized Islamabad for failing to protect its borders with Iran, saying Pakistan has been turned into a safe haven for terrorist outfits such as Jaish al-Adl, which claimed responsibility for the Feb. 13 attack.

On Sunday, the 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 Jaish al-Adl and its base inside Pakistan. Qassemi also said the ministry asked Pakistan to take "immediate and necessary measures" to identify and arrest the attackers.

In an interview with IRNA published on



Tuesday, Masood said, "Pakistan will continue to work with Iran to bring an end to terrorism that affects our region."

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.

## IRGC general: Claim that U.S. sabotaging Iran's missile program is a lie

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force on Tuesday strongly rejected claim that the U.S. has been sabotaging Iran's missile program, saying it is just a lie.

"If this is not a lie, then why are they calling for missile negotiations? But I say that it is a lie," Amir Ali Hajizadeh said, Fars reported.

Addressing a meeting in the Western city of Hamedan, the brigadier general said when the U.S. and Israel attempted to sabotage Iran's missile industry, the country's missile experts not only foiled their plot vigilantly but also turned it into a big and valuable opportunity for the country.

Hajizadeh referred to U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks who asked his predecessors about the reason for such huge expenses in the Middle East in the past few years, saying their failed attempts to sabotage Iran's missile program was one of the places that the money was spent.

His remarks came after the U.S. media claimed that the Trump administration had reportedly revived a secret plan to sabotage Iran's ballistic missiles as part of its broader plan to weaken the Islamic Republic's military might and harm its economy.

Citing current and former administration officials, The New York Times reported on



February 13 that the clandestine operation had been ongoing for some time now but it was practically impossible to determine whether it has been successful and if yes, to what extent.

The officials claimed the White House program might have caused a number of Iranian recent missile launches to fail over the past years.

According to the New York Times, the program was created under former President George W. Bush, who sought to disrupt Iran's aerospace program by slipping defective parts and materials into its supply chains.

According to the report, the sabotage attempts were sped up during the early years of former President Barack Obama's time in the White House. However, they were toned down in 2017, when Mike Pompeo, who would go on to become the country's Secretary of State, took over as the director of the CIA.



# We'll target U.S. if Washington deploys missiles in Europe: Putin

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned the United States against deploying new missiles in Europe, threatening to retaliate in kind by targeting Western capitals with his own new weaponry.

Delivering a state of the nation address, Putin said the U.S. abandoned a key arms control pact - the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF) - to free its hands to build new missiles and tried to shift the blame for the move on Russia.

"I'm saying this clearly and openly - Russia will be forced to create and deploy new types of weapons that could be used not only against the territories where a direct threat to us comes from, but also against the territories where decision-making centers directing the use of missile systems threatening us are located," Putin said.

"The capability of such weapons, including the time to reach those centers, will be equivalent to the threats against Russia."

He did not say what specific new weapons Moscow could deploy, but he reported quick progress on an array of new systems presented a year ago.

## New arms

Putin said the first batch of Avangard hypersonic glide vehicles will be deployed this year.

He added the tests of the new Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile, the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon nuclear-powered underwater drone have been progressing successfully.

The first submarine equipped to carry the Poseidon will be commissioned later this year, Putin reported.

He also announced the coming deploy-



ment of the new Zircon hypersonic missile for the Russian navy, saying it's capable of flying at nine times the speed of sound and will have a range of 1,000km.

He said the Zircon program will not be too costly as the missile has been designed to equip Russia's existing surface ships and submarines.

While issuing a tough warning to the U.S., Putin also said Russia still wants friendly relations with Washington and remains open to arms control talks.

"We don't want confrontation, particularly with such a global power as the U.S.," he said.

The U.S. has accused Russia of breaching

the INF treaty by deploying a cruise missile that violates its limits - accusations Moscow rejected.

The INF treaty banned the production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 500km to 5,500km.

The intermediate-range weapons were seen as particularly destabilizing as they take less time to reach their targets compared with the intercontinental ballistic missiles. That would leave practically no time for decision makers, raising the likelihood of a global nuclear conflict over a false launch warning.

## Internal audience

The tough talk on missiles seemed aimed at stirring up patriotic support for Putin, 66, who won re-election last year with more than 76 percent of the vote but has been recently struggling with dropping poll numbers.

A survey by Russia's independent Levada Centre released in January found his approval rating at 64 percent - a figure many Western leaders could only dream of, but Putin's lowest in five years.

Most of Wednesday's speech focused on promises to address poor living standards, a key source of frustration for many Russians nearly 20 years after Putin came to power.

"We cannot wait, the situation must change for the better now," Putin told assembled legislators from Russia's lower house State Duma and upper house Federation Council.

"Within this year, [Russians] should feel changes," he said. Putin lamented about 19 million Russians were living below the poverty line, saying: "This is too much ... The state should help." He focused, in particular, on help for Russian families, pointing to a demographic crisis that has seen birth rates fall drastically since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Last year, the government's statistics agency said the country's birth rate had fallen by 11 percent in 2017 to the lowest level in a decade.

"The incomes of Russian families should of course rise," he said, promising new child benefits and lower taxes for larger families.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## N. Korea's Kim shuffles nuclear talks team after defections, spying allegations

### Kim to travel to Vietnam by train, summit at Government Guesthouse

Veteran North Korean diplomats are being sidelined from nuclear talks ahead of a second summit with the United States as recent defections and allegations of spying undermine the trust of leader Kim Jong Un, South Korean officials and experts say.

Kim has purged and replaced many top diplomats and officials who served his father and grandfather with new, younger advisors as he gears up to meet the United States President Donald Trump in Vietnam next week.

Among the most significant changes, Kim has appointed little-known Kim Hyok Chol to spearhead working-level talks with U.S. nuclear envoy Stephen Biegun.

A former ambassador to Spain who was expelled in 2017 after North Korean nuclear and missile tests, Kim Hyok Chol has been working at the State Affairs Commission, a top governing body chaired by the young leader, a South Korean official said.

He replaced Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui, who led negotiations in the run up to the first Trump-Kim summit in Singapore in June.

"It's a big boys' game and many diplomats are being neglected, as they face fierce inter-agency rivalry and questions about their ideological faithfulness given their experience in richer, capitalist nations," the South Korean official said, asking to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the issue.

"Kim Hyok Chol is a career diplomat too, but he apparently has passed a loyalty test to become the point man in the negotiations."

## Spy charges

The promotion of Kim Hyok Chol, believed to be in his late 40s, was partly influenced by the 2016 defection of Thae Yong Ho, a former deputy ambassador to Britain, and the recent disappearance of Jo Song Gil, a senior diplomat in Italy, the official said.

Adding to Kim Jong Un's mistrust in veteran diplomats, Han Song Ryol, who was vice foreign minister in charge of the U.S. relations until early last year, has been purged on charges of spying for the United States, two sources with knowledge of the situation told Reuters.

Han was one of the best known and highly respected North Korean diplomats in the United States, having for years manned the so-called "New York channel," a key diplomatic conduit between Pyongyang and Washington, before returning home in 2013.

But Han has been out of the public eye for the past year,

with state media last mentioning him in February 2018.

South Korea's Unification Ministry removed his name in its annual 'Who's Who' in North Korea directory, released last month. A diplomatic source in Seoul told Reuters, citing North Korean officials, Han was purged last year after being accused of spying for the United States and pocketing funds.

Michael Madden, a North Korea leadership expert at the Washington-based Stimson Centre who regularly speaks with sources inside the country, said two people told him Han faced "espionage charges" and disappeared last July.

Thae also said Han had been purged, which means he was likely to have been sent to a labor camp for reeducation or possibly executed.

South Korea's Chosun Ilbo newspaper also reported last month, citing an unnamed source, that Han was sent to a labor camp after making an unspecified proposal on the nuclear talks against the ruling Workers' Party's guidelines.

An official at the Unification Ministry said the information on Han could not be confirmed.

"There were financial problems, but the biggest thing was his spy allegation. Several other diplomats, especially those who were close to Han, were investigated," said the first source, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

## Driving a wedge

In a 2017 report based on interviews with 20 elite defectors, the North Korea Strategy Centre, a defector-run think tank in Seoul, said more than 70 officials have been executed since Kim took power in late 2011.

Thae said at least 10 diplomats were killed under Kim, and replaced by younger aides and loyalists. Many other diplomats and officials have been sidelined.

In a Facebook post last week, Russia's Embassy in North Korea confirmed Kwon Jong Gun was the new director of the foreign ministry's North America Department, a post that has been vacant since Choe became a vice foreign minister.

Choe's boss, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, a former nuclear envoy who was widely expected to be the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's counterpart, has never had a chance to show his credentials as Kim continued to rely on Kim Yong Chol, a former spymaster specialized in inter-Korean affairs.

Thae, the former diplomat in London, said the unorthodox new breed of negotiators was aimed at driving a wedge between the free-wheeling Trump and his team of technocrats, who were mostly cautious and skeptical about



North Korea's claims of pursuing denuclearization.

"North Korea's diplomacy has taken an unprecedented tactical course, which is tailor made for Trump," Thae told a news conference in Seoul on Tuesday.

"By appointing Kim Hyok Chol, Kim Jong Un was trying to give the impression that there's no one between them, so that Trump will talk to him and shut his ears to his own staff."

## Kim to travel to Vietnam by train

Vietnam is preparing for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to arrive by train for his summit in Hanoi next week with President Donald Trump, two sources with direct knowledge of security and logistics planning told Reuters on Wednesday.

It could take Kim at least two and a half days to travel the thousands of kilometers through China by train, from the North Korean capital of Pyongyang to Vietnam, meaning he would have to set off later this week in time for his planned Feb. 25 arrival.

Kim's train will stop at the Vietnamese border station of Dong Dang, where he will disembark and drive 170 km to Hanoi by car, the sources said.

Separately, three other sources with direct knowledge of the summit preparations told Reuters the preferred location for the Feb. 27-28 meeting between Trump and Kim is the Government Guesthouse, a colonial-era government building in central Hanoi.

All five sources who spoke to Reuters said the plans were subject to change.

(Source: agencies)

## Cuba: Mobilize all peace-loving forces towards respect for sovereignty, independence, self-determination of people

Cuba's International Relations Commission in a statement urged the mobilization of all peace-loving forces towards respect for the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of people.

The statement said:

Dear Friends:

Urge the mobilization of all peace-loving forces towards respect for the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of people.

The United States government is preparing a military adventure disguised as a humanitarian intervention in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

They have unleashed economic, commercial, financial and media war against Venezuela, stealing their resources and seeking pretexts for aggression.

An attempt at a coup d'état is under way, following the imposition of the most crude manner of a self-proclaimed "president" that they impose and finance and who is willing to demand military intervention.

To fabricate pretexts they resort to deception, telling lies in order to present a humanitarian crisis that does not exist and to establish by force a humanitarian corridor that allows them to invade.

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

Havana, February 15, 2019.

International Relations Commission

## UAE eases Qatar shipping ban

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has eased a ban on the shipping of goods between it and Qatar enforced under a political and economic boycott of Doha, according to port circulars and an industry source.

An Abu Dhabi Ports circular dated Feb. 12 cancelled previous directives that banned cargoes of Qatar origin from UAE waters and ports and those of UAE origin from Qatar. It maintained a ban on vessels flying the Qatar flag, owned by Qatari shipping firms or nationals.

An industry source told Reuters the circular applied to all ports in the UAE. Government authorities in both Persian Gulf Arab states were not immediately available to comment.

The UAE, House of Saud regime, Egypt and Bahrain severed diplomatic, trade and transport ties with Qatar in June 2017 over allegations it supports terrorism, a charge Doha denies.

It was not clear if the move was linked to complaints filed to the World Trade Organization (WTO) related to the Persian Gulf dispute.

Qatar filed in July 2017 a wide-ranging legal complaint at the WTO to challenge the trade boycott. Last month, the UAE filed a complaint against Qatar at the WTO saying Doha has imposed a ban on Emirati products.

On the political front, there has been no indication of a thaw. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have said the dispute is not a priority and that Qatar must accept a list of conditions before ties are restored. Qatar has said that although it would like the matter resolved it is moving on and last year quit oil producer group OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries).

(Source: Reuters)

## Netanyahu-Putin meeting in Russia postponed

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin have postponed a planned meeting on Thursday in Moscow for talks on Iranian military activity in Syria, an Israeli official said.

The two leaders would speak by phone on Thursday instead, the official said on condition of anonymity on Wednesday, adding that a new date for the meeting would be set as soon as possible.

It was described as a postponement of several days.

The official gave no reason for the postponement, but Israeli media said it was related to Netanyahu's strategizing with allied right-wing parties for April 9 elections ahead of a Thursday deadline for electoral lists to be submitted.

Kremlin official Yuri Ushakov told Russian state news agency Ria Novosti that the meeting was postponed due to Israeli internal political reasons.

The meeting would have been their first extensive face-to-face talks since a friendly fire incident in September that led to a Russian plane being downed by Syrian air defenses during an Israeli raid, which angered the Kremlin.

Netanyahu and Putin, who have spoken by phone several times since the incident, met in Paris in November on the sidelines of World War I commemorations.

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Syria, and the Israel and Russia have set up a "de-confliction" hotline to avoid accidental clashes.

Netanyahu has pledged to stop Israel's main enemy regional power house Iran from entrenching itself militarily in the neighboring country.

Both Russia and Iran are allies of Syrian President Bashar Assad and have helped his forces inflict numerous defeats on rebels and militants.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Bahrain court gives life sentence to nine anti-regime activists

A court in Bahrain has sentenced nine anti-regime protesters to life imprisonment and handed down prison sentences to several others as the ruling House of Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy-handed clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy campaigners in the Persian Gulf tiny kingdom.

Bahrain's attorney general Ahmad al-Hamadi said the Fourth High Criminal Court sentenced six defendants to life in prison on Tuesday after finding them guilty of "having received training in the use of munitions, possession of explosive devices and weapons for terrorist purposes, hiding convicted citizens and entering and

leaving Bahrain."

Hamadi added that six defendants were sentenced to ten years in jail, one was given a five-year jail term and three others received three-year prison sentences.

The court also stripped three of the political dissidents of their citizenship, and ordered a dozen of them to pay a fine of 500 dinars (\$1,326).

Separately, the same court found three anti-regime protesters guilty of "having received training in Iran and Iraq" and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The trio were also ordered to pay a fine of 300 dinars (\$795).

It also sentenced a dissident to seven

years in prison and handed down five-year jail terms to two others. The court revoked the citizenship of five of the convicts as well.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the House of Khalifah relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates

(UAE) were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3, 2017.

(Source: Press TV)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	159489.5
IFX	1990.01

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,651 rials
GBP	54,861 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.86/b
WTI	\$56.03/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.03/b
Gold	\$1,345.40/oz
Silver	\$16.09/oz
Platinum	\$829.90 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



‘Industry’s priority preserving domestic production level’

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — “The main goal and priority of industry ministry is preserving the current level of domestic production,” Iranian industry minister announced in a news conference in the southern province of Kerman on Wednesday.

The main difficulties are with the issues including supplying working capital for production units and present liquidity volume, which need to be addressed in the current circumstances, IRNA quoted Reza Rahmani as saying.

Supplying raw materials and foreign exchange for units which are import-reliant as well as easing banking facilities and tax issues are among the demands of domestic industrial units, he said.

Iran’s oil exports exceed expectations in early 2019

**1 →** The U.S. imposed new sanctions on Iran’s oil sector in November but gave a six-month waiver to eight countries which allowed them to import some Iranian oil.

South Korea imported 12.46 million tons or 2.94 million barrels of crude oil from Iran in January, while Indian imports stood at 270,500 barrels per day (bpd) in the mentioned month, ship tracking data reviewed by Reuters showed.

Earlier in January, the governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) also announced that Japanese refiners resumed imports of Iranian oil in January.

In sharp U-turn, monetary policy easing back in play across Asia

A slowing global economy and increasing strain on businesses from a year-long Sino-U.S. trade war are tilting central banks from Japan to Australia towards monetary easing in a remarkable 180 degree turn.

Late last year, the debate in Japan was focused on the demerits of printing money and the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) was adamant the next likely move in rates will be up. An emerging market currency sell-off was seen forcing externally vulnerable economies such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines to keep tightening their policy rates.

But even they are now subject to rate cut bets. A softer dollar and lower oil prices played an important role in the turnaround. But crucially for Asia, regional growth engine China is having a worse than expected start to the year and is exporting disinflation to the rest of the region.

The Federal Reserve last month adopted a more cautious approach in a shift that signalled its tightening cycle might be at an end. “What’s obviously happening is that central banks are rethinking monetary policy,” said Piyush Gupta, CEO of DBS Group Holdings in Singapore.

With the exception of Philippines, which is also witnessing rapid disinflation, all major Asian economies are now facing inflation rates at the lower end or even below their central banks’ target. Price growth is sub-1 percent in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand.

“Underlying price pressures are remarkably soft ... and broadly falling,” Frederic Neumann, co-head of Asian economics research at HSBC, said.

“The case for further monetary easing may thus become more pressing, even if in itself this may not be enough to push up growth materially.”

On Tuesday, Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the central bank was ready to boost stimulus if sharp yen rises hurt the economy and its price goal.

Also in Tokyo on the same day, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) deputy governor Diwa Guinigundo said the central bank, which hiked five times last year, will act swiftly if liquidity conditions aren’t sufficient to maintain economic momentum.

Earlier this month, the RBA shifted to a neutral stance from its previous tightening bias, but an increasing number of economists polled by Reuters are predicting a cut.

India’s central bank unexpectedly lowered interest rates in February and analysts are tipping another cut. Of the three major economies running current account deficits, Indonesia is the only one where expectations for a policy reversal, after six hikes last year, are extremely low, as the central bank is more focused on exchange rate stability.

(Source: euronews)

Non-oil exports to Russia up 8.5% in 10 months on year

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s value of non-oil exports to Russia has risen 8.5 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018- January 20, 2019), Mehr news agency reported on Wednesday.

As reported, Iran exported 371.629 tons of non-oil commodities worth \$219 million to Russia during the mentioned ten-month time.

Iran’s non-oil export to the neighboring

country was 370,817 tons valued at \$201.9 million in the same period of time in the previous year.

As previously announced by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran exported 94.875 million tons of non-oil goods worth \$36.35 billion during the first ten months of the present year, registering 2.21 percent growth in terms of value.

IRICA data showed that gas condensate

Each 50MW wind farm creates 44,000 jobs in Iran: official

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Renewable Energy Association said on Wednesday that every 50 megawatts capacity of wind farms could create 44,000 job opportunities in the country, IRIB reported.

Speaking in a meeting at Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Akbar Adibfar noted that in addition to job creation, in the 100MW Takestan wind farm so far more than 90 million liters of gasoil has been saved.

The official also pointed to saving water resources and preventing CO2 emission as other important merits of generating electricity from wind power plants.

Wind and solar farms account for



about 90 percent of Iran’s total renewable generation capacity.

Overall, in the next five years, Iran is aiming for a 5,000 MW increase in renewable capacity to meet growing domestic demand and expand its presence in the regional electricity market.

Japan’s central bank examines central bank digital currencies in new report

Japan’s central bank has examined the role of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) in the current monetary system in a report released on Feb. 19.

In the document, the bank describes the possible ways to implement a CBDC and the hypothetical consequences of different approaches. The report divides possible CBDCs in two categories, the first being those accessible to the general public in a form like banknotes, and the other as those limited for large-value

settlements.

The source of this categorization is attributed to the report released by the Bank for International Settlements in March 2018, which divided CBDCs in general purpose and wholesale CBDCs.

Moreover, after explaining that CBDCs of the latter kind wouldn’t bring many new features to the monetary system, the Japanese report’s authors focused on the first kind throughout most of the document. The report also noted that distributed

Parliament allows oil ministry to issue up to \$3b of Sukuk

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — According to the latest ratification of the parliament, Iranian oil ministry is permitted to issue up to \$3 billion of sharia compliant bonds, known as Sukuk, Shana reported on Wednesday.

Once being approved by the Iranian cabinet, the oil ministry can issue rial-dominated or foreign exchange-reliant Sukuk via the Iranian state-run companies.

The parliament’s ratification also allows Iranian industry ministry and energy ministry to issue Islamic bonds up to \$3 billion, as well.

Sukuk are defined by Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) as “securities of equal denomination representing individual ownership interests in a portfolio of eligible



existing or future assets.”

Sukuk were developed as an alternative to conventional bonds which are not considered permissible by many Muslims as they pay interest and may finance businesses involved in non-Sharia-compliant activities (gambling, alcohol, pork, etc.).

Brexit jobs boom has a flip side that’s holding the economy back

Booming employment, a rare bright spot for the British economy, also has a dark side.

The country’s record-breaking job creation shown in Tuesday’s data may be coming at the cost of investment, which will hurt in the longer term. The idea is that firms are hiring people rather than buying new machinery or software because it will be easy to let them go if they need to change course.

And with just over a month until Britain is due to leave the European Union and no withdrawal agreement yet secured, the risk of a jobs retrenchment is rising. The precariousness of the strong employment figures was highlighted by Japanese carmaker Honda Motor Co.’s decision on Tuesday to close its UK factory in 2021, leading to thousands of job losses.

“Over the last several years you’ve had a slowdown in capital investment and that has actually fueled a labor boom,” said Sanjay Raja, a UK economist at Deutsche Bank AG in London. “In a no-deal scenario, it’s likely that we would see both investment and employment contract.”

The bad news is piling up ahead of the Brexit deadline, from the collapse of regional airline Flybmi to vacuum-maker Dyson Ltd.’s decision to move its headquarters to Singapore.

UK investment has dropped for four consecutive quarters, leading to a sharp cooling in overall growth in the fourth



quarter and forecasts for the worst performance since the financial crisis in 2019. The slowdown is coming despite the lowest unemployment since the 1970s.

■ BOE analysis

A preference for labor over capital has been a trend in the UK since the financial crisis, and Bank of England policy maker Gertjan Vlieghe highlighted the problem in a speech last week.

“When uncertainty rises, but demand is still robust, it makes sense for businesses to meet that demand by

expanding their workforce rather than by increasing investment spending,” he said. “Employment decisions are less costly to reverse.”

The BOE sees investment falling further this year, and surveys show manufacturers are more optimistic about the prospects for employment than investment. The trend has been good for workers, as figures Tuesday showed wages are now growing comfortably faster than inflation.

But it’s also deepened a dire productivity problem, which has left living standards below their pre-recession levels despite recent signs that labor shortages are pushing up pay growth. Britain still lags well behind all of its Group of Seven peers bar Italy, with hourly output barely higher than its pre-crisis peak.

Brexit may also force companies to invest more in machinery if less migration means that labor shortages get worse, some economists say. On the other hand, barriers to trade could reduce demand for UK products, removing the urgency to increase output and productivity in the first place.

“Firms will face not just weaker external demand but rising costs as a result of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers,” Deutsche Bank’s Raja said. “So you’d expect firms to compensate for these costs by reducing business investment and labor.”

(Source: Bloomberg)

Palladium breaks \$1,500 barrier in record run; gold rises

Palladium briefly surpassed the \$1,500 mark for the first time to touch a record high due to tight supplies and gold topped a 10-month peak on hopes of a U.S.-China trade truce, as investors awaited clarity on U.S. monetary policy.

Spot palladium, which traded as high as \$1,502 per ounce, was up 1.39 percent at \$1,5000 at 7:03 a.m. ET.

“There is a lack of supply in the market and demand is very high,” said Afshin Nabavi, senior vice president at MKS SA, citing lack of supplies from major producers Russia and South Africa.

The supply deficit is likely to widen this year as stricter emissions standards increase demand for catalytic converters, autocatalyst manufacturer Johnson Matthey said last week.

“Environmental requirements are getting stronger, which means more palladium is needed in (manufacturing) a car,” said Yuichi Ikemizu, Tokyo branch manager at ICB Standard Bank.

The autocatalyst metal is additionally supported by the fact that broad-based substitution from palladium to platinum was not immediately feasible, analysts said.

Both metals are primarily consumed

Symbol	Price	Change	%Change
*GOLD	1347.10 ▲	2.2999	0.17%
GLD	126.70 ▲	1.90	1.52%
GOLD/USD	1344.45 ▲	3.37	0.25%
SILV/USD	16.055 ▲	0.075	0.47%
PALL/USD	1499.50 ▲	20.00	1.35%
PLAT/USD	819.32 ▲	1.82	0.22%
*USD INDEX	96.53	UNCH	0.01%

by automakers in catalytic converter manufacturing, but platinum is more heavily used in diesel vehicles that have fallen out of favor since the Volkswagen emissions-rigging scandal broke in 2015.

Unlike platinum, palladium has benefited from a switch to petrol engines

and expectations for growth in hybrid electric vehicles, which tend to be partly gasoline-powered, helping cushion the metal from falling global car sales.

Indicative of the bullish sentiment, net long positions in palladium have jumped since August last year, with prices rising

about 80 percent during the same period.

Meanwhile, spot gold hit its highest since April 19, 2018 at \$1,346.73 per ounce and was last up 0.17 percent at \$1,343.34. U.S. gold futures also rose 0.09 percent to \$1,346.

“Hopes for a deal between the U.S. and China and the U.S. dollar, which is slightly lower, are offering support to the metal,” said ABN AMRO analyst Georgette Boele.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday said trade talks were going well and suggested he was open to extend the March 1 deadline for a deal.

The dollar fell as traders positioned ahead of the release of minutes from the Fed’s last meeting later today.

Investors will scan the minutes for more guidance on rate increases this year. Higher rates tend to weigh on non-yielding gold.

On the technical front, “the next psychological level is \$1,350, but what is more important is that gold breaks above the \$1,365 level,” Boele said.

Among other precious metals, platinum was up 0.58 percent at \$822.24 per ounce, while spot silver was up 0.33 percent at \$16.03.

(Source: Reuters)



valued at \$3.053 billion, LNG worth \$1.815 billion, liquefied propane valued at \$1.484 billion, methanol worth \$1.229 billion, low-density oils and their byproducts except for gasoline valued at \$1.223 billion were the

main exported products during the ten-month period with China, Iraq, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Afghanistan, and Turkey as the main export markets of Iranian non-oil goods.



# Oil dips below 2019 highs as surging U.S. supply counters OPEC cuts

Oil prices slipped away from 2019 highs on Wednesday, with surging U.S. supply and slowing economic growth tempering upward pressure from supply cuts led by producer club OPEC and from Washington's sanctions on Iran and Venezuela.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures hit 2019 highs of \$56.39 per barrel on Wednesday but had slipped back to \$56.16 per barrel by 0746 GMT, which was slightly above their last settlement.

International Brent crude futures were at \$66.41 per barrel, down 4 cents from their last close, though still not far off their 2019 high of \$66.83 per barrel, hit on Monday.

Oil prices have been supported by supply cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

OPEC-member and top crude exporter Saudi Arabia is expected to reduce shipments of light crude oil to Asia in March as part of the effort to tighten markets.

OPEC as well as some non-affiliated producers such as Russia agreed late last year to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to prevent a large supply overhang from swelling.

"We have lowered Saudi crude oil output in line with announcements... (and) are now assuming that Saudi Arabia will produce in



the first three quarters of 2019 less than the 10.31 million bpd target it agreed to at the Dec. 7 OPEC, non-OPEC meeting," French bank BNP Paribas said in a note.

Because of the cuts, BNP said it expected oil prices "to rally through Q3 2019", with Brent to average \$73 per barrel by then and

WTI to average \$66.

Another key oil price driver has been U.S. sanctions on oil exporters Iran and Venezuela.

Despite the sanctions, Iran's crude exports were higher than expected in January, averaging around 1.25 million bpd, according to Refinitiv ship tracking data. Many analysts

had expected Iran oil exports to drop below 1 million bpd after the imposition of U.S. sanctions last November.

Britain's Barclays bank said on Wednesday the U.S. sanctions meant "although there is no lack of resources, there is an increasing lack of access to them".

Standing against the supply cuts and sanctions is U.S. crude output, which soared by more than 2 million bpd in 2018 to a record 11.9 million bpd, thanks to booming shale oil production, which the Energy Information Administration on Tuesday said was expected to keep rising.

BNP Paribas said surging U.S. output would feed into lower oil prices toward the end of the year, with Brent to dip to an average of \$67 a barrel by the fourth quarter and WTI to average \$61.

"U.S. oil production growth, driven by shale, will be increasingly exported in greater volumes to international markets while the global economy is expected to witness a synchronized slowdown in growth," the bank said.

In a sign of a slowdown in Asia, central banks from Japan to Australia are returning toward monetary easing in an effort to stem stuttering growth.

(Source: Reuters)

## Oilfield in western China has Morgan Stanley thinking shale boom

An oil discovery in a remote corner of northwestern China could trigger a surge in shale drilling, benefiting service companies and providing a needed output boost for the world's biggest importer, according to analysts at Morgan Stanley.

PetroChina Co. has achieved daily output of 100 tons of oil (733 barrels) at a test well in the Jimsar field in Xinjiang province, suggesting that shale oil has strong commercial potential in the nation for the first time, analysts including Andy Meng said in a Feb. 18 note.

China has had some success in producing shale gas, but advancing on shale oil would be a particular help to the world's largest crude importer, which has seen output decline since 2015 even as the country's leadership extols the virtues of energy self-sufficiency. Still, it's unlikely China will be able to scale the heights of U.S. shale, which accounts for about half of American production, Morgan Stanley said.

The bank estimates shale oil output in China could reach about 100,000 to 200,000 barrels a day by 2025 -- still a sliver of total output. By comparison, the U.S. produced 8.3 million barrels a day in February, according to Rystad Energy.

Nevertheless, excitement over shale could spur more spending and boost revenue for the oilfield service companies that will be called on to handle the higher



workloads, Morgan Stanley said. Yantai Jereh Oilfield Services Group Co., which is up 31 percent this year, and SPT Energy Group Inc., which has risen 18 percent, are among the potential beneficiaries, it said.

"We believe the Jimsar shale oil discovery is likely to trigger China's shale oil revolution," Meng said in the report. "We expect a further capex rise in 2019, which could make onshore oilfield services names the key beneficiaries."

While Jimsar is China's first shale oil find, the country has been drilling shale gas for years. But difficult geology and restrictions that keep drilling in the hands of the state-owned giants have slowed development. While the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that China has nearly twice as much underground shale gas as the U.S., the U.S. produced about 639 billion cubic meters of the fuel in 2017, compared to about 9 billion in China.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## \$44b Indian-Saudi-UAE oil refinery hinges on India's elections

The fate of a proposed mega refinery and petrochemical complex in India worth \$44 billion and involving the national oil companies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE could depend on the outcome of India's general elections this spring and whether the party of incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi could win a second term in office.

In June last year, Saudi Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) signed a framework agreement and a memorandum of understanding with a consortium of Indian national oil companies to join the mega project at Ratnagiri in the Maharashtra state on India's west coast. Saudi Aramco and ADNOC will jointly own 50 percent of the new joint venture company RRPCL, while the other 50 percent will be held by the Indian consortium. The parties agreed to explore a strategic partnership and co-investment in the development of the \$44 billion mega refinery.

By investing in the giant Indian refinery, the national oil companies of leading OPEC producers Saudi Arabia and the UAE would secure off-take for their crude in a strategic fast-growing oil market in Asia.

However, the process of land acquisition for the new giant complex was put on hold late last year due to strong opposition from local farmers, many of whom depend on their land for their income and livelihoods.



On Monday, the chief minister of Maharashtra state, Devendra Fadnis, announced that the planned refinery would be relocated to another site, without specifying it.

Fadnis, a member of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), made the announcement after sealing an alliance for the general election with regional party Shiv Sena, which has opposed the proposed refinery.

The completion of the refinery carries a lot of political risk, and it would also depend on who wins the next election or who makes it in a coalition government, Sri Paravaikkarasu, an analyst at industry consultant FGE in Singapore, told Bloomberg.

According to Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd (RRPL), the joint venture company responsible for the huge 1.2 million bpd complex construction and development, the refinery is expected to be commissioned by the year 2025.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## India becomes biggest buyer of Venezuelan oil after U.S. sanctions: reports

India has emerged as Venezuela's biggest crude buyer in February after US imposed sanctions on Latin American nation's oil giant PDVSA, NDTV news channel reported.

India has been importing 620,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude oil a day since early February, up 66 percent from the previous month, the NDTV news channel reported.

Overall Venezuelan exports fell to 1.1 million barrels a

day this month, or 9.2 percent since January when Venezuelan oil shipments to the United States were called off in the wake of the sanctions.

The United States blocked around \$7 billion in assets belonging to Venezuela's state oil firm PDVSA and began transferring control over them to Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido, who on January 23 proclaimed himself

as Venezuela's interim president.

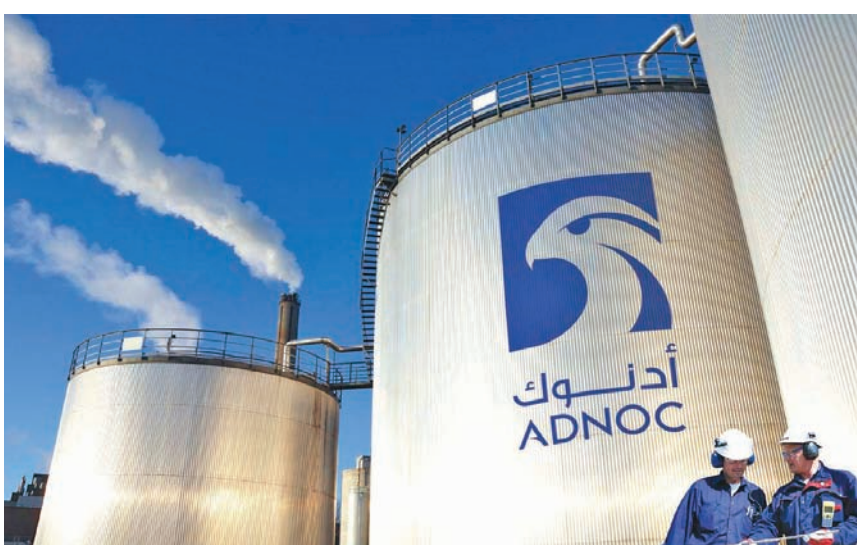
Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, backed by China, Mexico and Russia, accused Guaido of acting at the instructions of the United States and claimed that Washington was plotting together with the opponents of his government to overthrow him and get hold of Venezuela's oil assets.

(Source: Sputnik)

## A worrying trend for international oil giants

International ratings agency Fitch has awarded the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) a stand-alone credit rating of AA+. This rating is evidence of ADNOC's ongoing transformation from a traditional NOC into a more commercially-driven and innovative organization. The AA+ rating is the highest that Fitch gives out to companies in the energy sector. The ratings agency reiterated that a standalone rating only takes into account an entity's creditworthiness without including the ecosystem connected to it. The most remarkable fact at present is that ADNOC has a higher rating than the sovereign rating of its main shareholder, the government of Abu Dhabi. The Abu Dhabi NOC holds vast reserves and a high (and expanding) upstream output, which is combined with low production costs, strong downstream integration and a conservative financial profile.

ADNOC has clearly outperformed its main IOC rivals, such as Petrochina, Shell, BP and Total, which are rated A+, AA-, A and AA- respectively by Fitch. The ADNOC rating came after the successful downstream IPOs put in place by the NOC, such as ADNOC distribution. At present, ADNOC holds around 4.2 percent of the global production of crude, almost all produced and owned in Abu



Dhabi. In 2018 ADNOC increased its hydrocarbon reserves by 1 percent, while adding 7.1 percent of proven gas reserves. Last month, several mainstream IOCs, such as ENI, were awarded several new oil and gas concessions, targeting additional reserve and production expansions. With a production capacity of 3.5 million bpd, ADNOC is already in the top league of producers, but by 2020

it expects its production to increase to 4 million bpd, rising to 5 million bpd by 2030. Possible growth is also expected in local gas production as Abu Dhabi is aiming to become a net gas exporter in the coming years, countering ever growing local demand.

The attention of the financial world will undoubtedly be drawn by ADNOC's AA+ rating, which will be of interest as Saudi

Aramco plans to target international bond issues in the coming weeks. The new AA+ rating will undoubtedly help ADNOC to access international debt markets at lower costs. While ADNOC itself is not yet looking at international bond issues, one of its main units already entered the debt market in 2017, issuing a \$3 billion bond, which was more than three-times oversubscribed.

The success story of ADNOC will likely have a positive effect on other ratings and debt issuing projects in the region. In the coming weeks, Aramco's plans to access international debt markets will be of particular interest as it aims to finance part of its projects and a possible merger with SABIC. Following ADNOC's success it would not be surprising to see Aramco get a similar rating.

This may be bad news in the eyes of other international IOCs however, as the attractiveness of their companies has been waning of late. While giants such as Shell are reporting record profits and higher margins, institutional investors appear to be less interested in providing new capital for upstream and downstream projects of IOCs. The possibility of added competition from the new kids on the block, such as ADNOC or Aramco, will certainly cause some headaches in London, The Hague and Houston.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Saudi Arabia's oil deal with Russia is now 'more fragile than ever,' analyst says

A rolling oil pact between Russia and Saudi Arabia which seeks to support prices by reducing output looks to be on shaky ground with only the Arab nation appearing to fulfil its promises.

Late last year, OPEC producing countries, and non-OPEC producers, led by Russia, agreed to cut supply by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd), an arrangement known as OPEC+.

Saudi Arabia agreed to account for the bulk of OPEC nation cuts and has confirmed it will drop its crude oil production by a further 400,000 barrels per day to 9.8 million b/d in March. If achieved it would mean that since the December, Saudi Arabia has become responsible for 70 percent of the total OPEC+ target.

In turn, Russia was set to account for the greater share of non-OPEC cuts, but from October to the beginning of February had only decreased output by 47,000 barrels per day.

The slow pace to cuts from Russian oil producers drew criticism from Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih, who told CNBC in January that Moscow had moved "slower than I'd like."

That barb led to a response from Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak who said at the beginning of February that Russia was "completely fulfilling its obligations in line with earlier announced plans to gradually cut production by May this year."

During 2018, oil prices were dragged lower by increasing U.S. shale supply and fears over global demand. President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized OPEC on its decision making, claiming prices should be lower.

In November 2018 Trump tweeted that he hoped OPEC would not cut oil output.

On Tuesday International benchmark Brent crude was trading at \$66.39 a barrel at around 12 p.m. London time (7 a.m. ET), down around 0.1 percent, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) stood at \$56.09, almost 1 percent higher.

Oil prices have steadily edged higher since the OPEC+ promise to cut supply and are now sitting at levels not seen since November 2018.

But Torbjorn Soltvedt, principal MENA politics analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, said in a note Tuesday that any end to Russian-Saudi coordination would likely add significant downward pressure on prices.

"Although our base case is still that Riyadh and Moscow find a compromise to extend the agreement, the pact is now looking more fragile than ever," said Soltvedt.

The political analyst added that to save the pact he expected Saudi Arabia may even have to settle for "low levels of (Russian) compliance to save the pact."

Verisk Maplecroft estimate that Riyadh needs \$80 a barrel in order to fund its 2019 budget while in turn, Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed that \$60 is enough to satisfy Moscow's needs.

The next meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers takes place in mid-April.

(Source: CNBC)

## UN investigator seeks scrutiny of South Sudan oil economy

South Sudan's oil economy should be examined by the U.N. Human Rights Council for evidence that oil interests are responsible for war crimes, a member of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan said on Wednesday.

Andrew Clapham, a member of the three-person panel that will report to the Council on March 12, also said that the commission was outraged by reports of ongoing fighting between government forces and the National Salvation Front in the Yei River area, which had displaced thousands.

(Source: Reuters)

## Qatar to buy up to 60 new LNG vessels

Qatar Petroleum (QP) is expected to order 60 new liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers to serve new customers once it ramps up its annual capacity from the current 77 million tonnes (mt) to 110 mt after building four liquefaction trains by 2024.



A report in GulfTimes quoted the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi, who is also president and CEO of QP saying that the state-run oil company has a team, which is in talks with different ship builders worldwide.

"It should be between 50 and 60 vessels that we will require to transport the expanded output of LNG. It will be very substantial number, but things will become clear with time," he said.

He added: "We have a dedicated team of experts who are already working on that element (to acquiring vessels). They have visited different shipbuilders around the world. There will be international tenders put in place to procure the ships. Everything is going ahead as per the plan.

Asked if Qatar is considering building LNG carriers in the country itself, he said, "We have no such plans as it would be very expensive to build such vessels in the country. We will get them manufactured outside the country."

He said that Nakilat has a large and well-equipped shipyard in Ras Laffan Industrial City and has built a number of vessels with its partners, taking advantage of its expertise and low cost of raw materials and manpower, but the building of LNG carriers needs different expertise, which makes QP mostly geared towards South Korea that has proven its expertise in this field.

This is for the second time that he noted that QP is looking to South Korea and other countries for its ship building needs.

(Source: marineline.com)



NEWS IN BRIEF



India, Pakistan  
resume face-off  
in ICJ over spy  
row

**INTERNATIONAL** **TEHRAN** — India has renewed its appeal in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to take an alleged spy off death row in Pakistan, as political and diplomatic tensions soar between the neighbors.

Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, a former Indian navy officer, was arrested in the restive southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan in March 2016 on charges of espionage and sentenced to death by a military court in Pakistan.

India insists Jadhav was not a spy and that he was kidnapped in Pakistan. New Delhi is asking that the ICJ order Islamabad to annul the sentence.

Counsel termed India's oral arguments - presented a day earlier - as "an opportunity wasted", saying India failed to answer fundamental questions regarding subversive activities of its serving navy commander inside Pakistan.

Calling India's proposition as "absurd and nonsensical," he said India was showing lack of good faith and sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan through Jadhav.

The rare foray of India and Pakistan into international courts marks another flashpoint after Thursday's suicide bombing in Indian-controlled Kashmir that killed at least 46 Indian troops.



Pakistan  
FM wants  
'normal ties with  
Israel'

**TEHRAN** — In a controversial statement that has raised many eyebrows in Pakistan and the region, Pakistan's foreign minister has expressed desire to normalize relations with Israel.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi made the controversial remarks in an interview with an Israeli news portal on the sidelines of recently concluded Munich Security Conference.

According to a report published by Ma'ariv, Qureshi said Pakistan is interested in advancing its relations with Israel, but this is a "question of the political situation in the region."

Several Islamic countries, mostly Arab nations, with no diplomatic ties with Israel have been increasingly inching close to it with the common hostility towards Iran bringing them together.

However, Pakistani minister's statement has stirred hornet's nest as Pakistan has traditionally had no diplomatic ties with the Zionist entity.

Pakistan President Arif Alvi last October ruled out establishing any kind of relations with it. His statement came after reports about an Israeli business jet flying from Tel Aviv to Islamabad created stir.

Social media users at that time flayed the Pakistan government, demanding an explanation about the "secret Israeli mission".



China urges  
India, Pakistan  
to 'exercise  
restraint'

**INTERNATIONAL** **TEHRAN** — China, a regional giant, has urged two estranged neighbors Pakistan and India to exercise restraint and conduct dialogue to achieve resolution of outstanding issues.

The statement comes in the wake of deadly terror attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir that has again derailed relations between the two countries, bringing them on the brink of war.

He hoped that both India and Pakistan would exercise restraint and conduct dialogue to achieve a soft lining of relevant issues as soon as possible.

The spokesperson said that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was a pilot project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and it was committed to consultation and collaboration for shared benefits.

He further said it has always adhered to the principles of mutual cooperation, co-construction, sharing and openness, and transparency.

"Last year, when State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Pakistan, China and Pakistan agreed to welcome third parties to participate in the construction of the corridor, so that the corridor not only benefits the people of China and Pakistan but also promotes regional economic cooperation and interconnection and achieves common development", he added.



'India's  
aggression could  
affect Afghan  
talks'

**INTERNATIONAL** **TEHRAN** — The dastardly attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir last week and its shocks are being felt far and wide. It might have a bearing on the progress of Afghan peace talks as well.

Pakistan's envoy to Kabul said on Tuesday that peace talks between the United States and the Afghan Taliban would be affected if India showed military aggression towards Pakistan.

Following the Kashmir attack, India accused Pakistan for it and vowed "a befitting reply" and said it would initiate moves to "diplomatically isolate Pakistan".

Pakistan has played an instrumental role in persuading the Taliban to join negotiations with the U.S. officials, as stated by Prime Minister Imran Khan recently.

This week a Taliban delegation from Qatar was expected to meet Imran Khan in Islamabad, however the talks were canceled. The insurgent group cited the reason of 'travel restrictions'.

Taliban delegation is due to meet U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalizad in Qatar on February 25 in the next round of talks, which experts feel are heading nowhere. Despite many rounds of talks in recent months, the two sides have failed to reach an agreement.

# Peace talks in absence of Afghan govt merely 'intellectual exercise'

**INTERNATIONAL** **TEHRAN** — In recent months, hectic negotiations have taken place between the Afghan Taliban and U.S. officials, mostly in Qatar and UAE, while overstepping the Afghan government.

American envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been sauntering from one country to another chasing the insurgent group leaders. However the efforts have produced no concrete results, because the central party to the conflict has been missing.

According to sources, the national unity government in Kabul led by President Ashraf Ghani, which was seen close to the U.S., has gradually distanced itself from Washington, apparently unhappy with the way Khalilzad has disregarding the main stakeholders — the government and people of Afghanistan.

Ghani and Khalilzad, the two old friends who studied together in American University of Beirut, have developed serious differences over the nature of peace process. While former wants it to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, latter merely follows the orders from White House, sidestepping Kabul.

This week, Pakistan was scheduled to host talks between the Taliban and U.S. officials in Islamabad, which was canceled on the pretext of 'travel restrictions on Taliban'.

Afghan government slammed Pakistan, saying its bid to host Afghan peace talks amounted to violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty.

A letter submitted to the United Nations



on Friday by Afghanistan's envoy to the body, said the Taliban's trip to Pakistan — and particularly the meeting with Mr. Khan — would amount to "the official recognition and legitimization of an armed group that poses a serious threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan and whose members are sanctioned by provisions of the U.N. Security Council."

Meanwhile, in an interview with TRT, Amrullah Saleh, former Interior Minister and President Ghani's candidate for vice presidency in upcoming presidential elections, said that

any decision about the future of Afghanistan and peace talks without the engagement of the Afghan government will have no results and will be counted as "intellectual exercise".

Saleh said Afghanistan has changed and that Afghanistan has moved on and that movement has to be realized and appreciated.

"We are in control, we are in control of our country, we are in control of our cities. Our legitimacy stems from the will of our people. We had elections, we are going to have election. So, fundamentally, we are the factor. If you bypass the factor, it becomes

an intellectual exercise," Saleh said.

Pertinently, while Taliban has agreed to talk to the U.S. officials and representatives of regional countries, and even Afghan politicians, it has rejected demands to hold direct negotiations with the Afghan government led by President Ghani.

Saleh said that Taliban are "afraid of a pluralistic society" and that they think they will die in today's Afghan society.

"That future can be tomorrow, but they think [Taliban] they will die in that type of future. That is why they are trying to maintain their habitat away from civilization, away from integration, away from new Afghanistan. Because they are afraid that in a pluralistic society, which Afghanistan today is, Taliban will become another loud cleric, Mullah preaching after death," said Saleh.

Meanwhile, even though talks between the Taliban and U.S. have been underway for past many months, the violence perpetuated by the insurgent group continues in different parts of the country.

Afghans continue to be attacked, abused, displaced and refused their rights. Almost two-thirds of the population — 17 million people — live in areas directly affected by conflict. Approximately 6.3 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, of these 60 per cent are children. 1.5 million people are internally displaced across the country. In addition, 2.6 million people are close to famine, according to Norwegian Refugee Council.

## Pakistan PM offers cooperation, demands 'actionable evidence' from India

**1 →** "First of all, you accused Pakistan. [There was] no evidence. You never thought: 'what would be in it for Pakistan?'" he said. "Would even a fool do such a thing to sabotage his own conference? And even if he [MBS] had not been visiting, what benefit would Pakistan get from it?"

"Why would Pakistan, at this stage, when it is moving towards stability? we have fought a war against terrorism for 15 years, 70,000 Pakistanis have lost their lives, terrorism is receding, peace and stability are returning? what benefit would we get from it?" Khan asked.

Taking a dig at New Delhi, Khan said New Delhi holds Pakistan responsible every time something happens in Kashmir. "Instead of trying to resolve the Kashmir issue, start a dialogue or move forward, you want to make Islamabad your whipping boy again and again," he said, addressing New Delhi.

Referring to his slogan of 'Naya Pakistan' (New Pakistan), Khan said there is "a new mindset, a new way of thinking" in Pakistan and it is not in the country's interest that its soil is used to carry out terrorist attacks in other countries.

"Today, I would like to make the Indian government an offer. Any sort of investigation you wish to carry out regarding this incident about the involvement of any Pakistani, we are ready," he asserted.

"If you have any actionable intelligence that a Pakistani is involved, give it to us. I guarantee you that we will take action? not because we are under pressure, but because they [people involved] are acting as enemies of Pakistan," Khan said.

"If today in Afghanistan, after 17 years, the entire world has accepted that there is no military solution and that the issue can only be resolved through dialogue, shouldn't there be discussion about this in India?" he asked.

Commenting on the war rhetoric in India, Khan said it was unjust. "We are hearing the voices in India that say



'Pakistan must be taught a lesson', 'Revenge must be taken from Pakistan', 'There should be a strike' ... First of all, what law gives any country to become judge, jury and executioner?" he asked.

"Secondly, you are facing an election year. And we believe that during the election, [you think] you will get a big boost if you 'teach Pakistan a lesson'," he said, referring to upcoming elections in India.

"And after that, where does the matter go? We all know that starting a war is easy. Starting a war may be in our hands, ending it won't be. Where it will go, God knows. That's why I hope that better sense will prevail," he said, urging calm, and calling for dialogue and talks to resolve the issues.

Responding to Khan's offer, India's foreign ministry termed it a "lame excuse", and asked him to "stop misleading the international community".

"The prime minister of Pakistan has offered to investigate the matter if India provides proof. This is a lame excuse,"

## MBS tours South Asia, seeks to improve his battered image with petrodollars

**1 →** Dorsey said the \$10 billion project in Gwadar "would strengthen the kingdom's hold in the strategic province that both MBS and Donald Trump's hardline national security adviser John Bolton see as a potential launching pad for efforts to destabilise Iran."

Analysts Tehran Times spoke to agreed that the Saudi investments in Pakistan, and in particular Baluchistan, is part of a grand scheme devised by Riyadh and Washington to aid and abet proxy attacks against Iran through Baloch insurgent groups and also to prevent the strategic port of Chabahar to become a powerful maritime hub.

Just last week, a major attack took place in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, leading to death of at least 27 members of IRGC. Top military commanders in Iran linked the attack to Saudi sponsorship of insurgent groups in Pakistan.

These developments have expectedly raised concerns in Pakistan's intelligentsia circles as it is being seen counter-productive to Pakistan's interests.

"Pakistan, please stop housing these militants and stop using this precious nation to fight other's wars," tweeted Ayesha Siddiqi, Pakistan-based military scientist and author, "We will live without MBS's billions but don't throw people in this fire."

In August last year, soon after the new government took over in Islamabad, Siddiqi told Tehran Times that one of the biggest challenges for the government was implementation of laws to stop financing of terror organizations.

"The LeT or Jaish e Muhammad or Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ) all are going about their business. There is money coming from somewhere. These activities are observed by the world. This has to stop," she said, without



mentioning Saudi Arabia.

Taha Siddiqui, a senior Pakistani journalist, in an Al Jazeera column said the Saudis were "using aid packages and investment promises to buy the economically embattled Pakistani government's loyalty and convince it to turn a blind eye to their destructive actions within Pakistan's borders."

Meanwhile, during his two-day stay in Pakistan, hashtags like #MurdererBinSalman and #MBSNotWelcome were trending on Twitter and Facebook.

His next stop on the three-nation South Asia tour was India, but he didn't take the flight directly from Islamabad, rather went through his home turf to make it appear like a 'standalone visit'.

In India, although government officials accorded him warm reception, the story on the streets of New Delhi and other major cities was starkly different.

In the heart of New Delhi, thousands of people, holding placards and chanting slogans, gathered to say 'no' to the 'murderer of Yemeni children'. The pictures were shared widely on the social media.

According to reports, MBS signed deals worth around \$40 billion with the Indian government. But his growing proximity with Pakistan understandably didn't go well with many Indian observers.

"Saudi crown prince visits Pakistan, throws a \$20 billion lifeline, praises Pak for its effort to counter terrorism. Then comes to India to denounce terror attack in Pulwama. And we politely call it diplomacy!" tweeted M K Venu, a senior journalist and co-founder of The Wire.

Indrani Bagchi, a senior journalist with Times of India, said MBS had "screwed India over" even before arriving in New Delhi.

"Modi government should give up the idea

that the KSA relationship has been turned. The Saudi-Pakistan joint statement is a slap in the face for India," she tweeted.

Congress leader Manish Tewari, echoing her words, asked why the Indian government was welcoming Saudi crown prince and rolling out a red carpet for him.

"Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, if you read the joint statement with Pakistan, has essentially supported the non-listing of the Jaish and Masood Azhar as UN entities. So under those circumstances, why are we even receiving him in India when he is so openly battling for Pakistan," he asked.

Pertinently, a joint statement by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on Monday said there was a need to avoid "politicization of the UN listing regime" — in reference to India's efforts to list Masood Azhar as a "global terrorist".

Masood Azhar is the leader of Jaish e Mohammad (JeM) that carried out the deadly attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir last week, which sparked unprecedented diplomatic retaliation from India.

Minhaz Merchant, a noted author and commentator, said he was "personally repelled by MBS." "I've respectfully declined invitation to attend a banquet in his honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan tomorrow," he tweeted.

A Twitter user Mohd Atif Siddiqui said #MBSinIndia was a "disgrace to India", calling him "a ruthless monarch creating genocide in Yemen".

The final stop on his three-nation tour will be China. But, from what we observed in Pakistan and India, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia driven by petrodollars does not seem workable. And the intelligent minds in both the countries have already disapproved his wooing tactics.



# What caused the international impasse over Iran's Missile program?

By Alireza Ahmadi

In the later days of the negotiations between the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany) and Iran over the country's nuclear program, another in a long line of standoffs emerged. Iran's negotiators argued that since the deal was supposed to eliminate all nuclear sanctions against Iran, the language against Iran's missile program in a 2010 Security Council resolution should be stricken when the Council passes a new resolution endorsing a nuclear deal. They argued that since the resolution's language addressed the missiles in the context of their use as a potential nuclear delivery mechanism, they should be considered nuclear sanctions. The United States, a geopolitical adversary of Iran, disagreed. America's European allies sided with the United States. Critically, Russia and China sided with Iran.

The fissures among Iran's interlocutors led to a compromise that sets the current debate about the Iranian missile and SLV programs. In the last few weeks, after Iran's testing of a Space Launch Vehicle (SLV), a number of experts have weighed into the technical and legal dimensions of the current row, but important political issues underpinning this debate need to be understood to put those valuable contributions to the debate in the proper context.

## Anatomy of a Compromise

The compromise made in the context of the nuclear deal meant that the new resolution endorsing the agreement, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), would address the Iranian missile program but significant changes would be made in comparison to the 2010 resolution it supersedes.

The now-superseded Security Council resolution 1929 stated the following:

"Decides that Iran shall not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology, and that States shall take all necessary measures to prevent the transfer of technology or technical assistance to Iran related to such activities."

While the new, superseding resolution 2231 says:

"Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology, until the date eight years after the JCPOA Adoption Day or until the date on which the IAEA submits a report confirming the Broader Conclusion, whichever is earlier."

There are several key differences in the new language. The term "decides," binding language referencing the UN Charter's article 25 that demands members "carry out the decisions of the Security Council," is swapped for the non-binding term "calls upon." Therefore, there is no binding mandate being produced that Iran could theoretically violate. The superseding resolution also introduces



an expiration clause.

Critically, the section "ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons" is swapped for "ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons." Under the previous language, the United States and its allies successfully lobbied the UN to base its assessment of Iran's compliance on a definition—any missile with a range of 300 kilometers and a payload capacity of 500 kilograms—in use by the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Effectively, testing any conventional missile of that basic level of competence would be deemed a violation. While some experts have defended the applicability of the MTCR's definition as the "prevailing international standard," Iran has long argued that the MTCR itself lacks the needed level of international legitimacy.

The MTCR is not an international convention but an export control regime; it is an exclusive club—or an "informal political understanding"—of thirty-five missile-capable countries whose members have an interest in monopolizing this sensitive technology. Iran is not even a member. Therefore, treating it as a regulatory body or an independent source of expertise is somewhat problematic. The language in the superseding resolution essentially canonizes that objection. As experts and Russian officials have pointed out, whether a missile is "designed" to be nuclear capable involves adjudication of intent and cannot simply be gauged by examining its general competence alone.

The superseding resolution also removes any specific reference to SLVs that carry payloads such as satellites. The United States argues that Iran's Simorgh SLV is threatening because the technology involved is "virtually identical and interchangeable" with those used in ICBMs. Many non-proliferation experts have disagreed with Pompeo's position. In a recent assessment, IISS scholar Michael Elleman called that the notion that test launches using the Simorgh's technology can directly supply Iran with ICBM capability

"misguided." He says such launches "will not significantly shorten the time or reduce the expenses needed to create a militarily viable long-range missile."

## Effective Non-Recognition of 2231's Missile Language

Despite the missile issue being raised in the context of its potential use as a nuclear weapon delivery mechanism, Iran's implementation of the JCPOA never subdued western objections. When Iran tested a ballistic missile after the passage of resolution 2231, the United States, Britain, France and Germany wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General claiming that Iran is "in defiance" of the new resolution because the tested missile was "inherently capable of delivering nuclear weapons."

The United States, despite violating the superseding resolution by abandoning the JCPOA, has regularly reiterated this position. Pompeo recently claimed that resolution 2231 "calls upon the Iranian regime not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons." But, as explained above, these claims reflect the language used in the superseded resolution, 1929, not 2231. The U.S. media has been overly deferential to the State Department on this matter. Covering Pompeo's statement, the Washington Post, Reuters, The Associated Press and The Hill parroted Pompeo's reimagining of the superseding resolution's language or claiming the resolution opposes any ballistic activity.

As explained, the superseding resolution's language was a compromise representing political arrangement, rather than a unified outlook, between the veto-wielding members of the Security Council. It was understandable that these western countries are unsatisfied with the outcome they were forced into, but their claims simply are not supported by the language in the newly adopted resolution, either in its letter or spirit.

For now, the two sides are in a tactical stalemate. The UN committee overseeing implementation issued a report saying that

Iranian testing threatened the "constructive spirit" of the JCPOA but deferred to the Security Council on the interpretation of language—where Russia and China's position makes any future follow up action unlikely. Iran will likely continue its missile and rocket tests, the United States and the Europeans will likely continue to object. Meanwhile, the barrage of thinly veiled threats from the United States against Iran, coupled with its broader campaign, will reinforce the position of missiles in Iran's deterrence calculations.

## Partisanship Undermines Credibility

While European statements present their position as an objective advocate for stability and arms control, their alignment in the Middle East's geopolitical power struggle shapes the contours of this debate to a greater extent. China and Russia's support for the Iranian position is often depicted as a craven ploy to cash in on arms transfers but their involvement in the region, while controversial, is not nearly as partisan as that of their western P5+1 partners who are closely allied with Israel, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni power. Europe's direct role (or acquiescence) in the region's arms build-up has put advanced weapons systems, including missiles and weapons of mass destruction, in the hands of Iran's adversaries.

Israel developed nuclear weapons and ICBMs with significant European support and Saudi Arabia acquired advanced missiles from China with a range of 2,500 kilometers. Saudi Arabia is also in the process of purchasing nuclear uranium enrichment technology from the United States. Washington, even under the Obama administration, claimed Iran's indigenous development of this technology is subterfuge for uranium weaponization. Europe has also become a pipeline for a massive flow of advanced arms systems in the region. The Middle East, awash in conflict, has also become the most lucrative arms market in the world and western firms and governments have aggressively embraced this destabilizing phenomenon.

Simply put, the European effort to play the well-intentioned non-proliferation activist regarding Iran is undermined by their role as permissive arms dealers to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. In this context, Iran sees European policy as an effort to restrain Iran's ability to develop a cheap missile deterrent leaving the qualitative military edge of its foes unchallenged and advancing the hegemonic aspirations of its allies such as Saudi Arabia.

In order to reach a modus vivendi with Iran on missiles, European leaders must decide whether they will continue to seek primacy in the Middle East for their Sunni and Israeli allies or accept that Iran is also a fixed element in the region with legitimate interests and influence. The latter would lead it to seek a more stable security structure in the area that accounts for the security interests of the many actors in the region.

(Source: National Interest)

## JCPOA to stand, intervention in Venezuela to fail as U.S. Empire on its last leg: author

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Dean Henderson, author and geopolitical analyst from Missouri, said the U.S. Empire is nearing its end, predicting that the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers will stand despite U.S. pressures and Washington's intervention in Venezuela will fail.



"Yes, I think it (the JCPOA) will (stand). Common sense will prevail over the neo-cons and neo-liberals running U.S., UK and French foreign policies on behalf of their Crown masters. The U.S. intervention in Venezuela will also fail. The Empire is on its last leg," Henderson told Tasnim.

Dean Henderson earned a BLS (Bachelor of Liberal Studies) from the University of South Dakota and an MS in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana. He founded/published/edited one of America's first political "zines", The Missoula Paper, in 1990 in Missoula where he was also a regular columnist for the Montana Kaimin. Henderson has traveled to some 50 countries and has written articles for the Global Research, In These Times, Paranoia, Veterans Today, and Rense.com.

He has authored five books. His first book, "Big Oil and Their Bankers in the Persian Gulf: Four Horsemen, Eight Families and Their Global Intelligence, Narcotics and Terror Network" has become a global cult classic among conspiracy researchers. His second book, "The Grateful Unrich: Revolution in 50 Countries" chronicles insights gained from a lifetime of overseas travel. His third book, "Das Kartell der Federal Reserve: Acht Familien beherrschen die Welt", is published in German language by Kopp Verlag. His fourth book, "Stickin' it to the Matrix", is a practical guide to dropping out of the evil Illuminati system and kicking it in the nuts! His most recent book "The Federal Reserve Cartel", reveals the owners of the world's private central banks and offers a solution to end their global hegemony over the planet and its people.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ After months of foot-dragging, Britain, France and Germany in early Feb. issued a joint statement on the creation of a new trading system called the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) that will allow trade between the EU and Iran without relying on direct financial transactions. What do you think about this mechanism?

A: For INSTEX to work, it must find a way around the International Clearing System (ICS), run by the London Clearing House Ltd. (LCH). LCH is a subsidiary of the London Stock Exchange Group, which was founded in 1698 and whose biggest shareholders include Blackrock, The Capital Group & QIA. It is ultimately controlled by the Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland. In the US, the Federal Reserve serves as the intermediary for the Clearing System in this country and is part of ICS. SWIFT codes, IBAN bank numbers & National IDs are part of this rigged system, which is controlled by the global banking oligarchy. If INSTEX can find a way around this cabal then it could prove a revolutionary breakthrough which brings down the U.S. dollar Bretton Woods system.

The Crown-controlled Western nations cannot tolerate any national system which excludes access to its corporate and banking tentacles. Thus, socialism is the real enemy of the Crown. It will not hesitate to deploy its various "aid groups", NGOs, intelligence agencies and mercenary armies to attack any nation which dares to create an alternative to this international plantation model. Iran & Venezuela are two countries which have done just this. Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Sudan were others. All were or are currently under siege from the Crown's forces, many of whom reside in those nations. There are Crown agents everywhere who have sold their souls and their patriotism for the right price.

■ As you know, EU officials have repeatedly expressed the bloc's determination to preserve the JCPOA. Recently, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said, "(This is) an ill-advised step that will only strengthen Iran, weaken the EU and create still more distance between Europe and the U.S." Do you believe that the EU will finally stand up to the U.S. or it is just a bluff game?

A: History tells us that the U.S. plays the Crown's bad cop and the Europeans play its good cop. But in the end, their policies always align perfectly. So, at first glance, a betting man would say it is a bluff. But one wonders if the election of Trump could be a game-changer. He has alienated so many EU leaders. Germany seems especially ripe right now to take a long look East towards Russia and wonder if they are not better off allying with them. The relentless pressure from the U.S. over Germany's embrace of the Nord Stream II pipeline could push them further in that direction. If INSTEX can be deployed and the Europeans can see benefit materially from imported Iranian oil and exports to Iran, this could produce more daylight between the U.S. & EU.

■ Will the JCPOA stand?

A: Yes I think it will. Common sense will prevail over the neo-cons and neo-liberals running U.S., UK and French foreign policies on behalf of their Crown masters. The U.S. intervention in Venezuela will also fail. The Empire is on its last leg.

## Polish analyst: Trump uses Poland to divide Europe and undermine EU's policy towards Iran

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Political analyst Adrieli Kasonta believes hosting the Warsaw summit would cause further deterioration of Poland's relations with the European Union, which attempts to avoid the break with Tehran and works on a mechanism to bypass U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Adrieli Kasonta, in an interview with FNA, said that the right-wing ruling party in Poland instead of establishing an independent foreign policy, is strongly influenced by "the xenophobic warmongering Trump administration".

Mr. Kasonta believes that "there are many Polish politicians that condemn the shameful behavior of the current government" in hosting an anti-Iran summit which according to the analyst does not serve the interests of Poland or that of the European Union.

Adrieli Kasonta is a London-based lawyer, political analyst and entrepreneur of Polish-Jewish and Tanzanian descent. He is an editorial member at Central European Journal of International and Security Studies in Prague.

FNA has conducted an interview with Adrieli Kasonta about Trump presidency, his policy towards the European Union and also his move to host an anti-Iran summit in Poland.

Below you will find the full text of the interview:

■ How do you see Donald Trump's presidency and the way it affected the U.S.-EU relationship?

A: It is fair to say that on the 20th of January 2017 Europe gained a new enemy.

The day when the obnoxious, misogynist, racist, mythomaniac, and highly divisive businessman became the 45th President of the United States, marks the end of the so-called 'Obama-era' in the U.S. politics and puts America on an entire different course, which is both damaging to the United States and all of us here in Europe (not to say free world at large).

This despotic leader of the "Free World" having no previous political experience, being driven by his 'gut instinct' manifested in chaotic tweets, proved after two years being in the oval office that he wishes to break and shape the world in his own image.

Having assisted in the normalization of endemic racism in America by defending neo-Nazis from Charlottesville, being the indirect precursor for the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, separating and abusing migrant children rights,

aiming at destabilizing NATO, or bullying Europe over trade and pulling out from Iran Deal, Trump clearly wants to break with everything which was cultivated and achieved by his predecessor.

While most European countries find his actions unwise, dangerous, if not repulsive (notably, U.S. Ambassador to Germany seeking to empower right-wing parties to cause turmoil and divisions in our continent), there are countries with openly anti-European affinities that are captivated by his rhetoric and divisive persona.

■ On the 13th and 14th of February, the United States held an anti-Iran summit in Warsaw. Why do you think Poland was chosen as the host country?

A: It stands to reason that when it comes to my home country of Poland, whose ruling right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), perceive and portray Trump as Christian saviour of sorts, one who was sent to break the liberal status quo and save the White race from the barbaric hordes coming from what was described in Trump's words as "s\*\*\*hole countries", which, as a matter of fact, became and arguably remain "s\*\*\*holes" thanks to the colonial hand of Western imperialism.

In contrast, unlike Barack Hussein Obama who was (according to many Poles, Populists, and White supremacists) of "uncertain" background (vide conspiracy theories of Obama faking his birth certificate or being a 'Muslim mole' in the White House) and didn't abolish visas to the U.S. for Poles, Trump appeared as a breakthrough and a light of hope for Poland's Law and Justice party revanchist aspirations towards rest of the Western world, which according to them, didn't respect Poland enough.

Playing on the party's (and its electorate) primitive instincts, U.S. President Donald Trump delivered a well-distilled public speech in front of the Warsaw Uprising Monument at Krasinski Square, in Warsaw, the capital of Poland on July 6, 2017, giving them exactly what they've craved and what the Law and Justice Party required to deceive Poles and substantiate their point of view.

During his speech, Donald Trump argued that the future of Western freedom is at stake and called to defend the Western civilization against the threats of "terrorism and extremism," which many bigoted Poles linked with the famous Battle of Vienna, where the Habsburg Monarchy, the Polish-Lithuanian Com-

monwealth and the Holy Roman Empire, under the command of King John III Sobieski, won over the Ottoman Empire.

This vision is so ingrained to the point that they have forgotten about Poland's centuries-old friendship with Shia Iran and, as Foreign Minister of Islamic Republic of Iran rightly mentioned in his tweet, agreed to "host desperate anti-Iran circus" led by Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

This fact bothers me deeply as a born and bred patriot and lawyer of both Polish-Jewish and Tanzanian descent, that being said, I have a profound understanding what this signifies for my country.

This hostile move towards Iran not only "compromise 500 years of good relationship between Poland and Iran," as stated by Iranian Ambassador to Poland, Masoud Edrisi Kermanshahi in his interview for Rzeczpospolita magazine, but proves that the Law and Justice Party instead of establishing a moral and independent foreign policy, is pathetically taking cue from the xenophobic warmongering Trump administration.

Now to put things into context, it is worth mentioning that Iranian-Polish diplomatic relations started in the second half of the 15th century, where we became united against the growing threat of the Ottoman Empire.

Both countries were tolerant towards other religions. In Poland, the Warsaw Confederation was the first European act granting religious freedoms. Shia Iran, till this day (as expressed in the Iranian constitution), have guaranteed religious freedom and place in the parliament for Christians and Jews.

During the Third Partition of Poland (1795) Iran was one of the two countries which didn't recognize the loss of sovereignty and accepted 120,000 Poles after the WWII.

Now compare this deep and rich cultural connection in relation to the anaemic Polish government in office and their repugnant subservience towards the Trump administration. It goes without saying, that the Persian people have always shown mutual respect throughout history, and have been unquestionably supportive towards Poland and the Polish cause.

Fortunately, there are many Polish politicians that condemn the shameful behavior of the current government towards Iran, which doesn't serve Polish or EU's interest.



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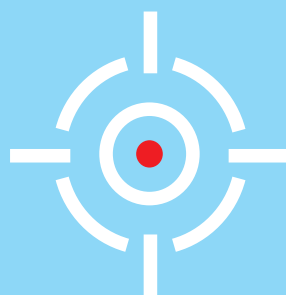
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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

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

For more information contact:

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# Medical tourism fetches Iran \$1.2b in last fiscal year

## 1 → ■ Most popular medical services in Iran

According to Hashemzadeh, infertility treatment, cosmetic surgeries, Maternal-fetal medicine, cardiovascular diseases treatment, ocular and general surgeries, orthopedics, cancer treatment and organ transplantation are the type of services mostly sought by patients traveling into the country.

### ■ IPD permits for hospitals

Hashemzadeh further noticed that International Patients Department (IPD) in Iranian hospitals is the unit tasked with providing foreign patients with medical services.

The Health Ministry official noted that the ministry has very strict policies in granting IPD permits to hospitals and closely supervises their work.

"We have inspected 55 hospitals and granted 20 of them with an IPD permit. The remaining hospitals can also get the permit if they can meet our requirements in a specific period of time," he said.

### ■ The main problem of medical tourism



**Iran has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026)**

According to Hashemzadeh, the biggest problem of medical tourism in the country are brokers who provide services to the medical travelers without having required licenses.

Using digital platforms is one way of solving this issue, he said, adding that the hospitals and foreign patients must be able to communicate as directly as possible. For example, if the health centers' websites clearly explain their types of services and their cost, the brokers' activity will be automatically reduced.

"Currently, we are trying to develop a set of principles for facilitator companies, active in the field of medical tourism and if the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization help us, the principles will be carried out more extensively." He further remarked.

In May 2018, Mohammad Jahangiri who presides over a national center for developing health tourism said that Iran has the capacity to annually earn \$7 billion in medical and health tourism, though the sector now brings in only one-seventh or even lesser of the sum.

## Tehran hosting International Oral and Maxillofacial congress

**HEALTH DESK** TEHRAN — The Seventeenth International Congress of Iranian Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons is running in Tehran from February 19 to 22, IRIB reported.

According to the executive director of the congress, this year's theme is "From Birth to Old Age" and covers subjects such as birth defects, tumors, cleft palate, oral and maxillofacial disorders and cancers, bone transplant, implants and cosmetic surgeries.

Mehran Dordaei added over 1,200 experts, surgeons and dentists attend the congress with lecturers from Germany, Italy, the United States and Belgium.

Simultaneously, the 9th International Persian Gulf Implant Symposium and the 7th Young Researchers Symposium will be held in the country, Dordaei noted.

## New stem cells could be 'universally transplanted'

Transplants are often a point of crisis, since there is a global shortage of donated organs, but also because there is a high risk that the receiver's body will reject the donated organ or transplanted tissue. A new type of "universal" stem cells could solve some of these issues. Researchers may have found a way to prevent the immune system from attacking new stem cells that arrive in a person's body.

Recent efforts from a team of University of California (UC), San Francisco, researchers have focused on genetically engineering pluripotent stem cells that would be able to bypass the body's immune response and, thus, preempt rejection.

So far, to bypass the issue of donated tissue shortages, scientists have created stem cells out of mature, fully developed cells they collect from the same person who needs a transplant. They call these "induced pluripotent stem cells" (iPSCs).

With iPSCs, scientists hope to minimize the chances of the body rejecting these cells — which will later specialize and step into their new role — as the recipient's immune system tends to "label" donor tissue as a potential pathogen, and act against it.

However, even this route has been fraught with many obstacles and, surprisingly, even stem cells that specialists have engineered from a person's own cells regularly face rejection.

Moreover, iPSC processes are difficult to conduct, and it is harder still to reproduce successful attempts.

"There are many issues with iPSC technology, but the biggest hurdles are quality control and reproducibility. We don't know what makes some cells amenable to reprogramming, but most scientists agree it can't yet be reliably done," notes Dr. Tobias Deuse, lead author on the new study paper that appears in the journal Nature Biotechnology.

(Source: medical news today)

## Iran, Japan start collaboration on stomach cancer studies

**HEALTH DESK** TEHRAN — The director of International Relations Office at Isfahan University of Medical Sciences announced of starting a research project on stomach cancer in collaboration with Japan's Kagoshima University.

According to Hamid Mir-Mohammad Sadeqi, stomach cancer is quite prevalent both in Iran and Japan and the joint project is aimed at studying the disease's latest treatment and care methods, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Kagoshima University or Kadai is a Japanese national university located in Kagoshima, Kagoshima Prefecture.

The project is part of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed last year between the two universities to start a

number of scientific projects on areas such as epidemiology, early diagnosis of illnesses, nursing and the management of family physicians.

The MOU was signed over a trip made to Japan by Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, followed by two trips made by Japanese researchers to Iran, investigating the country's research capacities.

According to Sadeqi, a Japanese delegation from Sasakawa scientific institute will visit Iran this month to discuss expanding relations in scientific domains and giving research grants.

He added that another MOU on scientific collaboration will be soon signed with another Japanese university.



## 'Young blood' transfusions to prevent aging are unproven and risky, FDA warns

If you think the idea of getting a transfusion with "young blood" to ward off aging sounds far-fetched, well, U.S. health officials agree.

Today (Feb. 19), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it was concerned about reports of "bad actors" offering infu-

sions of blood plasma from young people to purportedly treat age-related conditions and diseases, such as a memory loss, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. Such treatments are not only unproven, but they also come with potentially serious risks, the agency said.

"Simply put, we're concerned that some patients are being preyed upon by unscrupulous actors touting treatments of plasma from young donors as cures and remedies," Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the FDA commissioner, and Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's

Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said in a statement. "Such treatments have no proven clinical benefits for the uses for which these clinics are advertising them and are potentially harmful."

(Source: Live Science)

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## How to tackle motion sickness during travel

By Prof M. Karim Khan

I travel regularly by bus and often find some of my travel mates are vomiting 20-30 minutes after commencing the journey. It is really cumbersome for the other passengers but unfortunately it is irresistible by the victims. This condition we designate as the motion sickness.

Very simply motion sickness means nausea, vomiting caused by motion, especially by travelling in a vehicle. More scientifically we can say — motion sickness is a sensation of wooziness. Our body's sensory organs send mixed messages to the brain causing dizziness, lightheadedness, or nausea. Some people learn early in their lives that they are prone to the condition. Children and women are more prone to develop motion sickness. A person with motion sickness may become pale or complain of a headache.

Any form of travel on land, in the air, or on the water, can bring the uneasy feeling of motion sickness. Sometimes, amusement rides can induce motion sickness. It has been observed that people who develop motion sickness while travelling by bus, do not develop so while travelling by train. So train journey is safer and comfortable for the motion sickness victims.

Sometimes window seats helps them to prevent the sickness. On boats, or buses sit in the front and try to avoid facing backward. On a ship, ask for a cabin at water level and close to the front or the middle of the vessel. Open a vent for a source of fresh air if possible, and avoid reading.

It is important to get plenty of rest the night before travelling and avoid consuming heavy food. Some drugs like promethazine, domperidone, ondansetron, cetirizine etc. may be taken at least one hour before travel, which may prevent motion sickness.

(Source: The Daily Star)

## Scratches made by ancient witches discovered in UK cave

Markings have long been known to exist at the 60,000-year-old limestone gorge known as Creswell Crags in the United Kingdom, but visitors to these ancient rocks typically shrug them off as unfortunate graffiti. Subterranean explorers Hayley Clark and Ed Waters saw something different, however.

The pair are members of Subterranea Britannica, a group of passionate experts of man-made underground places. When they first peered upon these oft-ignored etchings, they noticed that the marks were suspiciously reminiscent of witches' marks that can sometimes be seen on stones from historic churches.

After other experts had a closer look, Clark and Waters' suspicions were confirmed. The scratches in the rocks were, in fact, ancient witches' marks, similar to engravings designed to ward off evil spirits known from other sites.

"These witches' marks were in plain sight all the time! Being present at the moment their true significance was revealed will stay with me forever. After 17 years at Creswell Crags, it makes me wonder what else it has to surprise us. This remarkable place continues to give up its secrets," said Heritage Facilitator John Charlesworth in a statement.

The most common symbol in the rock walls was a double VV engraving, believed to reference the Virgin Mary, and PM for Pace Maria. But the walls were littered with lines and boxes as well, like a maze, which is believed to confuse and trap the evil spirits which may attempt to enter the sacred spot.

Creswell Crags is a remarkable site also known for cave art left by ice age inhabitants of its caverns as long as 11,000 years ago. Before modern humans used these caves, they were occupied by Neanderthals. The fact that their walls also contain markings from ancient witches only adds to their historical value. It's no wonder the site was deemed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012.

(Source: Mother Nature Network)

ROUND THE GLOBE

## Serra da Capivara National Park

Many of the numerous rock shelters in the Serra da Capivara National Park are decorated with cave paintings, some more than 25,000 years old. They are an outstanding testimony to one of the oldest human communities of South America.

Established in 1979, the Serra da Capivara National Park stretched across the municipalities of Sao Raimundo Nonato, Sao Joao do Piaui, and Canto do Buriti in the south-eastern section of Piaui state in Brazil's Northeast Region.



In 1994, the municipality of Brejo do Piaui and, in 1995 the municipality of Joao Costa were dismembered of Sao Joao do Piaui. The municipality of Coronel Jose Dias was dismembered of Sao Raimundo Nonato in 1992. These three municipalities, plus Sao Raimundo Nonato, are partially located in the area of the Serra da Capivara National Park.

The Park covers nearly 129, 140 hectares and has a circumference of 214 kilometers. It is situated in the morphoclimatic zone of the Brazilian Caatinga, distinguished by the multiplicity of plant formations typical of the semi-arid regions of Northeast Brazil. The region's plant species are primarily characterized by the loss of most of their leaves during the dry season, extending from May to December, serving to lend the landscape its silver hue. The region borders two major geological formations – the Maranhao-Piaui sediment basin and the peripheral depression of the Sao Francisco River – and is endowed with a diversity of relief vegetation and landscapes of breathtaking beauty and dotted with exceptional vistas of the surrounding valleys, mountains, and plains.

(Source: UNESCO)

# World's most endangered languages

Combating climate change is a Herculean task, but one that can't be ignored if life on earth is to be preserved for future generations. Linguists currently face a similar challenge: Without human intervention, experts estimate that nearly half the world's 6,800 spoken languages will go the way of the dinosaurs, vanishing by the close of the 21st century.

In response to this crisis, armies of academics, independent researchers, and charitable organizations like Wikitongues have pledged to save the world's vanishing vernaculars, searching out the last living speakers and documenting their every word. The most vulnerable of these are termed "critically endangered," meaning they are familiar only to the most elderly members of a particular population, and may not be spoken fluently or regularly.

Starting with this definition and the "UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger," Stacker has scoured newspapers and magazine articles, academic journals, and online databases to compile this list of 30 of the world's most endangered languages.

Here are some of the world's most endangered languages

### ■ Forest Enets

One of five Samoyed languages native to Siberia and the Arctic, Forest Enets is spoken by fewer than 15 people—mostly reindeer herders and fishermen from the tiny Russian village of Potapovo. This endangered, indigenous tongue may just survive thanks to recent preservation efforts, including the creation of a "language nest" immersion kindergarten and easily accessible instructive videos.

### ■ Bathari

Bathari is a Semitic language of south Arabic origin. At present, it is spoken by fewer than 20 people in a small fishing community on the southwest coast of Oman. Economic and educational opportunities available to Arabic speakers have led the younger generation to abandon their native tongue. Recently, the London Middle East Institute has made significant efforts to document Bathari, collecting more than 2,000 recordings of elderly native speakers.

### ■ Boruca

Despite the presence of bilingual signs in local stores and language instruction in some local schools, Boruca is a rapidly disappearing tongue. Today there are fewer than 20 native speakers, all elderly, living in the Puntarenas Province on Costa Rica's Pacific coast.

### ■ Cornish

Like a Phoenix from the ashes, this ancient tongue has risen from the dead. Dolly Pentreath, thought to be the last native speaker, died at the close of the 18th century. Thanks to the broad revival of Celtic culture in the early 20th century, more than 500 residents of Britain's southwestern county identified Cornish as their primary language in the 2011 census. Cornish is taught in local schools, and can also be heard on BBC Radio Cornwall.

### ■ Balkan Gagauz

This dialect of Gagauz is spoken by fewer than 100 people, mostly elderly, in the Deliorman region of Bulgaria. An ethnically Turkish people, the Gagauz roamed what is now Eastern Europe, settling in present-day Moldova, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. Unlike its Moldovan cousin, which has enjoyed a revival in the independent province of Gagauzia, there exists no similar movement in Bulgaria and as a result, Balkan Gagauz risks extinction in the coming decades. Recordings of the language are available on YouTube.

### ■ Cappadocian Greek

Originally spoken in Asia Minor, and subsequently, by Greeks of Cappadocian origin, this medieval dialect was thought to have vanished by the mid-20th century. However, in 2005, Professor Mark Janse of the University of Ghent uncovered a cluster of approximately 200 Cappadocian speakers in isolated communities on the Greek mainland. The award-winning documentary, "Last Words," chronicles Janse's discovery. Cambridge University academic Ioanna Sitaridou also recorded her conversations with native speakers.

### ■ Gottscheerish

Native speakers of this rapidly disappearing language originally hail from a pocket of Germanic immigrants in Slovenia,



and were subsequently scattered across the globe after World War II. Although a thriving community of Gottscheer and their descendants settled in Queens, N.Y., fewer than 100 people are estimated to speak Gottscheerish fluently.

### ■ Manchu

More than 10 million ethnic Manchurians live in China, yet fewer than 20 elderly villagers in the northeastern part of the country can speak Manchu. Manchurian emperors reigned over China for almost 300 years, going to great lengths to preserve their ethnic identity. The fall of the dynasty in 1911, resulted in the acculturation of the Manchurian people, who increasingly adopted Chinese languages and customs. With only one local elementary school offering limited lessons in the language, scholars are not optimistic about Manchu's survival.

### ■ Karaim

In 1992, Swedish academic Éva Csató Johanson discovered a population of approximately 60 Karaim speakers living in the Lithuanian town of Trakai. Previously thought to have been extinct, Karaim is a Turkic language with Hebrew influences traditionally known as "lashon kedar"—"language of the nomads." In her efforts to preserve the language, Johanson spoke only Karain with her subjects. Karaim is now taught both in summer schools and also at the University of Uppsala. A channel dedicated to Karaim folksongs is available on YouTube.

### ■ Hawaiian

The tropical paradise of Hawaii boasts a particularly mellifluous native tongue. With fewer than a thousand fluent speakers, however, Hawaiian is a critically endangered language. After American annexation, the Hawaiian language was banned in the island's schools for 90 years. By the 1980s, few people could speak the language, prompting the establishment of Hawaiian immersion pre-schools, to help preserve the tongue for future generations. Duolingo, a free app available for both iOS and Android may just change that. Additionally, the language learning app Drops has recently added Hawaiian to their list of offerings.

### ■ Tsakonian

Tsakonian, which originated in the Greek military state of Sparta, is spoken by about 300 people living in a just a few mountainous villages on the eastern Peloponnesus. Panagiotis Tsgouris, a teacher who grew up speaking Tsakonian, has enlisted his students' help in updating the Tsakonian dictionary, in an effort to preserve the tongue. Wikitongues has also produced video recordings of native speakers.

### ■ Pite Saami

Spoken by only about 20 inhabitants of a reindeer herding community in Swedish Lapland, Pite Saami is a Uralic language that has no official written form. In the mid-20th century, public policy demanded the unilateral adoption of Swedish, and students were often banned from speaking Pite Saami at school. Video recordings of reindeer herders speaking Pite Saami are part of the larger efforts of the Freiberg Research Group to preserve this vanishing tongue.

### ■ Yaghan

For thousands of years, the Yamana people lived in the southern tip of Argentina, speaking their native language, Yaghan. Today, only one native speaker remains: 90-year-old Cristina Calderon, who can be heard speaking Yaghan in a documentary. Although Calderon grew up speaking Yaghan, her children preferred Spanish to their native tongue, which was frequently target for derision. The tide, however, has begun to turn. Chile now encourages indigenous languages, including the instruction of Yaghan in local kindergartens.

### ■ Nluu

Kristina Esau, 84, is one of the only living speakers of Nluu: the indigenous language of the South African San people. Notable for its distinctive "clicking sound," Nluu and its speakers were vilified by Dutch settlers, forcing most of the San to adopt Afrikaans. Esau, however, is on a one-woman crusade to save the dying language, teaching it to local children. Nluu is spoken in the PBS documentary, "The Linguists."

### ■ Louisiana Spanish

Louisiana Spanish, like Louisiana Creole, has been identified by UNESCO as a critically endangered language. With only a handful of fluent speakers, however, Louisiana Spanish is the more vulnerable of the two. A patois with Cajun, English, and Portuguese elements, it evolved from the parlance of 18th-century immigrants from the Canary Islands, known as "Isleños." Louisiana Spanish can be heard primarily in the southern parish of St. Bernard, notably in the distinctively Isleño satirical ballads known as décimas.

### ■ Votic

Votic—also known as Vote or Votian—is a Uralic language closely related to Estonian. Banned by the Soviets in the 1930s, Votic survives in several small Russian villages to the west of St. Petersburg, where it is spoken by just eight ethnically Finnish Vods. A recently opened museum in Luzhitsy offers language instruction as part of a larger effort to preserve what remains Votic culture. Russian folk group Bestiarium recorded an album of traditional Votic songs.

### ■ Nataoran

Nataoran, a Formosan language belonging to indigenous tribes on Taiwan's eastern coast, has fewer than 600 speakers. In 2017, the Taiwanese government allocated funding for the preservation of its critically endangered languages, which includes publishing documents in languages other than Mandarin.

### ■ Nuxalk

Nuxalk, also known as Bella Coola, is spoken by a small number of native North Americans in the Canadian province of British Columbia. Church-run residential schools once prohibited indigenous students from speaking their native tongue. Consequently, only 17 people spoke Nuxalk fluently as of 2017. Today, the Nuxalk are determined to protect the language, preserving voice recordings and teaching Nuxalk in local schools. The tribe also has plans to create children's books, CDs, and videos in the Nuxalk tongue.

### ■ Patuá

In China's autonomous Macau region,

locals are fighting to hold onto Patuá, a blend of Portuguese and Cantonese spoken by approximately 50 members of Macau's indigenous Eurasian community. Elderly Macanese who grew up with Patuá at home retain a knowledge of the language, despite being forced to abandon it in favor of Portuguese at school. Faced with the threat of extinction from increasing Chinese assimilation, actions are being taken to preserve Patuá—and Macanese culture as a whole—including the formation of the Patuá-language drama group, "Doci Papiacam do Macau."

### ■ Livonian

Grizelda Kristina, the last fluent speaker of Livonian, died in Canada in 2013. Thanks to her efforts, however, Livonian, a Uralic language similar to Finnish and Estonian, lives on, albeit on life support. Kristina, who was born in a small Latvian fishing village, recorded her native tongue for researchers. Today, Livonian is growing as a second language among ethnic Livonians eager to preserve their cultural heritage. The 1991 documentary, "Livonian Lives," preserves footage of native Livonian speakers.

### ■ Naukan Yupik

One of five endangered Yupik languages, Naukan Yupik is spoken by an indigenous people originating in Siberia. As of 2010, there were fewer than 60 native speakers, largely as a consequence of the Soviet displacement of the Yupik from their ancestral village of Naukan on the Bering Sea.

### ■ Arabana

As of 2005, there were only five people in the world who could speak Arabana, one of Australia's several critically endangered languages. In recent years, the University of Adelaide's Mobile Language Team has brought together the handful of remaining fluent speakers to lead "revival workshops" aimed at preserving the Arabana tongue for future generations. Arabana language lessons are also available on the Mobile Language Team website.

### ■ Manx

Although the last native Manx speaker, Ned Maddrell, died in 1974, this Gaelic tongue was miraculously resurrected on Britain's Isle of Man by concerned locals. Recordings made by Maddrell before his death documented the language, serving as a valuable resource for new learners. Bunscoill Ghaelgagh, an immersive Manx primary school, has created a generation of new native speakers. It is estimated that more than 1,800 people now have some level of proficiency in the language.

### ■ Ainu

Japan's indigenous Ainu people speak a language unrelated to any other. In 1996, fewer than 20 people spoke Ainu, which has not been employed conversationally since the 1950s. What remains of Japan's long-oppressed Ainu population is centered on the island of Hokkaido, where villages are taking steps to preserve their mother tongue, including documentary footage of elderly speakers, and young parents consciously raising their children as native Ainu speakers.

### ■ Cambap

Cambap, also known as Twendi, is spoken by fewer than 30 people living in two small villages in Cameroon. As with many other disappearing tongues, those with knowledge of Cambap are of advanced age, with younger generations favoring more widely spoken languages.

### ■ Nez Perce

Nez Perce, or Nimiputimt, is just one of many rapidly disappearing Native American tongues, with fewer than 20 fluent speakers as of 2007. The Nez Perce Language Program, based in Idaho, is battling the language's demise with technology—notably a learning app available on Apple and Android devices.

### ■ Kusunda

Gyani Maiya Sen, an elderly Nepalese woman, is one of the last two speakers of Kusunda, an enigmatic tongue of unknown origin that has mystified linguists for decades. Kusunda appears to have developed in complete isolation, as it bears no relationship to any of the 20 known language families. Scholars are working at a rapid pace to document Kusunda, including this video of Sen speaking her native tongue.

(Source: msn.com)

## Singapore's salad that makes you rich

Singapore may be known for glittering skyscrapers, glossy designer shops and hosting power meetings with international leaders, but the island nation's success could be due to another tour de force altogether.

The country has a secret weapon: a salad. For each Chinese New Year, chefs throughout Singapore create a raw-fish salad that when tossed is said to guarantee prosperity. You'll find them bowed over their chopping boards, slicing and dicing an array of flavorful ingredients, each of which embodies its own special power and meaning.

The origin of the dish, called yu sheng (which plays on the sign for 'yu' that means both 'fish' and 'abundance', and 'sheng', which can mean 'raw' or 'life'), is one of legend. With its roots in ancient China, the dish is said to have been invented by a young couple who survived on fish and vinegar when they were trapped during a storm; while others say that yu sheng was created by fishermen in China's Guangzhou province who would eat their catch to celebrate 'Human Day' – the birth of man – on the seventh day of the Chinese New Year.

When the dish was brought to Singapore by Chinese immigrants in the 1930s, it looked very little like the 'prosperity

salad' that's tossed today. Back then the simple street food was sold from hawker carts and served either Jiangmen-style, a small salad of raw fish, shredded ginger, lettuce strips and spring onion that the customer seasoned with salt, sugar and vinegar; or Teochew-style, where the customer would wrap a piece of grass carp in a lettuce leaf. Both versions were available throughout the year, but were most often ordered by people on Human Day since the Chinese symbol for 'fish' also represents 'abundance', so it's seen as a lucky food for mankind.

It remained that way until 1964, when four Singaporean chefs created a recipe that would become the focal point of every Singaporean Chinese New Year celebration. These chefs are held in such high esteem that they are known as the 'Four Heavenly Kings' of Singaporean cuisine: Lau Yoke Pui, Tham Yui Kai, Hooi Kok Wai and Sin Leong. Lau and Tham have since sadly passed away, but Sin, 91, and Hooi, 79, can still be found every day working at their bustling Red Star Restaurant near River Valley, which they have co-owned for the past 45 years.

The Chinese New Year festivities, which last for 15 days,

run from January to February depending on the lunar calendar. The focus of any New Year is the Reunion Dinner, held on Chinese New Year's Eve – the night before the first day of Chinese New Year – when family members would return home and traditionally dine on steamboat (hot pot), waxed duck and Chinese sausage. However, the Four Heavenly Kings were ready to change that.

To find inspiration for their festive dish, the chefs decided to look at what was traditionally eaten at New Year and was seen as lucky. That meant the dish needed to include raw fish due to its association with good fortune. And the chefs loved the idea of creating a celebration dish from one of their favourite street-food meals. On the street you would mix the yu sheng yourself, but the chefs saw an opportunity to create a more colourful, flavoursome and luxurious version that families could mix together.

It didn't take long to come up with this initial idea, Hooi said, but it took them years to perfect the dish. The new yu sheng was first launched at the chefs' Lai Wah Restaurant in 1964 and then rolled out to their other restaurants.

(Source: BBC)



# Climate change makes summer weather stormier yet more stagnant, scientists find

Climate change is shifting the energy in the atmosphere that fuels summertime weather, which may lead to stronger thunderstorms and more stagnant conditions for midlatitude regions of the Northern Hemisphere, including North America, Europe, and Asia, a new MIT study finds.

Scientists report that rising global temperatures, particularly in the Arctic, are redistributing the energy in the atmosphere: More energy is available to fuel thunderstorms and other local, convective processes, while less energy is going toward summertime extratropical cyclones -- larger, milder weather systems that circulate across thousands of kilometers. These systems are normally associated with winds and fronts that generate rain.

"Extratropical cyclones ventilate air and air pollution, so with weaker extratropical cyclones in the summer, you're looking at the potential for more poor air-quality days in urban areas," says study author Charles Gertler, a graduate student in MIT's Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences (EAPS).

## Tropical storms

In contrast to more violent tropical cyclones such as hurricanes, extratropical cyclones are large weather systems that occur poleward of the Earth's tropical zone. These storm systems generate rapid changes in temperature and humidity along fronts that sweep across large swaths of the United States. In the winter, extratropical cyclones can whip up into Nor'easters; in the summer, they can bring everything from general cloudiness and light showers to heavy gusts



and thunderstorms.

Extratropical cyclones feed off the atmosphere's horizontal temperature gradient -- the difference in average temperatures between northern and southern latitudes. This temperature gradient and the moisture in the atmosphere produces a certain amount of energy in the atmosphere that can fuel weather events. The greater the gradient between, say, the Arctic and the

equator, the stronger an extratropical cyclone is likely to be.

In recent decades, the Arctic has warmed faster than the rest of the Earth, in effect shrinking the atmosphere's horizontal temperature gradient. Gertler and O'Gorman wondered whether and how this warming trend has affected the energy available in the atmosphere for extratropical cyclones and other summertime weather phenomena.

**In contrast to more violent tropical cyclones such as hurricanes, extratropical cyclones are large weather systems that occur poleward of the Earth's tropical zone.**

## Fibers from old tires can improve fire resistance of concrete, team finds

A new way of protecting concrete from fire damage using materials recycled from old tires has been successfully tested by researchers at the University of Sheffield.

The team used fibers extracted from the textile reinforcement commonly embedded into tires to guarantee their performance. Adding these fibers to the concrete mix was shown to reduce the concrete's tendency to spall -- where surface layers of concrete break off -- explosively under the intense heat from a fire.

Using man-made polypropylene (PP) fibers to protect concrete structures from damage or collapse if a fire breaks out is a relatively well-known technique. Many modern structures, including large scale engineering projects such as Crossrail, have used concrete that includes PP fibers for protection against fire spalling.

## Used trees

The Sheffield study is the first to show that these fibers do not have to be made from raw materials, but can instead be reclaimed from used tires. The results are published in the journal Fire Technology.

"We've shown that these recycled fibers do an equivalent job to 'virgin' PP fibers which require lots of energy and resources to produce," explains lead author Dr. Shan-Shan Huang, in the Department of Civil and Structural Engineering at the University of Sheffield.

"Using waste materials in this way is less expensive, and better for the planet."

The fibers melt under the intense heat from a fire, leaving networks of tiny channels. This means that moisture trapped within the concrete is able to escape, rather than becoming trapped, which causes the concrete to break out explosively.

"Because the fibers are so small, they don't affect the strength or the stiffness of the concrete," says Dr. Huang.

"Their only job is to melt when heat becomes intense. Concrete is a brittle material, so will break out relatively easily



without having these fibers help reducing the pressure within the concrete."

## Extreme heat

Protecting the concrete from fire spalling means that steel reinforcements running through the concrete are also protected. When the steel reinforcements are exposed to extreme heat they weaken very quickly, meaning a structure is much more likely to collapse. The Liverpool Waterfront Car Park suffered this kind of damage during a fire in 2017, leading to the entire structure eventually having to be demolished.

Collaborating with Twincon, a Sheffield-based company that develops innovative solutions for the construction industry, the researchers have also developed technologies for reclaiming the fibers from the used tires.

This involved separating the fibers from the tire rubber, untangling the fibers into strands, and then distributing them evenly into the concrete mixture.

The team plan to continue testing the material with different ratios of the fibers to concrete, and also using different types of concrete. They also plan to find out more about how the materials react to heat at the microstructure level. By scanning the concrete as it is heated, they will be able to see more precisely the structural changes taking place inside the material.

(Source: phys.org)

## Physicists pinpoint a simple mechanism that makes bacteria resistant to antibiotics

Physicists at McMaster University have for the first time identified a simple mechanism used by potentially deadly bacteria to fend off antibiotics, a discovery which is providing new insights into how germs adapt and behave at a level of detail never seen before.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Communications Biology, could have implications in the global battle against antibiotic resistance, enabling the design of better, more effective drugs to fight infection.

"There are many, many bacteria out there, and so many antibiotics, but by proposing a basic model that applies to many of them, we can have a much better understanding on how to tackle and predict resistance better," says Maikel Rheinstädt, a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at McMaster and lead author of the study.

Researchers examined how the membranes of bacteria interacted with the antibiotic polymyxin B (PmB), which is commonly used to treat urinary tract infections, meningitis, blood and eye infections.

## Resistant to polymyxins

They concentrated on PmB because it was once considered the strongest drug of its kind, a last line of defense for physicians when nothing else worked. That failsafe status came into question in 2016, when Chinese scientists discovered a gene that allowed bacteria to become resistant even to polymyxins.

"We wanted to find out how this bacteria, specifically, was stopping this drug in this particular case," says Adree Khondker, a health sciences undergraduate student and first author on the study. "If we can understand that, we can design better antibiotics."

Employing techniques typically used by physicists for materials research, the team used highly specialized equipment to peer deep into the bacterial membrane,

## Global reanalysis of climate

They began by looking at a global reanalysis of recorded climate observations, known as the ERA-Interim Reanalysis, a project that has been collecting available satellite and weather balloon measurements of temperature and humidity around the world since the 1970s. From these measurements, the project produces a fine-grained global grid of estimated temperature and humidity, at various altitudes in the atmosphere.

From this grid of estimates, the team focused on the Northern Hemisphere, and regions between 20 and 80 degrees latitude. They took the average summertime temperature and humidity in these regions, between June, July, and August for each year from 1979 to 2017. They then fed each yearly summertime average of temperature and humidity into an algorithm, developed at MIT, that estimates the amount of energy that would be available in the atmosphere, given the corresponding temperature and humidity conditions.

"We can see how this energy goes up and down over the years, and we can also separate how much energy is available for convection, which would manifest itself as thunderstorms for example, versus larger-scale circulations like extratropical cyclones," O'Gorman says.

Since 1979, they found the energy available for large-scale extratropical cyclones has decreased by 6 percent, whereas the energy that could fuel smaller, more local thunderstorms has gone up by 13 percent.

(Source: natureworldnews.com)



capturing images with a resolution so fine they could view individual molecules at approximately 1/1,000,000th the width of a strand of human hair.

"If you take the bacterial cell and add this drug, holes will form in the wall, acting like a hole-puncher, and killing the cell. But there was much debate on how these holes were formed in the first place," explains Khondker.

When these antibiotics are working properly, researchers know the basic laws of physics apply: because the drug is positively charged it is attracted to the negatively charged bacteria. At the same time, the bacterial membrane is employing a repulsive force as it attempts to repel the drug.

## High-end gaming computers

Through imaging and simulations, researchers pinpointed which part of the antibiotic enters the membrane, where it enters and how deeply it penetrates. They simulated these processes on microsecond timescales with high-end gaming computers in their lab.

They determined that when a bacterium has become resistant, its membrane is more rigid and the charge is weaker, making it much less attractive to the drug and harder to penetrate. "For the drug, it's like going from cutting Jello to cutting through rock," Khondker says.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

## Breakthrough in the search for graphene-based electronics

Danish researchers just solved one of the biggest challenges of making effective nano electronics based on graphene: to carve out graphene to nanoscale dimensions without ruining the electrical properties. This allows them to achieve electrical currents orders of magnitude higher than previously achieved for such structures. The work shows that the quantum transport properties needed for future electronics can survive scaling down to 10 nanometer dimensions.

For 15 years, scientists have tried to exploit the "miracle material" graphene to produce nanoscale electronics. On paper, graphene should be great for just that: it is ultra-thin -- only one atom thick in fact and therefore two-dimensional, it is excellent for conducting electrical current and should be ideal for future forms of electronics that are faster and more energy efficient. In addition, graphene consists of carbon atoms -- of which we have an unlimited supply.

In theory, graphene can be altered to perform many different tasks within e.g. electronics, photonics or sensors simply by drawing tiny patterns in it, as this fundamentally alters its quantum properties. One "simple" task, which has turned out to be surprisingly difficult, is to induce a band-gap -- which is crucial for making transistors and optoelectronic devices. However, since graphene is only an atom thick all of the atoms are important and even tiny irregularities in the pattern can destroy its properties.

"Graphene is a fantastic material, which I think will play a crucial role in making new nanoscale electronics. The problem is that it is extremely difficult to engineer the electrical properties," says Peter Bøggild, a professor at DTU Physics.

The Center for Nanostructured Graphene at DTU and Aalborg University was established in 2012 specifically to study how the properties of graphene can be engineered, for instance by making a very fine pattern of holes. This should subtly change the quantum nature of the electrons in the material, and allow the properties of graphene to be tailored. However, the team of researchers from DTU and Aalborg experienced the same as many other researchers worldwide: it didn't work.

"When you make patterns in a material like graphene, you do so in order to change its properties in a controlled way -- to match your design.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

## This new optical device could one day detect plant life on distant alien worlds

A new optical instrument that can detect plant-based organisms from kilometres away due to the unique way living things reflect light could one day help in the search for life beyond this planet, new research suggests.

The working prototype device -- called the TreePol spectropolarimeter -- is the result of years of research by Dutch biologist Lucas Patty from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. If his wild vision comes true, circularly polarized light could ultimately help us to detect extraterrestrial life.

In a new paper and Ph.D. dissertation, Patty describes how the phenomenon of chirality (or molecular handedness) in biological systems affects the way they reflect light, resulting in fractional circular polarization of light, which "constitutes an unambiguous biosignature".

Because artificial grass isn't living and so doesn't exhibit homochirality (which means that all molecules should have the same handedness) at the molecular level, it doesn't produce the signal the TreePol spectropolarimeter is looking for, much as dead vegetation also doesn't.

Living trees and grass do work, however, and in Patty's testing, the device can successfully identify the signal of circularly polarized light from up to several kilometers away.

It sounds a bit crazy, but scientists investigating the remote sensing of life have developed similar kinds of systems before.

According to Patty, this kind of technique could one day help researchers do things like monitor agricultural crops from aircraft or satellites, but going even further, the sky's the limit.

"In the context of astrobiology, the circular polarisation of biomolecules is a powerful biosignature," Patty and fellow researchers explain in a new paper, which hasn't yet been peer-reviewed, but has been submitted to the journal Astrobiology.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## Fake-news-generating AI deemed too dangerous for public release, research says

Throughout human history, automation has supplanted humans in one industry after another. In the past, it was sawmills and food processing, and now it looks like trucking and cashiers could be next. However, there might be another employment casualty in the future. Your friendly neighborhood fake news writer could be out of a job if systems like GPT2 become commonplace. For the time being, the researchers who developed this AI consider it too dangerous to release.

You can give GPT2 a block of text, and it'll generate more of it in the same style. It does this by focusing on one word at a time and then decides what the next word ought to be. Unlike the mediocre text prediction on your phone, GPT2 creates coherent sentences that seem to get the point across. Honestly, I've read news articles written by humans that weren't as well-written.

So, why is this article being written by a squishy, living human instead of a hyper-efficient AI? GPT2 might be able to understand language, but it can't parse and explain facts. Everything it writes is a lie, making it the world's best fake news generator.

In a shocking finding, scientist discovered a herd of unicorns living in a remote, previously unexplored valley, in the Andes Mountains. Even more surprising to the researchers was the fact that the unicorns spoke perfect English.

The scientist named the population, after their distinctive horn, Ovid's Unicorn. These four-horned, silver-white unicorns were previously unknown to science.

Now, after almost two centuries, the mystery of what sparked this odd phenomenon is finally solved.

(Source: extremetech.com)

## Earthquakes drag masses of carbon into Earth's trenches, new study suggests

Earthquakes can pull massive amounts of carbon into the deepest parts of Earth's deep-sea trenches, scientists have discovered.

After analyzing the offshore magnitude 9 earthquake that devastated Japan in 2011, a team of researchers found that this single event pulled over a million tons of carbon into the Japan Trench to depths of around five miles.

The "results surprised us and our colleagues," Tobias Schwestermann, from the University of Innsbruck, said in a statement. "This is much higher than expected from carbon fluxes observed in other deep-sea trench systems worldwide."

The 2011 earthquake was one of the biggest recorded in recent history. It generated a tsunami that caused widespread devastation to the east coast of Japan -- it caused a meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant, destroyed 120,000 buildings and killed over 15,000 people.

## Earth's axis

The event was so strong NASA said it could have shifted Earth's axis and shortened our days.

During the earthquake, the Pacific Plate slipped under the plate beneath northern Honshu, along the Japan Trench. In some parts where the fault slipped, the land moved by 100 feet.



As well as causing major changes to the seafloor, the earthquake also caused huge amounts of organic matter to be displaced, with vast quantities being sucked deep into the Japan Trench -- a subduction zone that extends down almost five miles.

In a study published in Scientific Reports, scientists were trying to work out just how much organic carbon was pulled into these extreme depths. Quantifying this would allow them to better understand the global carbon

cycle -- the movement of carbon between fossil fuels, the atmosphere, the oceans and the land.

## High-resolution surveys

The team took samples and data that had been collected from the site of the earthquake between 2012 and 2016. They used high-resolution surveys and sub-seafloor structure imaging and then analyzed sediments taken from the site. By looking at the carbon content of the sediments, they were able to estimate the total carbon mass that was transported during the earthquake as being over one million tons.

That this much carbon could be moved during a single earthquake has major global implications, the team say. Concluding, they said that this much carbon is comparable to other Earth system processes, providing a greater insight into how large earthquakes affect carbon cycles. "Taken in the context of estimates of carbon burial in other trench systems, our findings highlight the importance of tectonic events for carbon cycling," they wrote.

Michael Strasser, one of the study authors, added: The "results show that when we talk about the global carbon cycle, we also have to think about the deepest and most-underexplored deep-sea trenches of our world's oceans in the future."

(Source: Newsweek)



## Charity foundation creates 41,000 jobs for the deprived

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Barekat Charity Foundation, affiliated to Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, has generated some 41,000 jobs for the people residing in underprivileged areas during the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2018), Mohammad Mokhber, director of Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, has said.



The Foundation has planned to increase job opportunities by 70,000 during the next year, Mokhber announced in a press release on Tuesday.

Since the past recent years, over 40,000 projects have been implemented costing 500 trillion rials (nearly \$12 billion), he stated, adding, the projects include 1,550 schools, 1,200 cultural centers, 30,000 residential units, 1,100 health projects, 2,500 hospital beds, and 159 health care centers. “We have financially supported 10,000 infertile couples in rural areas to receive necessary treatments, and 224 infants have been born,” he added.

He went on to note that 300,000 stationary packages were provided and distributed in deprived areas at the beginning of the current school year (September 23, 2018).

Additionally, over the past seven months, 41,000 direct and 40,000 indirect jobs were created by Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, he noted.

“Some 1,500 financially struggling individuals also received loans as job facilitation,” Mokhber concluded.

Providing dowries for girls, medications for cancer patients, wheelchairs for people with physical disabilities, stationery for students, and also cochlear implants are among other services of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam to the underprivileged.

## \$1.5b needed to complete 2 metro lines in Tehran

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** – A budget of 60 trillion rials (about \$1.5 billion) required to complete two metro lines of 6 and 7, stretching to 70 kilometers in the capital, Tehran City Council member has stated.

“Inauguration of the two aforementioned lines requires 2,000 subway cars,” Mahmood Mirlohi told Fars news agency on Tuesday.

Currently, the capital’s transport system is delivering over 18 million trips per day, 30 percent of which must be carried out by the public transport fleet, to do so, subway lines of 6 and 7 should be operational, he explained.

He went on to say that completion of the two lines costs 60 trillion rials (about \$1.5 billion), which must be provided to exploit the whole underground transport system.

“Some 350 subway cars will be domestically built to enter transport fleet, and 630 cars is planned to be supplied by the Chinese company,” he highlighted, adding that 70 cars are so far prepared and the rest will be provided in the next three years.

However, completing the 6 and 7 line of Tehran metro is the main priority, we tend to increase the lines with the private sector’s cooperation, he concluded.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Urban Legends

A: Have you read all these crazy things that are going on around the world?

B: What do you mean?

A: I was reading about how some people get tricked or drugged in their hotel rooms and have their organs removed! Then they are sold on the **black market**.

B: Don't tell me you actually believe all that? Don't be so **gullible**, they are just **urban legends**. They are just stories people **make up** to scare you.

A: Well, I was also reading about how some popular songs have **subliminal** or even **satanic** messages if you play them backwards! Can you believe that?

B: Sounds a bit too **far-fetched** to be true don't you think? You really think an artist or songwriter is going to go through the trouble of putting subliminal or satanic messages in a song? Don't be so **naive**!

■ **Key vocabulary**

**black market:** any system in which goods are sold and bought illegally

**gullible:** easily believing something that is not true

**urban legend:** stories that are exaggerated or not true

**make up:** invent

**subliminal:** affecting your mind in a way that you are not conscious of

**satanic:** relating to Satan or the devil

**far-fetched:** improbable; not naturally pertinent

**naïve:** having or showing a lack of experience or judgment

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**

**myth:** an untrue story

**boogie man:** a mythical creature used by adults to frighten children into good behavior

**cynical:** unwilling to believe that people have good, honest, or sincere reasons for doing something

**grounded:** quality of not letting emotions or impulses get the **best of you**; reasonable and in control of your emotions, even when this is difficult

**realist:** a person who tends to view or represent things as they really arr

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# An odyssey of Iranian-American Islamic scholar Laleh Bakhtiar

**1 →** He experienced different jobs and responsibilities. He was a peddler, later on a shopkeeper, and then a tutor.

Meeting Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan, who served as the president of Alborz High School (the then American College of Tehran), was a turning point in his life.

At the age of 39, Abol Ghassem served as the home teacher to a prominent Bakhtiari family in Tehran and used to drop their children at Alborz High School and wait there to pick them up in the afternoon every day.

Dr. Jordan who became aware of Abol Ghassem’s eagerness for learning decided to help him in obtaining his diploma. It took him 6 years to obtain his high school degree.

Nonetheless, finishing high school didn’t satisfy him as he was greatly interested in medicine since his early childhood after struggle with smallpox.

In 1918 when famine struck Iran a group humanitarian activists from Near East Foundation came to Iran for food assistance and they were looking for someone knowing English so that they could help them in distributing the food among the famine stricken people. Dr. Jordan introduced Abol Ghassem to them, and he told them about his yearning to go to the United States and become a physician.

On August 29, 1919 Abol Ghassem, penniless, finally managed to leave Iran to travel to the United States and he arrived in Ellis Island in New York City in October and decided to study medicine at a University in New York.

His request to study at the university was originally rejected, but a recommendation letter from Dr. Jordan assessing the qualities, characteristics, and capabilities of Abol Ghassem and his ability to study there granted him a seat at the university.

In order to pay his tuition fee, Abol Ghassem, burly and well-built, started a career in boxing and wrestling.

He initially was enrolled at Columbia University and afterward completed his academic study at Iowa and South Dakota universities and in 1923 he received his BA degree in medicine and entered the “Syracuse Medical School” in 1925 at the age of 51.

Finally, after the internship course, he started his residency program of the surgery at the “Bellevue Hospital” in New York. At the age of 55, Abol Ghassem became a fully qualified doctor.

In 1927 Abol Ghassem met and married his first wife, Helen Jeffreys, a 22-year-old American nurse. In 1931 Abol Ghassem returned to Iran with Helen with two of their children and twins on the way. Upon his arrival to Tehran they founded a private hospital where he performed different surgical operations.

Later he was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Tehran Medical School from 1934 –1935 and as teaching staff at the School between 1933 and 1937. During this period, he taught the topics of the anatomy, obstetrics and gynecology and minor surgery to students of medicine.

His other major contributions to the Tehran Medical Faculty dates back to 1934 when he played an effective role in planning and building of the Anatomy Hall.

In 1940, he went to Abadan, southern province of Khuzestan, and worked as the chief surgeon at the hospital affiliated to the “Oil Company”. He then moved to another city in Khuzestan Province, Masjed Soleyman, in 1942.

At the age of 90, in 1962, he came back to Tehran. For his contributions to medicine and educational services, the chancellor of Tehran University honored him in 1964 in an

## Majlis passes bill on soil conservation

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k**

**TEHRAN** – A bill on soil conservation, proposed to the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) in December 2014, has been finally approved, secretary of environmental policy at the center for strategic studies affiliated to the presidential office has said.

The parliament soon will pass the soil conservation bill, and the country will benefit a comprehensive law on the protection of soil resources, IRNA quoted Mohammad Darvish as saying on Tuesday.

As per the bill, the Department of Environment is the responsible body to deal with business units polluting the soil or even shut down industries contributing to soil contamination, he stated.

According to the law, the violator is not allowed to submit a complaint to the court, he added.

Darvish went on to conclude that in case of final approval, the soil protection bill will be operational since the next [Iranian calendar] year (starting on March 20).

According to Soil Science Society of America, soil provides ecosystem services critical for life, as acts as a water filter and a growing medium; provides habitat for billions of organisms, contributing to biodiversity; and supplies most of the antibiotics used to fight diseases. Humans use soil as a holding facility for solid waste, filter for wastewater, and foundation for the cities and towns. Finally, soil is the basis of nations’ agroecosystems which provides feed, fiber, food and fuel, while Industrial, household, and non-point source pollution jeopardizes the health of the environment and humans.



Laleh Bakhtiar



Helen Jeffreys



Abol Ghassem Bakhtiar

official ceremony and one of the anatomical halls at Tehran Medical School was named after him.

Eventually, after nearly a century of hard work Dr. Abol Ghassem Bakhtiar passed away on January 1971 in Tehran, at the age 99, due to a heart attack. He was buried next to the tomb of Ferdowsi (the great Persian epic poet) in Tus, near Mashhad, northeastern Iran.

Abol Ghassem had had a dream just before he died that his earth would mix with the earth of Ferdowsi and a Rostam would be born to save Iran. This is why he is buried in the public graveyard in Tus behind the tomb of Ferdowsi.

In a letter addressed to his son in September 26, 1953, quoted from the book “Abol Ghassem of Tus: The Epic Journey of Abol Ghassem Bakhtiar, M.D.” co-written by his daughters Laleh Bakhtiar and Lailee Bakhtiar, he writes: “At nineteen, I was a peddler in the Bakhtiari Mountains with thousands of hallucinating dreams. I had one guideline and that was my desire-my desire for an education and for betterment. At the age of forty-four, when I came to America, I had only a high school diploma from the American High School in Tehran. No money! No relatives! No one to back me up! But I was determined to study medicine. No one on the earth could divert me from my path. When I first met the Dean of Columbia College for admission to the college, he said I had chosen a very hard subject and I should change it. I told him that death or success was my aim and I would not change my subject even if I spent all my life trying to achieve it.”

■ **Helen of Tus**

Laleh’s mother, Helen Jeffreys, was a young nurse in her 20s when she married 55-year-old Abol Ghassem who was almost thirty-five years her senior.

According to the book “Helen of Tus”, a biographical memoir coauthored by two of Helen and Abol Ghassem’s daughters (Laleh, the youngest and Shireen, the second-born), Helen was the first American-trained nurse in Iran. Helen, an American from Idaho, immersed herself in Persian language and culture while pursuing her nursing career and commitment to prenatal and neonatal health education with a tremendous sense of mission. Simultaneously she bore the remainder of

## 2,500 houses reconstructed in quake-affected Kermanshah

**SOCIETY d e s k**

**TEHRAN** – Some 2,500 residential units have been reconstructed in quake-stricken regions of the western province of Kermanshah, and will be inaugurated by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 20), deputy director for housing department of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has said.

After inauguration of the aforesaid housing units, retrofitting and rebuilding of the whole houses in the quake-hit villages will be completed, ISNA quoted Ebrahim Bazian as saying on Tuesday.

“Over 10,000 residential units owned by the families covered by the Foundation, have been destroyed through the earthquake last year, 5,000 of which needed reconstruction and the rest retrofitting,” he explained.

He went on to say that some 2,500 quake-affected houses have been retrofitted and pro-

vided to the residents, and the other 2,500 is being reconstructed and provided by the next month.

The whole reconstruction and renovation measures have cost the Foundation some 600 billion rials (around \$14 million), Bazian noted.

There are 100,000 families under the foundation’s coverage who are residing in rental houses nationwide, so that the Foundation is going to grant them housing units, he highlighted, adding, the rest of financially struggling families also will receive rental assistance.

On November 12, 2017, a destructive earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale hit Sarpol-e Zahab in Kermanshah. Some 90,000 houses were partly or completely damaged by the tremor. Sadly, the quake took over 660 lives and left more than 10,000 injured.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Iran’s Rescue and Relief Organization to be equipped with drones

The Iranian Red Crescent Society’s Rescue and Relief Organization will be equipped with drones, said the Organization’s director Morteza Salimi. The Rescue and Relief Organization’s equipment have increased by 4 percent compared to the last year (March 2017-March 2018), Salimi said, ISNA news agency reported on Saturday.

“Using drones in operations has been a priority for some years and we have led some primary negotiations in this regard and signed a memorandum of understanding as well,” he added.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “dis-, di-, dif-”

■ **Meaning:** away, from, negative

■ **For example:** This structure *diverts* water into the canal.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Wind down

■ **Meaning:** to rest and relax after a lot of hard work or excitement

■ **For example:** I find it difficult to wind down after a day at work.

## IDIOM

### A tough nut to crack

■ **Explanation:** difficult task to complete

■ **For example:** Getting an A in this class will be a tough nut to crack.

## تجهیز سازمان امداد و نجات هلال احمر به پهپاد

مرتضی سلیمی رئیس سازمان امداد و نجات جمعیت هلال احمر از استفاده هلال احمر از پهپاد در آینده خبر داد.

سلیمی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا، اظهار کرد: تجهیزات امداد و نجات هلال احمر حدود چهار درصد نسبت به سال گذشته افزایش داشته است.

وی با اشاره به اینکه استفاده از پهپاد در برنامه‌های سازمان امداد و نجات و جمعیت هلال احمر بوده است، گفت: استفاده از پهپاد از گذشته در برنامه‌های جمعیت هلال احمر بوده است و در حال حاضر نیز مذاکرات اولیه‌ای نیز در این زمینه انجام شده است. این مذاکرات منجر به تفاهم نامهای شده است.



# U.S. rushing to give Saudi Arabia sensitive nuclear technology: congressional report

A congressional report reveals that the United States is rushing to transfer “highly sensitive nuclear technology” to Saudi Arabia, with the U.S. President Donald Trump being “directly engaged” in the push.

The House of Representatives’ Oversight and Reform Committee released the 24-page report on Tuesday, listing the actions taken by the Trump administration in an attempt to win government support for American firms to construct nuclear power plants in Saudi Arabia, in what could increase the risk of spreading nuclear weapons technology.

The report is based on whistleblower accounts and documents showing communications between administration officials and nuclear power companies.

“Experts worry that transferring sensitive U.S. nuclear technology could allow Saudi Arabia to produce nuclear weapons that contribute to the proliferation of nuclear arms throughout an already unstable Middle East,” says the report.

The House panel has opened an investigation into case.

The report said the probe was “particularly critical” because the administration’s efforts to hand over the technology to the kingdom appear to be ongoing.



Trump is reportedly “directly engaged in the effort.”

### Why the hurry?

The report, meanwhile, questioned why the push was characterized by such haste.

It said the House panel had obtained additional documents bolstering earlier whistleblower concerns about potential illegalities and conflicts of interest facing top White House aides, whom it accuses of advancing the push.

The document names some of the officials as former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Trump’s son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner, and Tom Barrack, the president’s inaugural committee chairman.

The report also implicates some firms linked to the president in contributing to the drive.

The commercial entities named are IP3 International, a private company, which has reportedly organized a group of the U.S.

companies to build “dozens of nuclear power plants” in the kingdom. ACU Strategic Partners, a nuclear power consultancy group, Colony NorthStar, Barrack’s real estate investment firm, and Flynn Intel Group, a consultancy and lobby group.

The House report divulges communications between Trump administration officials and nuclear power companies.

It states that “within the U.S., strong private commercial interests have been pressing aggressively for the transfer of highly sensitive nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia.”

### Big bucks

These commercial entities could “reap billions of dollars through contracts associated with constructing and operating nuclear facilities in Saudi Arabia,” it adds.

The House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) laid the foundation of the kingdom’s first nuclear research reactor last November amid nuclear talks with the United States.

The report also says that private commercial interests inside the U.S. are behind the push to trust Saudi Arabia with the “highly sensitive technology.”

Riyadh has refused to agree to safeguards, which ban it from using nuclear technology for military purposes.

(Source: agencies)

## Complicated puzzle in the UK!

➡ Meanwhile, supporters of the “People’s Vote” campaign, who are now very active in England, believe that the parliament’s negative vote will pave the way for a new referendum on the Brexit. This issue is no way contrary to the demands of Theresa May and the Conservative Party, but it’s secretly supported by them.

Puzzles in the UK over the country’s exit from the European Union are becoming more and more complex. The European Union is also keen on the continuation of this complicated game. However, it is still not clear if England will eventually leave the European Union. As mentioned, the two traditional British parties were both opponents of leaving Europe.

Labor Party officials led by Jeremy Corbyn have also agreed to vote again on the Brexit, and have officially backed this issue. The fact that Britain’s two rival parties have come to an agreement on holding a new referendum has provided the ground for its ultimate realization.

## Ireland hosts Mideast ‘peace’ talks shortly after Warsaw Summit’s failure

Ireland on Tuesday hosted “closed-door talks” between a group of European and Arab ministers over the “peace process” in the Middle East, a few days after a similar conference failed in the Polish capital of Warsaw.



The Tuesday talks focused on “how best to move forward” in the Middle East peace process, the Irish foreign ministry said.

Top Irish diplomat Simon Coveney headed the “re-treat-style” meeting with his counterparts from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Jordan, Spain, Sweden, as well as Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki.

The ministers were joined by Arab League head Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

“The intention was not to launch any new process but to consider ways to support and shape engagement on this issue in other fora,” a foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement.

The “confidential discussion on the present state of the Middle East peace process and how best to move forward” was held at Farnleigh, a manor house in Dublin used for visiting dignitaries.

Jordan’s foreign ministry says those attending the meeting agreed on the importance of launching serious and effective negotiations to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of a two-state solution.

“Discussions highlighted the importance of supporting all effective efforts towards ending the conflict, with participants stressing the centrality of the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution to efforts aiming to achieve security and stability in the region and combat extremism and despair,” a Foreign Ministry statement said.

“The ministers expressed concern about the status quo and stressed the importance of finding a political prospect for progress towards resolving the conflict,” the statement noted.

Tuesday’s meeting comes ahead of the first ever EU-Arab League summit in Egypt on February 24-25.

It also came a few days after a similar conference held by the United States in Warsaw, Poland on February 13-14.

The event has been widely viewed as a failure for the U.S. as most global leaders snubbed the meeting, making American Vice President Mike Pence sit and interact with foreign officials well below his diplomatic stature.

On the sidelines of the conference, which was supposed to discuss ways to promote “peace” in the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu startled the international community and even his allies in the White House by openly speaking of a “common” Israeli-Arab “interest” of “war with Iran.”

Netanyahu also made provocative remarks against the Poles, accusing the European country of collaborating with the Nazi Germany in carrying out what is said to be the Holocaust.

The Israeli PM has in the past hit out at what he describes as the EU’s “hypocritical and hostile attitude” -- referring to its criticism of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.

And Ireland has drawn criticism from Israel in recent months over a bill progressing through parliament which would outlaw the import of goods from the occupied territories.

The “confidential” meeting in Ireland came just days after Jared Kushner, the U.S. President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and adviser, outlined plans for a “peace” deal between Israel and the Palestinians at the Munich Security Conference.

The U.S. plans are to be formally presented after Israel’s April 9 elections. But the Palestinian Authority (PA) says it can no longer trust the United States as an honest broker after Trump in 2017 recognized al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the Israeli regime’s capital.

In December, several European Union member states warned that Trump’s plan on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is yet to be unveiled, will not be successful if it fails to take into account internationally-agreed parameters for peace, namely a two-state solution along the pre-1967 boundaries.

Britain, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden -- which are all member states to the UN Security Council (UNSC) - as well as Belgium, Germany and Italy released a joint statement in December, saying the so-called Middle East peace plan should support the Palestinian statehood and end the Israeli occupation.

(Source: Press TV)

## Three British Conservatives quit party in protest at ‘disastrous Brexit’

Three lawmakers from Britain’s governing Conservatives quit over the government’s “disastrous handling of Brexit” on Wednesday, in a blow to Prime Minister Theresa May’s attempts to unite her party around plans to leave the European Union (EU).

The lawmakers, who support a second EU referendum and have long said May’s Brexit strategy is being led by Conservative euro sceptics, said they would join a new independent group in parliament set up by seven former opposition Labor politicians.

The resignations put May in an even weaker position in parliament, where her Brexit deal was crushed by lawmakers last month when both euro sceptics and EU supporters voted against an agreement they say offers the worst of all worlds.

While the three were almost certain to vote against any deal, the hardening of their positions undermines May’s negotiating position in Brussels, where she heads later to try to secure an opening for further work on revising the agreement.

With only 37 days until Britain leaves the EU, its biggest foreign and trade policy shift in more than 40 years, divisions over Brexit are redrawing the political landscape. The resignations threaten a decades-old two-party system.

“The final straw for us has been this government’s disastrous handling of Brexit,” the three lawmakers, Heidi Allen, Anna Soubry and Sarah Wollaston, said in a letter to May.

Soubry later told a news conference that the Conservative Party had been taken over by right-wing, pro-Brexit lawmakers.

“The truth is, the battle is over and the other side has won. The right-wing, the hard-line anti-EU awkward squad that have destroyed every (Conservative) leader for the last 40 years are now running the ... party from top to toe,” she said.

May said she was saddened by the decision and that Britain’s membership of the EU “has been a source of disagreement both in our party and in our country for a long time”.

“But by ... implementing the decision of the British people we are doing the right thing for our country,” she said, referring to the 2016 referendum in which Britons voted by a margin of 52-48 percent in favor of leaving the EU.

Asked what May would say to others considering resigning, her spokesman said: “She would, as she always has, ask for the support of her colleagues in delivering (Brexit)”.

### Independent group

The three sat in parliament on Wednesday with a new grouping which broke away from the Labor Party earlier this week over increasing frustration with their leader Jeremy Corbyn’s Brexit strategy and a row over anti-Semitism.

Another former Labor lawmaker joined their ranks late on Tuesday, and several politicians from both the main opposition party and Conservatives said they expected more to follow from both sides of parliament.

What unites most of the group of 11 is a desire to see a second referendum on any deal May comes back with, now that the terms of Brexit are known in detail - something the prime minister has ruled out.

For May’s Brexit plan, the resignations are yet another knock to more than two years of talks to leave the EU, which have been punctuated by defeats in parliament, rows over policy and a confidence vote, which she ultimately won.

Britain’s 2016 EU referendum has split not only British towns and villages but also parliament, with both Conservative and Labor leaders struggling to keep their parties united.

May has faced a difficult balancing act. Eurosceptic members of her party want a clean break with the bloc, pro-EU lawmakers argue for the closest possible ties, while many in the middle are increasing frustrated over the lack of movement.

Those who have resigned have long accused May of leaning too far towards Brexit supporters, sticking to red lines which they, and many in Labor, say have made a comprehensive



deal all but impossible to negotiate.

But May will head to Brussels hoping that her team will get the green light to start more technical negotiations on how to satisfy the concerns of mostly Brexit supporters over the so-called Northern Irish backstop arrangement.

The “backstop”, an insurance policy to avoid a hard border between the British province of Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland if London and Brussels fail to agree a deal on future ties, is the main point of contention in talks with Brussels.

British officials are hoping they can secure the kind of legal assurances that the backstop cannot trap Britain in the EU’s sphere to persuade lawmakers to back a revised deal.

But May’s argument she can command a majority in parliament if the EU hands her such assurances is getting weaker. A government defeat last week showed the euro-sceptics’ muscle.

One pro-Brexit Conservative lawmaker, Andrew Bridgen, said: “I would find it very difficult to accept a legal document from the same (party) lawyer whose definitive advice four weeks ago was that we could be trapped in the backstop in perpetuity.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Saudi prince expects investment worth more than \$100 billion in India

The House of Saud regime’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) said on Wednesday he expected investment opportunities worth more than \$100 billion in India over the next two years as he began his first official visit amid tensions between arch foes India and Pakistan.

India rolled out the red carpet for the ambitious and inexperienced crown prince as it seeks diplomatic support against Pakistan following a militant attack in the disputed region of Kashmir.

The crown prince, whose country is facing frosty ties with Western countries after the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, was also given a lavish welcome this week in Pakistan where the two sides signed memoranda of understanding valued at about \$20 billion to help prop up Pakistan’s economy.

In a joint press appearance after talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the

crown prince said terrorism was a common concern and the Saudi regime was ready to share intelligence with India to tackle it.

The two countries will start a security dialogue at the level of national security advisors and set up a working group on counter-terrorism, said T.S. Tirumurti, who handles economic relations at India’s foreign ministry.

“Both leaders called on all countries to renounce the use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy,” Tirumurti told a press briefing.

India blames Pakistan for not doing enough to counter militant groups that operate from its soil including the one that claimed responsibility for the Kashmir car bombing last Thursday.

Pakistan denies any involvement in cross-border terrorism and has said it would retaliate against an Indian attack.

“We face similar challenges, chief among

them extremism and terrorism ... and we reaffirm to India that we are ready to work in the intelligence and political arenas to coordinate our efforts...” the crown prince said.

### Non-oil trade

On trade relations, the crown prince said “we expect the opportunities we are targeting in India in various fields to exceed \$100 billion in the coming two years”.

Sectors of interest included energy, infrastructure, agriculture and manufacturing, Tirumurti said, adding that Saudi Arabia’s focus was on expanding non-oil trade with India.

Giant petroleum and natural gas company Saudi Aramco said it was in talks with India’s Reliance Industries Ltd for possible investments and was seeking other opportunities.

Both India and Pakistan had expected a scaling up of investments on the crown prince’s first tour of the region since the

storm over the murder of Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist and critic of the Saudi government, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October.

The killing has strained Saudi Arabia’s ties with the West and battered the prince’s image abroad. He is also visiting China on this trip.

The European Commission has added Saudi Arabia to an European Union draft list of countries that pose a threat to the bloc because of lax controls against terrorism financing and money laundering, sources told Reuters last month.

Modi has sought to use India’s fast-growing economy to attract more investment from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic nations since he took office.

The two countries signed agreements on investment in infrastructure, housing sector and tourism.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Israel approves construction over 4,000 new settler units in al-Quds

Israeli officials have approved plans for the construction of thousands of new housing units in the occupied West Bank irrespective of the international outcry against Tel Aviv’s land expropriation and settlement expansion policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Israeli Hebrew-language daily newspaper Israel Hayom reported on Tuesday that the authorities have given the green light for 4,416 units to be built in al-Quds (Jerusalem), adding that 23,576 square meters of land would be expropriated for business projects and 4,253 for other purposes.

The report further noted that 464 settler units will be constructed in Gilo settlement, 180 units in Kiryat HaYovel, and 375 others in Kiryat Menahem settlement.

Earlier this month, Ir Amim, an Israeli NGO opposing Israel’s settlement expansion activities, published a new map, describing an “accelerated, intensifying chain of new facts on the ground in the most historically contested and politically sensitive part of Jerusalem [al-Quds]: the Old City and adjacent ring of Palestinian neighborhoods.”

The map pointed to a mounting number of Israeli regime-sponsored settlement campaigns inside Palestinian neighborhoods, as well as “settler-initiated evictions of Palestinians, takeovers of their homes, and the expansion of settler compounds,” in addition the use of “touristic settlement sites” as “key points along a ring of tightening Israeli control.”

Ir Amim said tourism and supposed archaeology projects “assume a central role in Israeli settlement policy.”

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

The United Nations Security Council has condemned Israel’s settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

Less than a month before the U.S. President Donald Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council in December 2016 adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement

activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem” al-Quds.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state with East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel’s continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

Trump backtracked on Washington’s support for a “two-state solution” in 2017, saying he would support any solution favored by both sides.

“Looking at two-state or one-state, I like the one that both parties like. I’m very happy with the one both parties like. I can live with either one,” the U.S. president said during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington on February 15, 2017.

(Source: Press TV)



## Federer to play on clay at Madrid Open

Roger Federer's comeback on clay will feature a return to the Madrid Open for the first time since 2015, it was confirmed on Wednesday. For the last two years, the 37-year-old has chosen to skip the clay-court season completely to preserve energy for tournaments on his preferred surfaces of grass and hard.

But Federer indicated in January that he would play at the French Open this year while the Madrid Open has announced he will be among those competing at the Caja Magica too.

"Federer is one of the best players in history, it's no secret," said Feliciano Lopez, the Madrid Open's tournament director.

"We are happy because his return to Madrid is a gift for the tournament but above all for the fans, because they will be able to see a player that is unique and unparalleled."

Federer has won the Madrid Open three times, in 2006, 2009 and 2012, but his last appearance was in 2015, when he lost his opening match to Nick Kyrgios.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion was beaten in the fourth round at the Australian Open in January, one year after he had claimed his last major title there.

Clay has been Federer's least favourite surface. He has won the French Open only once and not gone past the quarter-finals in Paris since 2012. "I am in a moment where I want to have fun," Federer said, when asked last month about returning to Roland Garros. "It's a personal desire. I feel like I don't need to take a big break again."

(Source: AFP)

## Khedira sidelined for over a month with irregular heartbeat - reports



Juventus midfielder Sami Khedira could be out of action for over a month while he undergoes treatment after being diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat, according to reports in Italy on Wednesday.

Former World Cup winner Khedira was ruled out of Wednesday's Champions League tie at Atletico Madrid because of atrial arrhythmia.

The condition causes an irregular and fast heart rate and can result in dizziness, shortness of breath and tiredness.

Khedira had suddenly felt his heart beat faster in training on Tuesday and immediately went for treatment.

"Sami Khedira is out of the squad, he stayed in Turin to undergo further tests," said coach Massimiliano Allegri. "He's an important player for us with good international experience."

The 31-year-old could be sidelines for between 30 to 40 days, according to sports dailies Gazzetta and Corriere Dello Sport.

Arsenal defender Stephan Lichtsteiner suffered from the same condition when playing for Juventus at the end of 2015 and was out for a month before returning to action.

Khedira has been struggling with a variety of health issues this season, and has played just nine league games and 15 matches in total.

He suffered a thigh injury in September which ruled him out for five weeks and then hurt his ankle on his return in November.

(Source: Mirror)

## Man City owners team with robot-makers to buy Chinese club

Manchester City's owners City Football Group announced the purchase of Chinese third-tier club Sichuan Jiuniu on Wednesday -- in partnership with a Chinese investment fund and a company that makes robots.

The rare swoop for a Chinese team, after Sheffield United bought Chengdu Five Bulls in 2006, expands CFG's portfolio to seven clubs and follows the rapid growth of Chinese football in recent years.

Few details were revealed about the deal, which partners Abu Dhabi-owned CFG with China Sports Capital and UBTECH, a Chinese artificial intelligence and humanoid robotic company.

Investment fund China Sports Capital was jointly established by Sequoia China and Chinese state-linked CMC, which bought a 13 percent stake in CFG in 2015.

CFG also owns New York City and Melbourne City football clubs, but chief executive Ferran Soriano said it had been a long-held "dream" to become part of China's growing football scene.

"We want to be part of the initiative... even just a small part," he told a press conference in Chengdu.

"We will be patient. We are here for the long-term."

CFG is also the owner of Club Atletico Torque in Uruguay, and has stakes in La Liga outfit Girona FC and Yokohama F. Marinos in Japan's J-League.

Sichuan Jiuniu, its latest addition, are based in the western Chinese metropolis of Chengdu, and play their home games at the Chengdu Longquanyi Football Stadium.

Chinese football was buoyed by an influx of funds and foreign stars after President Xi Jinping, who visited Manchester City in 2015, outlined ambitions to turn the world's most populous nation into a global soccer power.

(Source: France24)

# Sala tragedy sparks unsavory legal wrangle

The tragedy of the plane crash that killed Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala has now entered an ugly aftermath as Premier League club Cardiff City and French side Nantes threaten to go to court over his £15 million (\$19 million) transfer fee.

Sala, who was buried at the age of 28 in the Argentine village of Progreso on Saturday, never played a game for Cardiff. The plane carrying the striker and pilot David Ibbotson came down in the English Channel en route to the Welsh capital on January 21, two days after he completed his transfer from Nantes.

Cardiff have so far refused to pay the first instalment of the club record fee, believed to be £5 million, as they await the results of an Air Accidents Investigations Bureau (AAIB) investigation into the causes of the crash.

The Telegraph reported on Sunday that Cardiff believe that if the AAIB find Ibbotson did not hold the necessary license to carry passengers on a commercial basis, then a negligence claim could be launched against whoever arranged the flight.

That would point the finger at agents Willie and Mark McKay, who were hired by Nantes to secure the transfer.

Willie McKay has accused Cardiff of "trying to throw me under the bus" in an attempt to avoid paying the transfer fee.

Speaking to The Times, Willie McKay said his son Mark arranged the fateful flight carrying Sala and Ibbotson, just as he had organized several flights for brokers of the deal in the weeks previously, including Cardiff manager Neil Warnock.

Willie McKay also rejected a statement



from Cardiff chairman Mehmet Dalman that the club were unaware of who made Sala's flight arrangements.

In his published timeline of events, Willie McKay said: "Emiliano was due to be met by the Cardiff City player liaison officer who was waiting for him to arrive at the Signature Flight Support building at Cardiff Airport on Monday evening (January 21). Cardiff City knew of the flight and who organized the flight."

Cardiff have also reportedly questioned Willie McKay's practice of trying to inflate

transfer fees by fabricating interest in players from clubs.

"It was us who put in the media about other clubs wanting you - West Ham, Everton etc - to create an interest on you that's what we do," Willie McKay wrote in a letter to Sala that has now been made public.

However, that is a common, if dubious, practice among football agents and Cardiff's case to use that as a reason for avoiding any part of the transfer fee is unlikely to be met with favor should the case proceed to court.

Nantes believe the McKays' work for them

ended when Sala's move was transfer was completed, therefore absolving them of any responsibility over the arrangements of the flight.

■ **What happens next?**

The Guardian reported on Wednesday that Nantes will take their case to FIFA this week if the £5 million instalment is not paid.

"FIFA has not been contacted on this matter," world football's governing body said when contacted by AFP.

A resolution via FIFA's players' status committee or even the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) is likely unless Cardiff relent on their current stance.

"There are, in my opinion, two possible solutions," sports lawyer Gianpaolo Monteneri, who was head of FIFA's Players' Status Department from 1997-2005, told the Press Association.

"The first one is that the parties have established to go to FIFA and, in such a case, the matter is submitted to the players' status committee in the first instance, with the possibility of an appeal to CAS.

"But it is also possible that the parties have decided to skip FIFA and go direct to CAS."

Should Cardiff be found to have failed to comply with their contractual obligations without due cause, a range of sanctions are on offer to FIFA, according to Monteneri.

"If certain deadlines, which are mentioned in the transfer contract, are not met then these may trigger consequences for the club in question.

"This can be from an admonishment right up to a withdrawal of league points."

(Source: AFP)

## Hamilton shrugs off Ferrari's early testing pace



Lewis Hamilton shrugged off Ferrari's testing pace on Wednesday while recognising that he and Mercedes faced their toughest challenge yet as they seek to stretch their Formula One domination into a sixth successive season.

Ferrari, overall runners-up last year, have led the timesheets for the first two days of testing at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya and have also done plenty of laps with their new SF90 car.

Sebastian Vettel, the four times champion who is partnered by young Monegasque Charles Leclerc this year, said on Monday his Ferrari had been "close to perfection".

Mercedes, winners of both titles for the past five years, have also been pounding out the mileage without setting any eye-catching times.

"They (Ferrari) have been looking great," Hamilton, who will be chasing his sixth title, told reporters. "For us it's been just digging deep, trying to understand the car. Pretty much the same as the beginning of every year.

"The Ferraris always look strong, particularly in the last few years they look very strong right at the beginning so it's

to be expected."

Ferrari won the first two races of last year with a car that seemed quicker than the Mercedes but the champions came back strongly and Hamilton ended the year with 11 wins to Vettel's tally of five.

Last year Ferrari -- who won six successive constructors' titles between 1999 and 2004 -- were fastest in testing but it was still Hamilton who put his Mercedes on pole position at the first race in Melbourne with a circuit record time.

"At the moment I don't really hold any worry about anything," said the 34-year-old Briton, who conceded that Ferrari did appear to have produced a better package than last season.

"I just try to focus on our job. I don't know what everyone's doing, there's different fuel loads. I've been in this business a long time so I know how it goes over the first week and into the second.

"It's not a time where we need to be focusing on others. We let everyone else do their thing and really try to focus on digging deep, making sure our processes are better than ever before, analysing the data better than ever before."

(Source: Reuters)

## Ghosts of '81 defeat haunt Bayern boss after Anfield draw



Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has warned Bayern Munich not to let history repeat itself against Liverpool in their home Champions League last 16, second leg after a goalless draw at Anfield.

Bayern earned the draw in a nervy first leg on Merseyside to put the German giants in a good position for the return at their Allianz Arena on March 13.

"We have opened the door for the second leg a bit, but I warn against going into the return leg with too much euphoria - it's not a result that is safe," Rummenigge, Bayern's chairman, warned.

The 63-year-old speaks from experience having been in an identical situation before. He was part of the same Munich team as current president Uli Hoeness that lost the semi-final of the 1981 European Cup to Liverpool.

In 1981, Bayern also earned a goalless draw at Anfield and Rummenigge scored in a 1-1 draw in the return leg, but an away goal by Ray Kennedy at Munich's Olympic Stadium put Liverpool through.

"We were eliminated after a 1-1 draw in Munich, so we must not make the same mistake my team made. We have to play

very well in the second game," said Rummenigge.

Bayern put in a solid defensive display on Merseyside on Tuesday to frustrate a Liverpool side fresh after a 10-day break, but head coach Niko Kovac also warned they must finish the job in Munich.

"Everyone was there for the other and you can see that if we have a structure in our game, it's hard to score against us," said Kovac.

"That's the approach, but there was still room for improvement.

"We have reached our goal and earned a draw, now we have to see that we finish the job at home."

Centre-back Mats Hummels said Bayern's game plan was focused on frustrating Liverpool's forward trio of Mo Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane.

"It was primarily about taking out the strengths of the opponent and we succeeded," said Hummels.

"The goal was to slow down Liverpool's three forwards.

"We now have a situation where we can progress with a home win and no team is ever happy to come to Munich."

(Source: AFP)

## Concern for misfiring Suarez as goals dry up for Barcelona

The image of a frustrated Lionel Messi with his hands on his hips in Barcelona's 0-0 Champions League draw in Lyon on Tuesday may reverberate the most around the world, but it is Luis Suarez's form in front of goal that is causing most concern in Catalonia.

Suarez laboured throughout much of the Champions League last 16, first leg in France, although he came as close as anyone to scoring for Barcelona when he fired just wide from a Jordi Alba cutback 20 minutes from time.

Barca's recent struggles away from home at the business end of the Champions League go on -- it is now six matches without an away win in the knockout rounds, with just one goal scored in that time, since beating Arsenal 2-0 three years ago.

Suarez, meanwhile, has now gone 16 away matches without scoring in the competition since a draw at Roma in the group stage in 2015. That adds up to more than 24 hours in total.

"I'd be worried if he were not creating chances, but he has always had chances, he creates them for his teammates, and he is a constant headache for opponents," said coach Ernesto Valverde in defence of the 32-year-old.

Suarez has 16 goals in all competitions this season, but only one in his team's last eight matches.

"Maybe he is saving them for the games to come," added Valverde.

The performance has added to the worries back in Catalonia, with Barcelona "unable to translate their overwhelming dominance into a goal", as the daily Sport put it on Wednesday.

They had 24 attempts at goal, but just five were on target.



"Nobody had the punch, precision, sharpness or clarity to kill the game," said El Pais, with Barcelona "victims of a negative run, all blinded, including the infallible Messi. It's a mystery".

■ **Fatigue**

It is not just their away form in Europe that is an issue -- Valverde's team have now won just one of their last five matches, drawing the other four.

They have scored just once in their last three outings, and that was a Messi penalty against Valladolid last weekend.

While drawing against a Lyon side deprived of their World Cup-winning captain Nabil Fekir due to suspension could be seen as a missed opportunity, the result also needs to be put into context.

Lyon had already taken four points from Manchester City in the group stage and recently beat Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1. They have not lost in Europe this season.

Barcelona should still finish the job in the return at the Camp Nou on March 13. After all, of their last 29 home matches in the competition, they have won 26 and drawn three, losing none.

Messi -- who made his 130th Champions League appearance on Tuesday, equalling Andres Iniesta's tally of games in the competition -- has not been at his majestic best in the last couple of weeks, but he has scored 30 goals this season.

■ **Ageing side**

It would be wrong to question him, but fatigue has to be a worry for the Argentine and his team.

Tuesday's game was Barca's 13th in 2019 in all competitions, and this is an ageing side.

While a young Lyon team featured nine players aged between 20 and 25, Barcelona fielded five players in their 30s at the Groupama Stadium.

All of them -- Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets, Ivan Rakitic, Messi and Suarez -- are vital, and Valverde needs them at their best in the weeks ahead.

There are two trips to Real Madrid to come in the next 10 days, one in the Copa del Rey and one in La Liga.

An eighth league title in 11 seasons seems likely, but there is work to be done if they are to be the side to end Madrid's recent dominance in the Champions League, starting up front.

(Source: Eurosport)



# Team Melli one win away from 2019 FIBA World Cup

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Despite not getting the chance to play for Hamed Haddadi, Samad Nikkhah Bahrami and Arsalan Kazemi, Iran national basketball team remain hopeful that they will qualify for the 2019 FIBA World Cup in China with a home win against Japan.

Team Melli will meet Japan and Australia at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers on Thursday and Sunday in Tehran's Azadi Hall, respectively.

Iran are at solo second spot in Group F with seven wins against three losses and a win against Japan will guarantee them a place at next year's showpiece event in China.

Australia, the group's top team, have already booked their tickets to China, and Iran are aiming to follow suit.

If Iran win at least one game, they'll finish with eight wins and four losses, which will

be good enough to get them through to the World Cup.

If Iran lose both of their sixth window games, however, it could potentially place them in a three-way tie with Japan and the Philippines if all of them finish at seven wins and five losses. In that unlikely scenario, there's still a slight chance Iran will slip out of the World Cup race.

"The team is in a good place," Japan's Argentinian coach Julio Lamas said in the lead-up to the game. "It is indeed going to be the most important game. We've come this far together, and as we are almost to the World Cup. We want to be well prepared and perform our best so there will be no regrets."

The last time the teams met, Japan defeated Iran 70-56 in Tokyo, but this time, the task is far more daunting.



## Iran name squad for World Cup qualifiers against Japan, Australia

**TEHRAN** — Iran national basketball team coach Mehran Shahintab has named his 12-man team for two crucial matches against Japan and Australia in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers. Team Melli will host Japan on Thursday in Tehran's Azadi Hall and face Australia three days later at the same hall.

Hamed Haddadi, Samad Nikkhah Bahrami and Arsalan Kazemi are big absentees of the list.

Iran are at solo second spot in Group F with seven wins against three losses and a win against Japan will guarantee them a place at next year's showpiece event in China.

Australia, the group's top team, have already booked their tickets to China, and Iran are aiming to follow suit.

If Iran win at least one game, they'll finish with eight wins and four losses, which will be good enough to get them through to the World Cup.

12-man Iran pool for the final Asian Qualifiers window

Rouzbah Arghavan, Aren Davoudi, Mohammad Hassanzadeh, Hamed Hosseinzadeh, Mohammad Jamshidi, Sajjad Mashayekhi, Meisam Mirzaei, Navid Niktash, Keyvan Riaei, Michael Rostampour, Behnam Yakhchali, Arman Zangeneh

## Puskas winner and Malaysia cult hero left without a club

2016 proved to be a proud year for Southeast Asia. One of their very own, Malaysia's Faiz Subri, had beaten the likes of Lionel Messi, Neymar, and Saul Niguez for the renowned FIFA Puskas Award, implying that he scored the 'best' goal in the past year.

However, what should have kick-started his career has now been left as a meagre milestone, as Faiz finds himself without a club for the time being.

AS reported by New Straits Times, Faiz Subri's contract with his former club Penang FA ended last November. The club called the midfielder back for a selection trial which he refused, leaving him with no takers.

According to NST sports, the Puskas winner has now returned to his hometown Jitra, Kedah, where he wishes



to start his own business.

The news website also revealed that the player himself refused to comment on his current predicament. Although one of his close friends revealed what brought on this situation.

"The friend, who preferred not to be named, said when Faiz's contract ended in November last year, the Penang FA management called for a selection trial but he declined. "Faiz also did not want to move to other teams as it would mean he has to shift his family of three small children, which he felt would be inconvenient," read the statement.

Meanwhile, according to Faiz's friend, the renowned star hasn't given up on his football dream yet and hopes to secure a club during the Summer transfer window.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Al Ain 2019: Alaryani on target

The UAE's Paralympic medalist and title favorite Abdullah Sultan Alaryani heaved a sigh of relief as he finally picked up his first gold medal at the Al Ain 2019 World Shooting Para Sport World Cup in UAE on Tuesday (19 February).

The gold in the R7 (men's 50m rifle 3 positions SH1) was also his first medal at Al Ain 2019 after competing in three events. And the way he clinched it was all the more satisfying for the local star as he led from the start en route to taking the title in front of his home crowd.

Alaryani, who went into Al Ain off the back of a triple gold medal-win at the Sharjah 2019 IWAS World Games, maintained a steady lead throughout to stay ahead of world champion duo Radoslav Malenovsky of Slovakia (452.7 pts) and South Korea's Jinho Park (442.1 pts).

"It was a strong competition. All the shooters were shooting good scores. It's satisfying

to finish on top at [my] home event. This medal is going to inspire me to work harder and get ready for Tokyo 2020. My target from here on is to improve my skills and get better result than before," said Alaryani, whose qualification scores also helped UAE take the Team gold.

■ **Golden start for Javanmardi**

One of Iran's biggest Paralympic stars Sareh Javanmardi started her campaign at Al Ain 2019 in style, clinching the P2 (mixed 10m air pistol SH1) gold.

Javanmardi overcame a strong challenge from her closest competitors Iryna Liakhu from Ukraine and Hungary's Krisztina David who stayed neck and neck before both faltered. Italian Nadia Fario put up a late fight but it wasn't enough as the Iranian star kept her cool to finish on 232.6 points.

Liakhu, the World Championships silver medalist, finished second on 229 points, much ahead of Fario (209.7 pts).

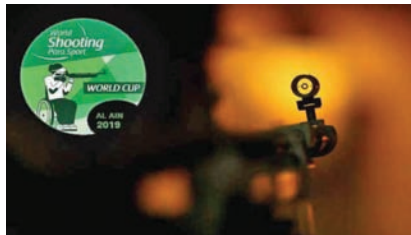
An excited Javanmardi later said: "I am very happy to win this gold as this will set the tone for the year where we have the World Championships in Sydney. I am also content to help Iran win another gold in the team event.

"It was a good competition as most of the finalists will be going for the Tokyo 2020 and Worlds. I am looking forward to the season," she added.

■ **Thrilling final**

The day's highlight was the thrilling R2 (women's 10m air rifle standing SH1) final where Turkey's Cagla Atakal came from behind to take the gold. Atakal, a Worlds silver medalist, surprised a star-studded field of Paralympic medalists including China's Zhang Cuiping and Yan Yaping.

Lying in the sixth position after the first competition stage, Atakal gradually made the surge with several 10 scores, before ending with impressive scores of 10.5 and



10.6. She finished just 0.2 points ahead of Zhang. Iran's Roghaye Shojaei was third with 225.6 points.

"It was a tough final as everyone was trying hard. And the scores were very close. But being a mother, I have developed the characteristic of staying patient. And this helped; I was able to keep my calm during the tense moments," said Atakal, who also plays wheelchair basketball at a national level.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## USA Gymnastics hires NBA exec Li Li Leung as its new CEO

USA Gymnastics named NBA executive Li Li Leung as president and CEO of the embattled program amid calls for decertification in the wake of former team doctor Larry Nassar's conviction for molesting hundreds of athletes.

A former University of Michigan gymnast, Leung is the fourth person to hold the position of president and CEO in the last two years. Steve Penny resigned under pressure in March 2017 and has since been arrested and charged with tampering with evidence in the Nassar case.

His replacement, Kerry Perry, lasted less than a year when she stepped down under heavy scrutiny from the USOC last September. Perry was criticized for naming longtime coach Mary Lee Tracy as the organization's elite development coordinator. Tracy had publicly supported Nassar as recently as 2016.

The organization then turned to former U.S. Rep. Mary Bono on an interim basis last October, but she resigned after just four days, saying she felt her affiliation with the embattled organization would be a 'liability' after a social



media post by Bono criticizing Nike and former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick drew widespread scrutiny within the gymnastics community.

Leung served as vice president of global partnerships for the NBA. She arrives as USA Gymnastics attempts to fend off decertification from the United States Olympic Committee.

"I am honored to be the next CEO of USA Gymnastics and to lead an organization that plays an important role in a sport that I care deeply about and had so much positive influence on my life," Leung said in a statement. "Like everyone, I was upset and angry to learn about the abuse and the institutions that let the athletes down. I admire the courage and strength of the survivors, and I will make it a priority to see that their claims are resolved.

"I look forward to collaborating with the entire gymnastics community to create further change going forward, which requires that we implement important initiatives to strengthen athlete health and safety and build a clear and inclusive plan for the future. For me, this is much more than a job: it is a personal calling, for which I stand ready to answer."

(Source: Daily Mail)

## Alireza Jahanbakhsh needs time: coach

Brighton coach Chris Hughton is confident the club's record signing, Alireza Jahanbakhsh, will benefit from consistent playing time.

The £17 million Iran international has made two appearances for the Seagulls since returning from Asian Cup duty.

"I think in and out he showed some really good qualities," Hughton.

"He is back with us now and I think what he needs is a sustained period of being with us and training with us, with no interruptions, and he will be better for that."

## Iraj Arab appointed Persepolis general manager

**Tasnim** — Iraj Arab has been officially appointed as general manager of Iran's Persepolis football club.

Arab, who was previously working as deputy chief of the club's administrative and financial affairs, was named as acting general manager of Persepolis in December and he has been chosen as the Club GM on Wednesday.

Arab replaced Hamid Reza Garshasbi in the football club.

Garshasbi left his post due to a law barring the employment of retirees in government, state or public institutions which use state funds or facilities.

Under management of Garshasbi, Persepolis became runners-up at the 2018 AFC Champions League and won the Iran Professional League title.

## 17 countries ready to participate in Karoon Cup chess tournament

**IRNA** — Chess players from well-known 17 countries have announced their readiness to take part the 6th International Karoon Cup Chess Competition in Ahvaz.

Chief of Chess Board of Khuzestan Abdulmir Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday that the international chess competition will be held in Ahvaz for seven days started from February 2.

He added that more than 250 chess players (international masters and Grandmasters) from countries of India, Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, France, Ireland, Austria, Nepal, Syria, Iraq, Portugal, Botswana, England, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Denmark and Iran compete with each other.

Khatibzadeh went on to say, "About 30 international masters, Grandmasters and masters of FIDE from our country announced their readiness."

The Chief of Chess Board of Khuzestan referred to the three international tables and said, "Given the presence of the world's top chess players in the competition, it is expected that the tournament will be held at a very good level, which will be beneficial for chess in Khuzestan."

## Foolad sign Japanese midfielder Takafumi Akahoshi

**IRNA** — Iranian football club Foolad completed the signing of Japanese midfielder Takafumi Akahoshi on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old player has joined the Ahvaz-based football club until the end of the season.

Akahoshi has most recently played at Thailand football club Suphanburi. Foolad have earned three wins and one draw in four matches under guidance of newly-appointed coach Afshin Ghotbi.

They are going to earn an AFC Champions League berth for the next season.

Foolad sit sixth in Iran Professional League, 13 points behind leaders Sepahan.

## A troublesome foreigners for Tractor Sazi



**PLDC** — The Iran international players have performed well for Tractor Sazi but their foreign players except Japanese midfielder Yukiya Sugita have not been satisfying so far.

Ashkan Dejagah, Masoud Shojaei and Ehsan Haji Safi, Iran national team captains, have played key roles in Tractor Sazi's success in the current season.

Tractor Sazi are a favorite to win their first ever title in Iran Professional League but the Tabriz-based football team have faced problem with foreigners such as Kevin Constant.

The former AC Milan midfielder joined Iranian football club Tractor Sazi in early January but has yet to play for the team.

Tractor Sazi started the IPL season with Scottish Lee Erwin, Irish Anthony Stokes, Englishman Harry Lee Forrester and Sugita, under guidance of John Toshack, however the Welshman was sacked following poor results.

Afterward, Forrester joined another Tabriz-based football team Machine Sazi. Then, Erwin and Stokes left Tractor Sazi, however the Irish striker returned to Iran after solving his personal problems.

In the second half of the season, Belgium coach Georges Leekens has faced a problem since Constant is not in-form.

Maybe it's better for Tractor Sazi to study more for signing a new player.



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He who does not read good deeds in his heart, and does not consider ugly deeds bad, ruins his life and moves towards destruction.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Cinematheque of North Macedonia hosts festival of Iranian films

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A festival of Iranian films opened at the Cinematheque of Macedonia in the North Macedonian capital of Skopje on Tuesday.

Six movies by Iranian filmmakers are scheduled to be screened during the festival, which has been organized by Iran's cultural office in Skopje to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.



A poster for a festival of Iranian films underway at the Cinematheque of Macedonia in Skopje.

"Children of Heaven" by Majid Majidi, "Café Transit" by Kam-buzia Partovi and "Where Are My Shoes" by Kiumars Purahmad are among the films.

The lineup also includes "Don't Be Tired" co-directed by Afshin Hashemi and Mohsen Qarai, "Don't Be Embarrassed" by Reza Maqsoodi and "Where Is the Friend's Home" by Abbas Kiarostami. The festival will continue until Saturday.

## Istanbul center displays photos of Islamic Revolution

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of photos by veteran Iranian photographers opened at the Cennet Kultur Merkezi in Istanbul on Wednesday to mark the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Entitled "Iran 1979-2019", the collection contains the critical moments of the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic Center of Moscow played host to this exhibition last week.

The exhibit has been organized by the Iran Photographers Center.

## "Fault Lines" appears in Iranian bookstores

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Canadian writer Nancy Huston's 2006 novel "Fault Lines" has recently been published in Persian by Nimaj Publications in Tehran.



Front cover of the Persian version of Canadian novelist Nancy Huston's "Fault Lines".

Translated by Fariba Majidi, the book tells the story of the highly gifted six-year-old Sol, who has the same birthmark that his father, grandmother and great-grandmother had before him.

Narrated by children in each generation of the family, "Fault Lines" traces their history back through the years from California to New York, from Haifa to Toronto and Munich.

The book won the Femina Prize, a French literary award, as well as the Prix Goncourt: "the Polish choice" and the Prix France Televisions.

## 3 music industry elites receive lifetime honors at Fajr festival

**I →** In his short speech, the director of the festival, Shahin Farhat, spoke of his old wish that finally came true.

"I have been cooperating with the Fajr organizers since 1985 and have witnessed various changes, but this year works by Iranian musicians were performed both by Iranian and international ensembles, which was an old wish of mine," he said.

The closing night of the non-competitive event also featured performances by ensembles Roshan, Khonyagaran-e Mehr and Yagligi.

# Top artists of post-revolution Iranian theater honored

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The organizers of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival honored ten top artists of the post-revolution Iranian theater during a ceremony held at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Tuesday.

Directors Azam Borujerdi, Saeid Esmaeili, Hossein Alambakhsh and Mahmud Farhang were among the honorees.

Actor Maryam Motaref, Neda Sabeti and Karim Akbari Mobarakeh, scholar Nasrollah Qaderi, producer Amir-Hossein Shafiei and writer Morteza Shahkaram were also honored.



Director Azam Borujerdi (L) receives her award from the organizers of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival at Tehran's City Theater Complex on February 19, 2019.

Moreover, "40 Years of Theater", a book that reviews the post-revolution Iranian theater, was unveiled during the ceremony.

Published by Iran's Dramatic Arts Center, the book

has been compiled by Iranian theater experts Manuchehr Akbarlu and Ali Izadi.

The Fajr International Theater Festival will come to an end on Saturday.

## IIDCYA to honor nominees for 2019 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) plans to honor Iran's nominees for the 2019 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, a prestigious Swedish honor to promote children's and youths' literature in the world.

The nominees are the literati Jamshid Khanian, Ali-Asghar Seyyedabadi, Farhad Hassanzadeh and Hushang Moradi Kermani.

The honoring ceremonies will be held in four different sessions beginning on February 24 and running for four days.

Khanian is a researcher and a playwright. Among his credits are "A Half Day in the Interrogation Room" and "Compass". He is also the author of several stories, including "Money" and "Where is My Joseph", which have been translated into English, Russian and Polish.



This combination photo shows Iran's nominees for the 2019 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Ali-Asghar Seyyedabadi, Farhad Hassanzadeh, Jamshid Khanian and Hushang Moradi Kermani.

Seyyedabadi is a researcher and writer. His credits include "Whom Did Aunt Suska Marry?", "The Wedding of Bijan and Manijeh" and "Rainbow in My Pocket".

Hassanzadeh is the author of over 80 books, including "The Backyard" and "Watermelon with Love".

Moradi Kermani, whose works also appeal to adults, is the author of numerous bestsellers such as "You're No Stranger Here", "The Water Urn" and "A Sweet Jam".

Iran's nominations for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award are selected every year by the IIDCYA, the Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Youth, and the Children's Book Council of Iran.

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award was established in 2002 by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs to commemorate writer Astrid Lindgren.

## IED to observe Italian Design Day in Tehran

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The IED - Istituto Europeo di Design located in Milan plans to celebrate Italian Design Day in Tehran on March 3 by organizing a seminar on the smart city and art.

The Seminar of Smart City, Design, Art and Fashion of the Future will be held at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran (UT), the IED has announced.

IED art director Giovanni Ottonello will deliver a speech during the seminar organized in collaboration with Soreh University and UT's Center of Excellence in Architectural Technology.

"Recent data state that by 2050 the global population living in urban areas will double and more than 70%

of the inhabitants of our planet will live in a city," the IED wrote in a statement.

"These alarming data make us think about broader and more complex issues connected with migratory flows, the work system, hygiene, means of transport, communication and integration. The next challenge will surely be played in finding a balance and management of these processes.

"The city therefore becomes a place of aggregation able to sustain and guarantee quality of life and relationship with the surrounding environment. Our era will be marked by a new phrase: the smart city. Behind it are hidden concepts that involve technology, research and new strategies."

## "Green Book" enjoys biggest Oscar nominations bounce at box office

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Oscar-nominated dramedy "Green Book" has turned Hollywood awards race publicity into more box-office gold than each of the seven other films in the best-picture contest.

The road-trip movie about race relations in the segregated U.S. South of the 1960s had collected more than \$127.1 million at global box offices as of Monday, according to estimates released on Tuesday by website Box Office Mojo.

Nearly two-thirds of that sum - \$82 million - came after Oscar nominations were announced on Jan. 22.

That topped the \$55.8 million boost for 21st Century Fox Inc's rock biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody." The story of late Queen frontman Freddie Mercury has grabbed a much larger total of \$854.3 million, three-fourths of it outside the United States and Canada.

Movie studios execute carefully crafted release strategies and marketing campaigns leading up to the Oscars, hoping the prestige of the nominations will draw audiences to theaters.

Comcast Corp's Universal Pictures, for example, debuted "Green Book" in about 1,000 domestic theaters in November. That number had been slashed nearly in half just ahead of the announcement of this year's Oscar contenders.

After the movie landed five Oscar nominations, Universal expanded the number of locations playing "Green Book" to more than 2,600 by early February.

Backers of "Green Book" also plowed \$1.4 million into national television ads after the nominations through Monday, according to data measurement firm iSpot.

That came in second among best-picture nominees to the \$2.2 million to advertise



Actor Mahershala Ali talks during a news conference to discuss the movie "Green Book" at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada September 12, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

"Vice", a political satire from Annapurna Pictures.

The highest-grossing movie among the eight best-picture nominees is "Black Panther" from Walt Disney Co's Marvel Studios. "Black Panther" was 2018's second-highest grossing movie worldwide with \$1.3 billion in global ticket sales. It left theaters long before Oscars season.

It is unclear how much the 10 nominations for Netflix Inc's "Roma", a foreign-language film about a Mexican housekeeper, boosted its audience. Netflix has declined to release ticket sales data for "Roma", which has been playing in a more limited range of theaters since November and is currently in 74 U.S. locations.

Major U.S. theater chains refuse to show Netflix movies because the company refuses to wait the traditional three months before making its films available outside of theaters. "Roma" was released on Netflix's streaming service in December.

The best-picture winner will be announced at the Academy Awards ceremony on Sunday.

## Want to win an Oscar? Spend millions on the film campaign trail

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Making an unforgettable movie is not the only requirement to win the prestigious best picture Oscar. Add millions of dollars for TV and digital ads, plus actors' travel, hair and makeup for events to promote their work on the busy film campaign trail.

If the race is close, as it is heading into Sunday's awards ceremony, studios must dig deeper to gain an edge with the roughly 8,000 voters in the Academy for Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

Netflix Inc and AT&T Inc's Warner Bros. are among the distributors opening their checkbooks to try to land the most-coveted golden statuette.

"You have to spend money," said Matthew Belloni, editorial director at The Hollywood Reporter. "You have to shake hands. You have to have a message for your movie."

"It's about working the people out there and getting the academy to know you and to believe in your film," he added.

For the eventual winner, the investment will pay off. A best picture trophy brings in extra box office dollars, plus cachet to help attract A-listers for future projects.

So from December through late February, actors, directors, producers and writers attend a heavy schedule of lunches, screenings, cocktail receptions and panel discussions, crisscrossing the country to get in front of voters in the industry hubs of New York and Los Angeles.

Aside from the movie's stars, studios recruit A-list fans to host events, such as a "Roma" screening with Angelina Jolie, part of Netflix's push to secure the first best picture award for a streaming service.

The "Roma" publicity campaign cost roughly \$25 million, according to estimates from Hollywood publication Variety. The tab for Warner Bros.' "A Star is Born" was

**ITALIAN DESIGN DAY 2019 DESIGN AND CITY OF THE FUTURE**

**SMART CITY, DESIGN, ART AND FASHION OF THE FUTURE**  
by Giovanni Ottonello  
Art Director, IED - Istituto Europeo di Design

**CINQNAV MARZO THE 2ND 2019**

A poster for the Seminar of Smart City, Design, Art and Fashion of the Future.



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)

just under \$20 million, Variety said.

Much of that spending was dedicated to TV commercials, plus online ads on Hollywood-oriented news sites or Facebook. Some ads also are aimed at encouraging consumers to see the films.

Part of the Warner Bros. campaign involved covering a Sunset Strip billboard with a picture of Ally, Lady Gaga's "A Star is Born" character. The signage is a replica of one seen in the film and looks like a promotion for the fictional star.

Studios also are trying out new experiences, said Marc Becker, chief executive of The Tagent Agency, which works with Hollywood studios on marketing campaigns. Netflix, for example, put together an exhibition of "Roma" costumes and props. "They have always dined people," Becker said of awards campaigners, "but now they are immersing them even more in the world of the properties."

Other films in the best-picture race are "Green Book" and "BlacKkKlansman" from Comcast Corp, 21st Century Fox's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "The Favourite," Annapurna Pictures' "Vice," and Walt Disney Co's "Black Panther."