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Halbousi: Iraq stands by Iran in face of sanctions



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Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohamed al-Halbousi (L) at a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani in Tehran on Wednesday, March 6, 2019.

Iran, Azerbaijan confer about economic, energy ties

TEHRAN — In his visit to Tehran, Azerbaijan's Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev discussed expansion of economic and energy ties between Iran and his country with his Iranian counterpart Farhad Dejjasand and Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian.

In a meeting between Dejjasand and Mustafayev, which was held at the place of Iranian Ministry of Economy on Tuesday, the two sides agreed on

signing monetary, financial and banking contacts, and also expanding economic cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan, especially on the completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project.

The Iranian minister said that his country always considers development of relations with its neighbors, especially Azerbaijan Republic, as one of its strategic policies. **→4**

Some 1,200 stem cell transplants performed in Iran annually

TEHRAN — About 1,200 stem cell transplants are performed annually in Iran, the deputy health minister, Qasem Janbabaie, announced, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

He made the remarks during a ceremony held on the 30th anniversary of stem cell transplantation in Iran.

According to statistics, Iran ranks first in the region for performing stem cell

transplants, he said.

Janbabaie announced that over 10,000 patients have so far received stem cell transplants, 80 percent of them have been cured. Currently, 18 centers for stem cell transplantation are active in different parts of Iran offering services to patients.

Six centers are located in Tehran and 12 others are in other provinces, he said. **→9**

Barham Salih : Iraq will not be military base

Iraq will not be a military base for a foreign government to attack neighboring states, the country's President, Barham Salih, said on Wednesday.

The United States President Donald Trump infuriated Iraqi politicians last month by saying that an American presence was needed in Iraq to watch Iran. Washington has around

5,200 troops in Iraq at the request of Baghdad but their mission is to help combat the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit.

"Iraq has often served as a conflict arena for neighboring country's interests," Salih said during the sixth annual Sulaimani Forum. **→13**



PERSPECTIVE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Ambiguity in European economic leadership

Europe's economic situation remains uncertain! The European economic crisis and austerity policies remain in place. On the other hand, there is no sign that the EU is passing through the current situation. Two conservative /Social Democrats in Europe have not been able to effectively counteract the economic crisis over the last few years.

This same issue has led to anger by European citizens from traditional European parties. Subsequently, the trend of European citizens to nationalist and extremist parties has increased in recent years.

The events that have taken place in France in recent months have led to disappointment with the eurozone leaders over the current deadlock. The most important point is that Macron was planned to assume the title of the Europe's economic leader in the short term, and that was to be after succeeding in creating and sustaining economic reforms in France and the Eurozone.

Meanwhile, European citizens expressed their satisfaction with the election of Macron as French President in 2017. They thought that the French president, while challenging austerity policies, would strengthen the components of economic growth in the European Union. Moreover, EU leaders also hoped that Macron's success in pursuing economic reforms in France would be a solid step in pushing the entire Eurozone out of the economic crisis.

In other words, in the midst of anti-Euro and extremist and far-right movements in Europe, Macron was the last hope of European authorities to "manage the economic crisis" which was raising inside the Eurozone: the hope that has soon faded away!

The main dilemma in France is quite clear!"Failing to persuade French citizens" on his economic reforms, and Macron's miscalculations about the support of French citizens for himself, were among the important factors in shaping this process. Macron had to give concessions to protesters to prevent further tensions in France. **→7**

'Feast of charity' underway at Iranian schools

TEHRAN — 'Feast of charity', a campaign held prior to the Iranian New Year celebration each year helping families having hard time addressing their essential needs, is underway at schools across the country.

The charity event called Jashn-e Nikoukari (feast of charity) started on Wednesday in schools nationwide and will last until Friday.

Philanthropist all over the country attend a charity

event prior to Noruz (Iranian new year holidays starting March 21), to provide deprived families with cash handouts, commodities or clothes.

There are 4100 educational units in the capital city of Tehran and 1.180 million students who donated 20 billion rials (nearly \$476,000) last year, ISNA quoted deputy education minister Abdolrasoul Karimi as saying.

Some 75,000 centers collecting donations

have been established in the country in this regard thanks to the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation efforts, he added.

Such charity events would certainly encourage altruistic behaviors and generosity in the society. Particularly encouraging the youngsters to practice giving even though this brings no advantage to them would result in bringing up a caring generation.

'Quota system' fanning ethnic prejudice in Afghanistan

By Wahid Haidari

TEHRAN — In Afghanistan, the criterion for admission to institutions of higher education is tribe and region, rather than merit and qualification. The bitter reality dawned on students yet again this year.

Recently, Marshal Fahim National Defense University announced results of Kankor (entrance examination) for admission to higher educational institutes. Instead of being a source of joy and celebration for meritorious students, the results came as a rude shock.

The results were widely critiqued by the country's media and academia and it only revived an old debate: what is the criterion for admission in institutions of higher education in Afghanistan?

Asmatullah Alizada, who belongs to the 'minority' Hazara ethnic tribe in central Uruzgan province, amassed 312 marks out of 360, with an impressive percentage. But, much to his disappointment, it still wasn't enough to get him a place in university.

Another student from the same province,

belonging to the 'majority' Pashtun ethnic tribe, scored 124 marks out of 360 and he was declared successful by the country's examination authority.

The glaring discrepancies in the examination system, in which a meritorious student from a minority tribe is snubbed and a student from a majority tribe is given preference, has again put the spotlight on the phenomenon of tribal bias that has been institutionalized in the war-ravaged country. **→6**

Joint logistics companies key to boost North-South Corridor's capacity

By Morteza Rahmani

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iran's Roads and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami called on the member states of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to establish joint logistics companies to increase the Corridor's transportation capacity.

Addressing the opening session of the seventh Coordinating Council meeting for INSTC in Tehran on Monday, Eslami urged the need to

improve the Corridor's infrastructures saying, "formation of joint transportation and logistics companies among the member states will definitely help increase INSTC's transportation capacity."

The official expressed hope that the member states, as well as the countries situated along the strategic Corridor's routes, would gear up their political will to remove the hurdles in developing the mega project.

This could help bring economic prosperity to the regional governments and nations, he added.

Eslami further noted that Iran, for its part, is making every effort to accelerate the development of the projects related to the transportation network's capacity.

According to him, the strategic "Qazvin-Rasht" railway, which will be inaugurated this Wednesday, will reduce a significant share of cargo transportation costs between Asia and Europe. **→7**



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Leader plants trees on national tree planting day

TEHRAN — Concurrent with National Tree Planting Day, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei planted two fruit tree saplings on Wednesday.

"National Tree Planting Day heralds the beginning of the spring and reminds us the importance of protecting the vegetation," Leader said.

Disrespect for the rangelands, forests, and vegetation would incur losses on the country and the issue of vegetation conservation should find its place among the public, the Leader highlighted. **→12**



ARTICLE

Syed Zafar Mehdi
Journalist
from New Delhi

India's war-crazy TV media stoops to new low

Truth is the first casualty of war, said Greek playwright Aeschylus. The phrase has been interminably used to explain and contextualize the gross misrepresentation of facts in the event of war.

Last week, when warring neighbors India and Pakistan engaged in an aerial showdown, the chest-thumping, arm-chair jingoists in Indian news studios gleefully cheered them on.

India conducted a 'surgical strike' first, followed by Pakistan's strong retaliation, leading to heightened tensions and briefly bringing the two regional heavyweights to the brink of full-fledged war.

The airstrike was conducted in response to the deadly terror attack in Indian-held Kashmir last month by Pakistan-based Jaish e Mohammad (JeM), in which at least 44 Indian paramilitary police were killed.

While liberals in India voiced their opposition to the idea of belligerent military retaliation against Pakistan, rightwing Hindu groups brazenly cheered for war, calling on Narendra Modi-led nationalist government in India to seek 'revenge' for Pulwama by 'attacking' Pakistan.

Television media in India, an extended arm of the Modi-led government, took lead in preparing the ground for war, even before the 'surgical strike' was conducted.

"We want revenge, not condemnation... It is time for blood, the enemy's blood," screeched Arnab Goswami, a famously infamous Indian TV journalist, a day after the Pulwama attack.

Goswami's news channel Republic, owned by a legislator from Modi's party, has often been criticized for shamelessly peddling lies and distorting facts in defense of Modi and his government.

In an attempt to make Modi look heroic, the channel eulogized him for taking 'revenge' by conducting an airstrike inside Pakistan's territory and mowing down more than 300 militants, of course without verifying the information.

It was later confirmed that the payload was dropped in an area with dense forest cover in Balakot village of Pakistan-held Kashmir, causing no casualties or damage to nearby buildings. **→6**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran: Cooperation with IAEA not the only option

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran has said that co-operation with the International Atomic Energy Agency is not the only option that the country could adopt vis-a-vis the international nuclear watchdog.

“Cooperation with the Agency is not the only option when it comes to the 2015 nuclear deal,” Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s envoy to the IAEA, told the agency’s Board of Governors on Wednesday.

He pointed out that while the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the agreement last May, Iran decided to stay in the deal and cooperate with the IAEA.



New Iraqi ambassador submits credentials to Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraq’s new ambassador to Tehran, Saad Abdul Wahab Jawad Qandil, on Wednesday submitted a copy of his credentials to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Qandil was appointed as Iraq’s ambassador to Iran in summer. He replaced Rajah al-Musawi.

Qandil has a history of membership in the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.

He has also served as ambassador of Iraq in Finland and South Africa.

Iraq’s Foreign Ministry had earlier announced it was removing Musawi for not serving Iraqi nationals in Tehran properly.



‘General Soleimani and Zarif are friends’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Esmail Gha’ani, deputy commander of the IRGC Quds Force, said on Wednesday that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, are “friends”.

He noted that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s visit to Tehran on February 25 was organized by the Quds Force and the Foreign Ministry was not informed due to lack of coordination in the presidential office.

General Soleimani said on February 27 that Iran’s top officials support Zarif as foreign minister and he is in charge of the country’s foreign policy.



Iraqi diplomat in Tehran ahead of Rouhani’s Baghdad trip

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ahead of a historic visit by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Iraq, Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar al-Khairallah held talks with his Iranian counterpart Morteza Sarmadi in Tehran on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the Iraqi official invited his counterpart to visit Baghdad, announcing that there is no limit to ties, especially in areas of security, defense and energy.

He also vowed that Iran will play a key role in the Arab country’s reconstruction.

Khairallah and Sarmadi also exchanged views on the river (Arvand Rud) separating the two countries, with the Iranian side touching upon the need for precise and complete implementation of the provisions of the 1975 Algiers Agreement.



‘Iran trains Indian, Omani and Pakistan military men’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Second Brigadier General Hassan Valivand, the commandant of AJA University of Command and Staff, has said that Indian, Omani and Pakistani military men are receiving training at the university under this leadership.

Students from other countries also seek to pass training courses in the university, he told IRNA in an interview published on Wednesday.

He also said Iranian students of the AJA University of Command and Staff are being sent to other countries to pass training courses.



France names new ambassador to Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — France has appointed Philippe Thiebaud as its new ambassador to Tehran.

The French embassy in Tehran announced on Wednesday that Thiebaud will start his job in next weeks.

Thiebaud was French ambassador to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

He was also France’s ambassador to Pakistan from 2011 to 2014 and to South Korea from 2005 to 2009.

Bahram Qassemi, the current spokesman of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, said on Monday that he will probably be dispatched to Paris as Tehran’s ambassador.

Halbousi: Iraq stands by Iran in face of sanctions



Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohamed al-Halbousi (L) meets Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, March 6, 2019

“Just as Iran had positive stance in fighting terrorism, we will also support Iran against sanctions,” Iraqi parliament speaker notes.

ties as well as on ways to establish sustainable security in the broader region.

Larijani also told his Iraqi counterpart that it should not be allowed that the Zionist regime find dominance over Arab states.

He also said it is necessary to help the Palestinians as an oppressed nation.

■ **‘U.S. presence in the region endangers democracy’**
On the same day, Halbousi met with Ali

Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council.

In that meeting, Shamkhani said the presence of American forces in the region poses “long-term threat to democratic and domestically empowered governments”.

“The costly invasion of Daesh on Iraq showed that not only is America not prepared to defend people and governments against terrorists at times of crisis, but quite to the contrary, it employs all its weapons and intelligence capacities to manage and make instrumental use of it [terrorism],” he noted.

Shamkhani also hoped that an upcoming visit to Iraq by President Hassan Rouhani will provide a historic chance to make final decisions on border issues, legal affairs, and economic cooperation.

“With the measures taken over the past years, grounds have been amply laid for a surge in economic ties between the two countries,” he noted.

Halbousi, for his part, stressed that Iran plays a big role in the region’s security and stability.

“Conquering Daesh would not have been possible without the presence and active part of Iran,” the top legislator asserted.

He also condemned any unilateral sanctions on other countries, saying Iraq will now allow its soil to be used as a base to attack any other country.

Iran-U.S. differences non-negotiable, Rouhani says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that differences between Iran and the U.S. are non-negotiable.

“The differences with the U.S. cannot be negotiated and compromised on, we should make the enemy back off and continue our path of glory,” he said, addressing a gathering of people in Lahijan, Gilan province.

He noted that Iran will continue the path of “independence”, “progress”, “freedom” and “democracy”.

The president said that the government has no fear of the economic war that the Trump administration has launched against Iran by unilaterally pulling out of the international 2015 nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions against Iran.

He also said, “By permission of the Leader of the Revolution [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei], the president is commander of countering enemies’ economic war against Iran.”

Calling the current situation very “sensitive”, the president said the Iranians have always resisted enemies’ pressure. “The enemy imagined that the people



will be defeated after the first and second rounds of sanctions, however, the nation stood against them and foiled all the plots,” Rouhani remarked.

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.

By withdrawing from the JCPOA, the United States violated international law because the agreement has been endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

JCPOA Joint Commission focuses on EU financial mechanism

Araqchi says INSTEX is only one of the commitments of the Europeans

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The JCPOA Joint Commission held its 11th meeting in Vienna on Wednesday with the participation of the remaining parties to the international nuclear deal.

The meeting was co-chaired by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and Helga Schmid, secretary general of the European Union’s foreign policy service.

According to IRNA, the JCPOA parties discussed details of a newly-registered EU financial mechanism —known as INSTEX — to facilitate trade with Iran despite U.S. sanctions.

The meeting, which began at 9:40 o’clock local time, was held at the level of political directors and deputy foreign ministers of Iran, the European Union trio (Germany, the UK, and France), Russia and China.

Writing on her twitter account earlier in the day, Schmidt said the meeting is the first since the adoption of INSTEX. She said Iran and its partners are committed to implementing the JCPOA.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, which lasted for about five hours, Araqchi said the European side gave detailed explanations about INSTEX and how it will work.



Araqchi added, “We reminded the Europeans that the instrument in support of trade exchanges (INSTEX) is only one of their commitments, and that economic cooperation with Iran has different dimensions.”

Speaking prior to the Wednesday meeting, Araqchi criticized Europe for repeated delays in introducing INSTEX.

After months of delay, France, Germany and Britain announced the creation of INSTEX on January 31.

Araqchi urged Europe to take more serious steps in

keeping the JCPOA alive.

“Ways should be found to help Iran benefit from the deal. The U.S. unilateral and illegal sanctions have caused many problems, however, what is important is political determination of the remaining parties to the JCPOA to counter the U.S. and find solutions,” he asserted.

EU 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.

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.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 16, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence urged European powers Germany, France, and Britain to follow Washington in withdrawing from the deal and to “stop undermining U.S. sanctions.” However, the European Union rebuffed the offer.

It is essential experts help Expediency Council in decision on FATF: Foreign Ministry official

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Tuesday that it is necessary that economic experts help members of the Expediency Council in their decision on joining the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

“It is essential that all experts fulfill their national duty and help the Expediency Council’s members take the best decision that guarantees the country’s national security and interests,” he told IRNA.

He noted that the Foreign Ministry does not have a factional view on the issue.

“We seek to enjoy the least of banking and financial interactions and there is no choice but accepting certain standards which have been accepted by all the countries except for one or two,” he said.



He noted that approving the FATF does not mean that all the economic problems will be solved overnight, however, he said that refusing to accept it will definitely cause more problems.

The Paris-based FATF watchdog announced on February 22 that Iran has until June to fix its anti-money laundering and terrorism financing rules or face increased international scrutiny of its banks.

U.S. needs Rukban refugee camp to justify military presence in Syria: Lavrov

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says the United States needs Rukban refugee camp in southern Syria and near the border with Jordan, where thousands of internally displaced people are stranded, in order to justify its illegitimate military presence in the crisis-hit country.

"The fact that people are not allowed to leave [the camp] and are held hostage makes one suggest that the U.S. needs this camp to continue justifying its illegitimate presence there," Lavrov said at a joint press conference with Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Hamad Al Sabah in Kuwait City on Wednesday.

He added, "This is in line with the U.S. policy aimed at creating something like a quasi-state on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River. It does not want these territories to get back under the control of Syria's legitimate authorities."

"We will insist that these people are no longer held in the camp against their will," Lavrov pointed out.

The remarks came only a day after Russia's Defense Ministry said Russian satellites had found a cemetery with 300 graves immediately outside Rukban camp's fence.

"U.S. forces prevent refugees from exiting the camp, while militants are forcibly holding them inside, demanding large sums of money in U.S. dollars to let them out."

"At the same time, the UN data show that more than 35,000 Syrians want to return to the territory controlled by the Syrian government, including 28,000 to the province of Homs, 2,800 to the province of Dayr al-Zawr, 1,600 to the provinces of Rif Damashq and Hama and 1,200 to the province of Aleppo," the ministry said.

On February 28, a Syrian official held the U.S. military forces and their allied militants responsible for the humanitarian crisis affecting thousands of internally displaced people at Rukban refugee camp.

"The responsibility for the humanitarian crisis of our people at al-Rukban camp falls solely on U.S. occupation forces and their stooges, as they have been preventing



civilians' departure by means of force and threats. This is while safe corridors have been opened for those who are willing to leave the camp," an unnamed official at the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates was quoted by official SANA news agency as saying on Thursday.

He stressed that Damascus is prepared to take responsibility for securing a safe and decent return of displaced people to their hometowns.

The United Nations says about 45,000 people, mostly women and children, are trapped inside Rukban, where conditions are desperate. This is while Geneva-based international aid agency Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières/MSF) has put the number there at some 60,000.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on February 25 that the U.S. forces were unlawfully deployed to al-Tanf region in southern Syria, and were training terrorists, who carry out acts of terror across Syria and prevent the return of displaced people in Rukban to their hometowns.

Last October, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said people in Rukban had been without access to food and humanitarian aid for several months, highlighting that the tough situation was

further complicated with a closed border by Jordan.

Senior French terrorist Jean-Michel Clain killed in ISIL Syria's redoubt

Meantime, notorious French militant Jean-Michel Clain has been killed as the U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are fighting to retake the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group's last enclave in the eastern Syrian province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Clain's wife Dorothee Maquere told AFP on Tuesday that he was killed in mortar shelling less than two weeks ago.

Maquere, fully veiled in black and surrounded by her five children, added that her husband had earlier been wounded when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group carried out a drone strike against the besieged village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border on February 20. "The drone killed my brother-in-law (Fabien) and then the mortar killed my husband," she said as she was cradling her two-week-old baby under a red blanket at a screening area run by SDF militants.

Fabien Clain, 41, achieved notoriety after he claimed responsibility for a series of violent attacks targeting cafes and a concert hall in the French capital city of Paris on

November 13, 2015, which took the lives of at least 129 people.

While Fabien was regarded as a senior propagandist for ISIL terrorist group, his younger brother Jean-Michel, 38, was mostly known as a singer of the "nasheed" chants heard on some of the videos released by the Takfiris.

Maquere said she did not regret moving from southwestern France with her family four years ago.

She said she wanted nothing from France and did not wish to return there but wanted to remain in Syria.

"I want to continue to live here with my children, to rebuild myself. I want to be left alone after everything I've been through... some place where I can live, where I won't be bothered, where I can live my life," Maquere said.

She also said she thought Hayat Boumedienne, the widow of Paris Kosher market gunman Amedy Coulibaly, was also killed recently in Baghouz.

Malian-born Coulibaly took hostages at a Jewish supermarket on the edge of Paris on January 8, 2015. Four hostages were killed before French elite forces stormed the shop and gunned the militant down. His wife had travelled to Syria a few days earlier.

As foreign-backed militancy erupted in Syria in March 2011, thousands of people streamed toward the country from around the world to fight alongside militants there, with a particularly strong influx from European countries, including France.

Foreign nationals could buy budget tourist flights to Turkey and then sneak across the border.

As many as 1,910 French citizens joined the ISIL terrorist outfit, according to statistics from the Soufan Center, a U.S.-based think tank, The Washington Post reported.

France has been exploring how to return its nationals who fought alongside ISIL and their families seeking to return from combat zones in Iraq and Syria, as well as those who surrendered and are in detention. France is a leading member of the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting ISIL in Syria.

(Source: Press TV)

Images show madrasa buildings standing after Indian attack claim



Satellite images show a religious school run by Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM/The Army of Muhammad) in northeastern Pakistan still appears to be standing days after India claimed warplanes destroyed it and killed a large number of fighters.

The images produced by Planet Labs Inc, a San Francisco-based private satellite operator, show at least six buildings on the school's site on March 4 - six days after the air raids. Until now, no high-resolution satellite images were publicly available.

The images are virtually unchanged from an April 2018 satellite photo of the facility. There are no discernible holes in the roofs of buildings, no signs of scorching, blown-out walls, displaced trees around the school or other signs of an aerial attack.

The images cast further doubt on statements made over the last eight days by the Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the February 26 raids had hit all the intended targets at the school site in northern Pakistan's Balakot region.

India's foreign and defense ministries did not reply to questions about the satellite images emailed by Reuters news agency.

Government sources said last week 12 Mirage 2000 jets carrying 1,000kg bombs carried out the attack.

Pakistan has disputed India's account, saying the operation was a failure that saw Indian jets, under pressure from Pakistani planes, drop their bombs on a largely empty hillside.

"There has been no damage to any infrastructure or human life as a result of Indian incursion," Major-General Asif Ghafoor said. "This has been vindicated by both domestic and international media after visiting the site."

India must hold a general election by May and pollsters say Modi and his Hindu nationalist party stand to benefit from his aggressive response to a suicide bomb attack that killed 40 Indian paramilitary police in the disputed Kashmir region on February 14.

Indian officials said hundreds of "terrorists" were killed in the air raids.

But the Indian government has failed to produce evidence that the camp was destroyed and fighters killed. That prompted some opposition politicians to push for more details.

Modi has accused the opposition Congress party and other opponents of helping India's enemies by demanding evidence of the attacks.

After the Indian air force incursion, a dogfight resulted in the capture of a downed Indian pilot, who was released on March 1 as part of a "peace gesture" by Pakistan.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey says to conduct joint raid with Iran against PKK

Turkey says it is planning to carry out a joint attack with Iran against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) militant group, which has waged a three-and-a-half decade armed campaign against Ankara for independence.

"God willing, we will carry out a joint operation against the PKK together with Iran," Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu told Anadolu news agency Wednesday.

He did not specify which PKK positions were going to be targeted in the planned operation or when the attack would take place. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has in the past indicated that he would order the military to attack militant hideouts in Iraq.

Soylu said the operation was part of Turkey's efforts to eradicate the group after successfully blocking most of its inroads at the border and basically trapping the few hundred PKK militants left in the country.

"There are less than 700 terrorists in Turkey," he said. "The terrorist entry into the country is so little, as well, 12 people entered Turkey since January. We are taking serious measures at our borders."

He also accused the group of recruiting teenagers to fight the Turkish government forces.

Besides Turkey, the European Union and the United States have also declared the PKK a terrorist organization. The militant group has been seeking an autonomous Kurdish



region since 1984.

Over the past few months, Turkish ground and air forces have been carrying out operations against PKK positions in the country as well as in northern Iraq and neighboring Syria.

In January 2018, Ankara launched a cross-border military operation inside Syria, code-named Operation Olive Branch, with the declared aim of eliminating the Syrian Kurdish militants of the People's Protection Units (People's Defense Units/Yekineyên Parastina/YPG).

The YPG forms the backbone of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an anti-Damascus alliance of predominantly Kurdish militants supported by the United States.

Ankara views the YPG as a terrorist organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed PKK.

More than 40,000 people have been killed during the three-decade conflict between Turkey and the autonomy-seeking militant group.

Iran has had its own struggle with the PKK's Iranian offshoot, the so-called Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK/Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê), which has waged several terrorist attacks in western Iran over the past years.

Al Jazeera did not receive a response to Soylu's comments from the Iranian authorities.

Despite backing opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, both neighbors, have recently been working with Russia towards a political solution to the crisis.

Turkey backs moderate Syrian rebels in the conflict while Russia and regional power house Iran are the Syrian government's principal foreign allies.

Ankara has conducted two military operations in Syria in the past three years targeting the YPG fighters and its political wing, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD/Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), which it considers "terrorist groups" with ties to the PKK.

(Source: agencies)

North Korea restoring part of launch site it promised to destroy

North Korea has restored part of a missile launch site it had begun to dismantle after pledging to do so during the first summit with the United States President Donald Trump last year.

South Korean legislators briefed by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) said the work was taking place at the Tongchang-ri launch site, Yonhap news agency reported on Wednesday.

Satellite images seen by 38 North, a Washington DC-based North Korea project, showed structures on the launch pad had been rebuilt sometime between February 16 and March 2, Jenny Town, managing editor at the project and an analyst at the Stimson Center think-tank, told Reuters news agency.

The news comes days after a second summit on denuclearization between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un broke down over differences on how far North Korea was willing to limit its nuclear program and the degree of the U.S. willingness to ease sanctions.

South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper cited unidentified legislators as saying NIS Director Suh Hoon told them the structures being restored at the launch site included the roofs and doors of buildings.

Suh was quoted as saying the move is seen as either preparation to restart long-range missile test-launches in the event that the nuclear diplomacy completely collapses, or



to add structures to the launch site to blow up more dramatically in a show of denuclearization commitment when the U.S. inspectors visit, if negotiations with Washington go well.

The offices of South Korean legislators who took part in Tuesday's briefing couldn't immediately confirm the newspaper report.

A U.S. official speaking anonymously said the NIS was considered reliable on such issues, but added that the work described did not seem particularly alarming, and certainly not on a scale of resuming missile tests, which

have been suspended since 2017.

The breakdown of the summit in Hanoi last week has raised questions about the future of the U.S.-North Korea dialogue.

The U.S. secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday he was hoping to send a delegation to North Korea in the coming weeks but he had had "no commitment yet".

While North Korea's official media said last week that Kim and Trump had decided at the summit to continue talks, its Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui told reporters

Kim "might lose his willingness to pursue a deal" and questioned the need to continue.

Yonhap also quoted legislators briefed by intelligence officials as saying the five-megawatt reactor at North Korea's main nuclear site in Yongbyon, which produces weapons-grade plutonium, had not been operational since late last year, concurring with a report from the United Nations atomic watchdog.

Yonhap quoted the sources as saying there had been no sign of plutonium reprocessing from the reactor and that tunnels at North Korea's main nuclear test site in Punggye-ri had remained shut down and unattended since their widely publicized destruction in May, which Pyongyang said was proof of its commitment to ending nuclear testing.

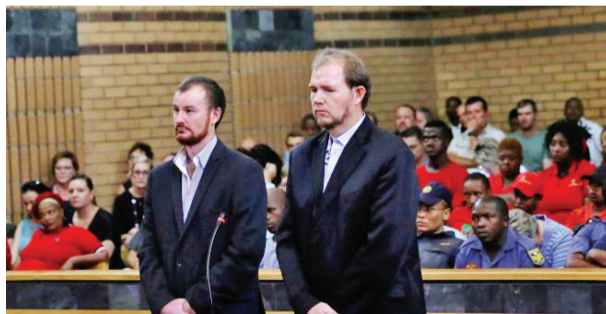
The fate of the Yongbyon nuclear complex and its possible dismantling was a central issue in the Hanoi summit.

Trump's national security adviser said on Tuesday the United States will look at ramping up sanctions on North Korea if Pyongyang doesn't scrap its nuclear program.

"If they're not willing to do it, then I think President Trump has been very clear ... they're not going to get relief from the crushing economic sanctions that have been imposed on them, and we'll look at ramping those sanctions up in fact," John Bolton told Fox Business Network in an interview.

(Source: agencies)

South Africa: Two white farmers jailed for murder of black teen



A South African court has handed lengthy jail sentences to two white farmers who murdered a black teenager they suspected of stealing sunflowers in a remote farming community.

Pieter Doorewaard, 28, and Philip Schutte, 35, were found guilty of killing 15-year-old Mathomola Mosweu in April 2017 after claiming they caught him taking a plant from a farm in the area.

On Wednesday, Doorewaard was sentenced to at least 18 years in prison while Schutte was given a 23-year term.

Judge Ronald Hendricks said in mitigation of Doorewaard and Schutte's sentences that "there was no direct intention to kill the deceased".

Mosweu suffered a broken neck and died after being thrown out of a moving vehicle driven by the pair in a case that sparked rioting and looting of white-owned businesses in the town of Coligny.

The men had claimed the teen jumped off the truck as they drove him to the police, but it was found that Schutte threw Mosweu to his death.

Judge Hendricks previously found the pair guilty of kidnapping and intimidation.

Family members watched on as the judge announced his ruling - as did members of the radical Economic Freedom Fighters Party which has vigorously opposed racism against the country's black majority.

Racially charged incidents between white farm owners and managers and poor black farmhands are common in South Africa. In 2016, two white farmers in eastern Mpumalanga province forced into a coffin a black man they accused of trespassing.

The case sparked outrage after a video of the incident emerged on social media; the pair were handed jail terms of between 16 and 19 years.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	162827.3
IFX	2063.97

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,591 rials
GBP	55,197 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.69/b
WTI	\$56.02/b
OPEC Basket	\$64.86/b
Gold	\$1,286.55/oz
Silver	\$15.13/oz
Platinum	\$834.35 oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

IFX rises 8.7% in February

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — IFX, the main index of Iran’s over-the-counter (OTC) market, known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), rose 168 points or 8.7 percent to close at 2,100 points in February, IFB Public Relations Department reported.

As reported, market capitalization increased by 3.4 percent in February.

The Total number of trading days in February amounted to 18 days and the daily average volume of trades accounted for 824.9 million sheets worth \$123.1 million, down 7 percent and up 18 percent, respectively from January.

Notably, value traded of the listed equity i.e. first and second markets, SME and base market (A) amounted to \$504.1 million and value of trades for unlisted equity i.e. base market (B&C) accounted for \$441 million down 11 percent from January. This month total trade of the listed equities reached 7,391 million sheets.

Meanwhile, the total trade of the listed securities or structured financial products (i.e. ETFs, mortgage rights, debt market and underwriting) reached 401.66 million sheets worth \$1,269 million indicating an increase in both value and volume as compared to February 2018.

Base metals and chemical products are the top two sectors in terms of the value of trades in the equity market (excluding block trades) contributing 18 percent and 13 percent to the total amount (value of trades).

Economists warn that China’s growth could plummet to 2% in next decade

China has been a strong performer among emerging economies, even if its growth has been slowing. But that’s set to end, according to research firm Capital Economics.

Growth in China could plummet to 2 percent over the next decade — from the expected 6.0 to 6.5 percent target this year, predicted Capital’s Chief Asia Economist Mark Williams.



“China’s time as an emerging markets outperformer is ending,” said Williams, at the Capital Economics annual conference in Singapore on Tuesday. He added that the estimated 2 percent growth is a “long way” from the 5 to 6 percent expected by the International Monetary Fund for the next decade.

Speakers at the conference pointed to a number of risks, as well as changing demographics in the world’s second largest economy. That includes its debt problem, declining work force, and increasingly weaker drivers of productivity, they said.

Those predictions come as Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said at the annual National People’s Congress on Tuesday that the official economic growth target this year will be 6.0 to 6.5 percent, slowing from last year.

Li also warned that there will be greater risks ahead for the Asian economy, saying: “We must be fully prepared for a tough struggle.”

Risks ahead
China’s debt problem will not go away, with the real concern being corporate debt and household debt — as opposed to government, said Julian Evans-Pritchard, Capital Economics’ senior China economist, at the conference. He blamed rising debt levels on poor lending practices.

“Policymakers have been trying to shift lending away from state firms towards their more efficient private counterparts. But so far, the results have been underwhelming,” Evans-Pritchard said.

Data also showed that state firms’ capital spending is higher now compared to a few years ago, he added. “Servicing the existing stock of debt will be more difficult as China’s economy continues to slow.”

Evans-Pritchard noted that the real risk lies with property developers, who have borrowed the most to fund their land-buying spree.

Some analysts have said that Beijing might stimulate its slowing economy this year through more loans, but Williams warned that the “key headwind” on the Chinese economy so far has been the tightening on shadow lending.

Shadow banking refers to activities performed by financial firms outside the formal banking sector, and therefore subject to lower levels of regulatory oversight and higher risks. State-owned banks usually prefer lending to companies owned by the government, and as a result, private companies have turned to shadow banking, (Source: CNBC)

Iran, Azerbaijan confer about economic, energy ties

1 → He lamented the insufficient speed of the progress of some joint projects between Iran and Azerbaijan, including the final stages of the Rasht-Astara railway project, and proposed establishment of a committee to supervise the implementation of the agreements signed between the two countries, a suggestion that was welcomed by the Azerbaijani side.

Dejpasand also called for signing a bilateral monetary and financial agreement and expansion of banking cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan, saying that the cooperation in economic field should be at the same level as the political relations between the two countries.

The Azerbaijani minister, for his part, welcomed his Iranian counterpart’s suggestions regarding signing of a bilateral monetary, financial and banking agreement and expressed his country’s readiness to cooperate with Iran on completion of the remaining parts of the Rasht-Astara railway project.

Mustafayev also referred to a 74-percent increase in trade between the two countries in the previous year, and put the value of bilateral trade at \$450 million, saying that Iran’s share of the figure is \$420 million.



Iranian Economy Minister Farhad Dejpasand (R) and Azerbaijani Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev (L) met in Tehran on Tuesday.

The minister further called for increasing the shares of both sides in the bilateral trade. He also voiced his country’s full support to the Iranian investors.

Joint Economic Committee
Mustafayev also visited Iranian Energy

Minister Reza Ardakanian at the place of Iranian Energy Ministry on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Ardakanian said that the next meeting of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee will be held in Azerbaijani capital city, Baku, in

Iranian capital market to experience new financial instruments

By Mahnaz Abdi

Applying new financial instruments in Iranian capital market has been a significant approach that Iran’s Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has adopted over the recent years to expand this market through availability of variable methods of financing.

These instruments are applied in different stock markets of Iran, including Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran’s over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and Iran Energy Exchange (IEE), after being investigated and approved by the Jurisprudence Committee of SEO, which oversees compliance of capital market instruments with sharia rules.

As TSE Head Ali Sahraei believes, innovation in launching new financial instruments in the capital market is one of the strategic stock exchange policies to promote the share of capital market in providing financial resources for the productive economic activities.

One of the newly applied financial instruments in Iran’s capital market is futures contract, which was launched in mid-December 2018.

Futures contracts (more colloquially, futures) are financial contracts obligating the buyer to purchase an asset or the seller to sell an asset at a predetermined future date and price.

Addressing the ceremony to launch this instrument, Sahraei said that futures contract is one of the risk management tools (also called hedging tools), and expressed hope that it would act as a highly-applied derivative for hedging in the capital market.

Addressing the same ceremony, SEO Head Shapour Mohammadi said that futures are some very important instruments for the market balance, while they are also some strong hedging tools.

They provide investment opportunities for those who are seeking the amount of profit more than they can earn in the normal market deals, the official noted.

He further highlighted the significance of taking the advantage of new financial instruments to grab the opportunities for market arbitrage (purchasing and selling the same security at the same time in different markets to take advantage of a price difference between the two separate markets).

The new financial instruments will em-

power the capital market and fill many gaps, Mahmoud-Reza Khajehnasiri, a board member of SEO, says.

Option was another new financial instrument which was launched on Sunday (March 3) by Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

Option is a contract which gives the buyer (the owner or holder of the option) the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell an underlying asset or instrument at a specified strike price prior to or on a specified date, depending on the form of the option.

IME launched this contract for saffron trades in an approach to diversify financing methods for agricultural products.

IME Managing Director Hamed Soltaninejad refers to launching this instrument as one of the major measures so far taken by IME regarding financial market and derivatives.

Launching new financial instruments in the capital market lures more industries into the stock market, and the good news in this field is that some new instruments are going to be launched at Iranian capital market soon, as announced by Sahraei on Wednesday.

The official said that these instruments are already in the stage of being approved by the Jurisprudence Committee of SEO; their

the near future.

He evaluated Iran-Azerbaijan energy cooperation as fruitful and said; “We have a contract on electricity exchange between the two countries and our cooperation in the electricity and water sectors is moving forward.”

The Iranian minister also said that his country is considering plans to connect its power grid to Russia through Azerbaijan to help synchronize Iran’s power system with that of Russia.

He also added that during his talks with the Azeri side, the possibility of electricity cooperation with Turkey through Azerbaijan was discussed and the two sides agreed to take the necessary steps in this regard.

Mustafayev, for his part, said that besides their bilateral cooperation, Iran and Azerbaijan are trying to lay the ground for trilateral cooperation in a way to take the advantage of possible opportunities, adding, “In our today meeting we discussed trilateral cooperation between Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia, between Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia, and between Iran-Azerbaijan-Turkey and we believe that there are many potentials in this due.”

Tehran hosts 5th meeting of ECO reference marine organizations

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The fifth meeting of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) reference marine organizations kicked off on Wednesday at the place of Iran’s Ports and Maritime organization (PMO) in Tehran, the portal of PMO reported.

Headed by ECO’s Secretary General Hadi Soleimanpour, the gathering was attended by the representatives from all member nations.

Speaking in the meeting, Soleimanpour expressed the importance of cooperation between the member states in maritime sector, saying, “The main objective of this gathering is to expand cooperation between member states in the field of maritime navigation and also to connect landlocked

nations to the sea through coastal members.”

The official noted that maritime transportation is a key factor for economic development of all ECO members, adding “connecting the landlocked members to the ports in coastal countries is among ECO’s top priorities.”

“For over 40 years, ECO nations have been investing extensively in development of various transport infrastructure in the area, however the members should continue their efforts to eliminate various barriers, such as customs and other problems which halts fluent transit.” he said.

Soleimanpour further noted it is estimated that by 2025 about 80 percent of the residents of ECO countries will have access to transit and communication ways such as

rail and road.

In April 2018, during the 23rd meeting of ECO foreign ministers in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the rotating presidency of ECO was handed to the Islamic Republic of Iran for a three-year term.

ECO is an inter-governmental regional organization encompassing countries from Europe, Caucuses and Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia with more than 460 million inhabitants and over 8 million square kilometers connecting Russia to the Persian Gulf and China to Europe.

The overall objective of the organization is the sustainable economic development of its member states and the region as a whole.

French seed firm Vilmorin maintains some Iran sales

French seed maker Vilmorin, said on Tuesday it was continuing some exports to Iran with the backing of a French bank, and will participate in efforts to implement a European scheme to avoid U.S. sanctions targeting trade with Tehran.

Vilmorin, one of the world’s largest suppliers of seeds for grain and vegetable crops, has cited the U.S. sanctions against Iran as among the short-term risks to its activities in emerging markets, along with currency volatility.

Food and agricultural goods are not directly targeted by U.S. sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program, but restrictions on dollar-based transactions have impeded trade.

Vilmorin is working with a banking partner that is not one of the big French lenders to finance deals with Iranian clients able to pay in euros, Chief Financial Officer Vincent Supiot said at a presentation of the



company’s first-half results.

“We have done a few transactions since the start of the financial year,” he told reporters.

“We are going to have lower sales (to Iran) than before,” he said, adding they should amount to “several million euros”.

He declined to name the bank working with Vilmorin but said it was much smaller than the major French lenders that have U.S. activities and massive dollar flows.

(Source: Reuters)

Date export grows 53% in 10 months

In its latest report, Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced that export of various types of date registered a 53 percent growth in 10-month period of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018 – January 20, 2019) as compared to the last year’s corresponding period.

Mahmoud Bazari, the Director General of the Exports Coordination Office at TPO for Agro Crops and Processing Industries’ Products, made the remark on Tuesday, adding “statistics showed that Iran has exported 249,000 tons of fresh dates, valued at \$258 million, which shows a 27 and 53 percent growth in terms of weight and value respectively.”

He went on to say that the country exported 196,000 tons of fresh dates, valued at \$186 million, in 10 months of the past Iranian calendar year.

More than \$284 million worth of Ira-



nian fresh dates were exported to five main target markets including India, Pakistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan and Turkey in the same period, showing a significant 53 percent hike as compared to the last year’s corresponding period, he added.

With purchasing more than \$43 million worth of fresh dates, India claimed the first place in terms of importing this product from the Islamic Republic of Iran, followed by Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

(Source: Mehr News Agency)

Surveys show signs of brightening outlook in Eurozone economy

A round of more upbeat surveys on the Eurozone economy, released on Tuesday, has offered hope that the region may be stabilizing after its travails of recent months.

The composite IHS Markit purchasing managers’ index for the Eurozone — which is based on polls of executives in the services and factory sectors — rose to 51.9 in February, up from both a preliminary reading of 51.4 and 51 recorded in January.

The brightening in the closely watched gauge was led by

the services sector, which IHS Markit said contrasted persistent sluggishness in manufacturing. The bloc’s economy has faced a slew of headwinds in recent months, ranging from a global growth slowdown, to the trade skirmish between the U.S. and China.

Signs of stabilization come as an optimistic sign just before a European Central Bank decision, scheduled for Thursday. “Today’s PMI numbers provide some hope that the bottom” has finally been reached for European activity, said Angel

Talavera, economist at Oxford Economics. They confirm the “divergence between the resilient domestic economy and the struggles for the more externally oriented manufacturing sector, a dynamic that we have been witnessing for quite some time”, he added.

The composite PMI for France was revised upwards, to point to a slight expansion, rather than the initial reading which pointed to contraction.

(Source: Financial Times)

Oil dips on U.S. stocks build, production outlook

Oil prices slipped on Wednesday as bullish output forecasts by two big U.S. producers and a build in weekly U.S. crude stockpiles outweighed ongoing OPEC-led production cuts.

International Brent crude futures were at \$65.36 per barrel at 0440 GMT, down 50 cents, or 0.8 percent, from their last settlement. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were also down 0.8 percent, or 45 cents, at \$56.11 per barrel.

“Crude oil futures continue to demonstrate whippy trades as markets balance between OPEC-led cuts and the effects of rising U.S. production levels,” said Benjamin Lu, commodities analyst at Singapore-based brokerage firm Phillip Futures.

Increasingly event-driven trading was adding to market volatility, he added.

Chevron Corp and Exxon Mobil Corp released rival Permian Basin projections on Tuesday pointing to increased shale oil production.

If realized, the increases would cement the pair as the dominant players in the West Texas and New Mexico field, with one-third of Permian production potentially under their



control within five years.

Data from the American Petroleum Institute (API), an industry group, also showed larger-than-expected U.S. crude stockpiles. U.S. crude inventories rose by 7.3 million

barrels in the week ending March 1 to 451.5 million, compared with analysts’ expectations for an increase of 1.2 million barrels, API said. Crude stocks at the Cushing, Oklahoma, delivery hub rose by 1.1 million barrels.

“An increase in U.S. crude inventories is weighing on oil prices and in the long term, concerns over rising oil production in the Permian region is keeping a lid on prices,” said Kim Kwang-rae, commodity analyst at Samsung Futures in Seoul.

Official data from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Information Administration is due later on Wednesday.

The rise in North American production undermines supply cut efforts led by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

OPEC and its allies pledged to curb output by 1.2 million barrels per day, and they are likely to push back their decision whether or not to extend the output cut agreement to June from April, according to sources.

Meanwhile, the market is looking for further signs that the United States and China are making progress in talks to resolve their trade conflict.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said President Donald Trump would reject any trade deal that is not perfect, but added the White House would keep working on an agreement. (Source: Reuters)

Sour crude oil market to tighten further in Mediterranean

Azerbaijan’s state oil firm SOCAR is ramping up production at its new refinery in Turkey and is actively buying sour crude grades for the facility, additionally tightening the already tight sour crude market in the Mediterranean and Europe, crude traders and sources tell Reuters.

SOCAR’s oil refinery STAR is designed to have a processing capacity of 200,000 bpd, and it has already reached half that planned capacity, sources familiar with the refinery start-up told Reuters.

Full capacity could be reached as soon as next month, and SOCAR is actively buying Russia’s Urals sour crude grade at a time when supply of sour and heavy crudes in the Mediterranean and Europe

is tightening.

OPEC’s production cuts and the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela and Iran have been limiting the availability of heavy and sour crude grades to Europe, where prices for sour and heavier grades, including Russia’s Urals, have recently shot up amid an increasingly tightening market.

The U.S. sanctions on Iran had already limited some of the heavy grade supply into Europe. Then with the new round of OPEC/non-OPEC cuts that began in January, Iraq’s Basra Light and Heavy—typically very popular among European refiners—have also been in short supply on the spot market in Europe as Iraq is diverting more barrels of Basra to the

premium market for Middle Eastern producers: Asia.

To top off the sanctions on Iran and the OPEC cuts, the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela at the end of January further tightened the heavy crude market in Europe, and traders expect the market to tighten even more in the coming months.

The sanctions on Venezuela and on Iran, as well as OPEC’s cuts, have led to a huge imbalance between light sweet grades and heavy sour grades, especially in Europe, as Middle Eastern and other oil producers are targeting to keep their sales on the Asian market.

Due to tighter supply of medium and heavy sour crude oil, Middle Eastern



benchmarks for sour crude grades traded higher than Brent Crude prices at the beginning of February in a rarely seen development in global oil prices.

(Source: oilprice.com)

When insanity makes sense. Australia’s best option is LNG imports

By Clyde Russell

Australia has painted itself into a corner with its natural gas industry and faces the stark reality that there are no easy choices to alleviate the dual problem of a looming supply crunch and the associated higher prices.

Australia is far from the first country to find itself with an energy issue, but it is unusual insofar as the country is about to become the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and still it can’t get its policy settings right to ensure domestic supplies.

It sounds counter-intuitive and somewhat bizarre, that a country that in 2019 will export nearly 80 million tons of LNG finds that the best solution to its domestic supply crunch is to start importing cargoes of the same super-chilled fuel.

There was grudging acknowledgement at this week’s Australian Domestic Gas Outlook (ADGO) conference that LNG imports were likely the “least worst option”, as one of the delegates put it.

In tracing the story of how Australia reached this point, a tale emerges of poor policymaking, overly ambitious LNG projects and a failure of natural gas users to realize that the market dynamics were permanently shifting.

Much of the blame for the domestic natural gas problem is settled on three LNG plants built in Queensland state over the past seven years that tripled the amount of gas needed in the eastern Australia market.

These three plants, with a combined capacity of about 25 million tons a year, were planned and executed on the basis that they would use their own reserves as feedstock.

These reserves themselves were somewhat controversial, being based on coal seams, and while nobody doubts the engineering achievement of building three LNG plants based on a new type of natural gas, many now question the wisdom.

The three ventures were built more or less at the same time and didn’t engage in any cooperative sharing of infrastructure, partly because of the difficulty in aligning the interests of so many various partners and partly because the authorities believed in a competitive gas industry.

The net effect was that while the three projects were responsible for developing a massive new natural gas resource, they also sucked up the skills, capital and appetite from the rest of the industry to explore for gas for the domestic market.



At the same time that Queensland was developing this world-first LNG industry, cheap offshore natural gas from Australia’s southern coast was declining, after providing a low-cost fuel for industry and retail customers for more than 40 years.

While new fields in the Bass and Gippsland offshore acreages are still planned, the new reserves will be more expensive to develop and process, given the different nature of gas in the now harder to reach fields.

A third leg to the problem is the mounting environmental and farming opposition to onshore natural gas development, which has led to bans and moratoriums being placed on projects in New South Wales and Victoria states, Australia’s most populous and most industrialized regions.

The effective sequestering of onshore reserves is exacerbating a looming supply shortage, likely in the next few years when declining offshore fields, coupled with depletion of some of the fields in central Australia, mean not enough natural gas will be available in those two southeastern states.

This problem has been widely acknowledged by most of the participants in the industry, but they have mainly spent the last few years pointing fingers at each other, rather than looking for solutions that have more than a snowball’s chance in hell of working.

It’s all very well for Rod Sims, the chairman of Australia’s competition regulator to say, as he did at the ADGO event, that natural gas producers are treating customers with “almost contempt”, and that if they don’t make more supply available, a strong regulatory response is inevitable.

It’s also not really helpful to point out that the state governments of New South

Wales and Victoria should reverse their onshore development bans, since this is unlikely to happen. Both major political parties in those states have shown very little appetite to engage in a conflict with the environmental and farming lobbies.

It’s probably not that helpful either, for producers to tell gas customers that there is no problem with supply, but that the price they will have to pay for it is at least double what they have been used to paying.

Virtually all industry participants agree more supply is needed, but how best to achieve this is the burning question.

Companies such as Exxon Mobil, which operates some of the southern offshore fields, are committed to spending hundreds of millions of dollars to explore for new reserves and to further develop existing fields.

A range of both small and large domestic companies say they can develop onshore fields in the north of the country, but that the cost of transporting the fuel from there to the southeastern demand centers means it will be a relatively expensive resource.

And there are also five proposed LNG import terminals, of which at least three look to have the financial backing necessary to be brought to fruition.

These projects would see floating storage and regasification ships anchored near Sydney and Melbourne in order to supply natural gas into those markets.

Given the relatively low capital costs, especially compared to developing remote fields in the north of the country, the sponsors of the LNG import terminals believe they can supply natural gas at a competitive price.

They may well be correct, and that is how the conclusion is reached that the world’s largest LNG exporter is to become an importer as well.

(Source: Reuters)

KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA TEHRAN (Embassy of India School)

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

Kendriya Vidyalaya-Embassy of India School an International English Medium School under Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) and Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) New Delhi called an Walk-in-Interview on dated **09.03.2019** at **9:00am** for the following Teaching/Non-teaching posts on purely part-time contractual basis to make pannel for the Academic Session 2019-20.

1. The candidates must able to teach the English and must have age between 18 to 60 years.
2. Candidates should attend the walk-in-interview along with one passport size photograph, original and a set of attested photo copies of all certificates.
3. The prepared pannel of teachers will be operated as and when required by the school.

No.	Post/Designation	Essential Qualification
1.	Post Graduate Teacher (PGT) Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Commerce, Economics and Computer Science	Post-Graduation in the relevant subject and with at least 50% marks and B.Ed.
2.	Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT) English, Science, Hindi, Punjabi, French, Social Science and Physical Education & Heath Teacher (PHE)	Graduation in the relevant subject with at least 50% marks and B.Ed.
3.	Physical Education & Heath Teacher TGT (PHE)	B.Ped, M.P.Ed and must be competent in teaching in English language.
4.	Primary Teacher (PRT)	12 th Pass with at least 50% marks and Elementary Teacher Training/ Junior Basic Training/or Equivalent
5.	Primary Teacher - Music (PRT Music)	1. 12 th Pass with at least 50% marks 2. Degree/Diploma in Indian Music
6.	Pre-Primary Teacher (Pre-PRT)	12 th Pass with at least 50% marks and NTT (Nursery Teacher Training)
7.	Senior Secretariat Assistant (SSA)	1) Graduation with at least 50% marks 2) Working knowledge of Computers. 3) Knowledge of English, Hindi & Persian language is preferable.
8.	Junior Secretariat Assistant (JSA)	1) 12 th Pass with Typing speed 30-35 WPM in English, Hindi and Persian. 2) Working Knowledge of Computer, 3) Knowledge of English & Persian Language is preferable.
9.	Maids (Nazafatchi)	Experienced, Energetic and English knowing persons shall get preference
10.	Care-taker (Negehban)	12 th Pass, Experienced, Energetic and English knowing persons shall get preference

Candidates may send their Personal Resume (CV) to kvtehran@yahoo.com or to the address mentioned on or before **08.03.2019. KV (Embassy of India School), Tehran, Saadi Ave, Qayedi (Hedayat) Ave, Noormohammadi Ave, Darvish Street, No. 24 Telephone No: 77635033 & 77531183.**

(Dr.S.S.Dakua)

NEWS IN BRIEF

**Pakistan govt cracks down on militant groups**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — In a significant move, Pakistani authorities have reportedly detained 44 members of various militant groups, including relatives of Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar.

Azhar's JeM was allegedly responsible for the February terror attack in India-controlled Kashmir that brought the two warring neighbors to the brink of full-fledged war last week.

A senior Pakistani government official was quoted saying that those arrested would be held for at least 14 days, and would be prosecuted if further evidence was found against them.

India had shared a dossier with Pakistan following the Kashmir attack that killed 44 Indian paramilitary police forces personnel. In Tuesday's press conference, the government official alleged that the Indian dossier, shared with Pakistan on Thursday, lacked prosecutable evidence.

"The objective of the UNSC (Freezing and Seizure) Order 2019 is to streamline the procedure for implementation of Security Council Sanctions against designated individuals and entities," Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday.

**Seven of top ten most-polluted cities in India**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — In a shocking revelation belying India's tall claims of rapid economic progress and development, seven of the top ten most polluted cities in the world are in India.

A study by Greenpeace showing South Asia's fight against deteriorating air quality and its toll on global economy was released on Tuesday.

India's commercial hub Gurugram led the most polluted cities in the world in 2018, with other commercial hubs Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Noida, and Bhiwadi in the top six worst-affected cities.

What's alarming, according to the report, is that air pollution is likely to cause the death of an estimated seven million lives globally in the next year while costing the world's economy nearly \$ 225 billion.

The index measures the presence of fine particulate matter known as PM2.5, a pollutant that can fester deep in the lungs and bloodstream of human beings.

India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, makes up 22 of the top 30 most polluted cities, with five in China, two in Pakistan and one in Bangladesh.

China made progress in its usually dismal pollution levels, with average concentrations falling by 12 percent in 2018 from the previous year, according to the data.

**Afghanistan hit by worst floods in 7 years**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — More than 32 people have been killed and thousands others displaced due to massive flooding across Afghanistan over the past week.

Many homes and buildings have been swept away by flooding, according to reports, especially in the southern part of the country bordering Pakistan.

In southern Kandahar province, which has been hit hardest, hundreds of residential houses have been destroyed and an estimated 4000 families rendered shelter-less, in need of assistance. Many humanitarian organizations have been pressed into service in the worst-affected areas to assess the needs of people affected by the flooding.

Beside Kandahar province, thousands of others have been affected by flooding in the nearby provinces of Helmand, Farah and Herat. The impact of changing climate conditions, on top of over 40 years of conflict, is deeply affecting the people of Afghanistan, say experts.

The latest catastrophe came as the UN humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan lashed out at the European Union for its "wholly insufficient" response to hunger and suffering in the country already devastated by 'world's deadliest conflict'.

The latest floods have been described as the worst in seven years with UN 'shocked' by the lack of crisis funding. In recent months, many areas of the country have been cut off due to snow.

**ICC team in Bangladesh to meet Rohingyas**

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — A delegation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is expected to arrive in Bangladesh on Wednesday to gather information on atrocities committed against Rohingya refugees by the Myanmar military.

The seven-member team will be in Bangladesh for a week to gather information for a "preliminary examination" report, based on which the ICC will hold a hearing to decide on opening a full-fledged investigation.

It marks a major step towards criminal prosecution over the violence that caused more than 700,000 Rohingyas to flee the violence in their native country and come to Bangladesh since August 2017.

In April 2018, ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda submitted a request seeking a ruling on whether the court may exercise jurisdiction over the alleged deportation of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

It has been more than a year since Rohingya Muslims were forced to leave Myanmar following brutal crackdown by Myanmar military with tacit support from the government. As per conservative estimates, there are around 905,000 Rohingya refugees presently in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, although some human rights bodies have put the figure higher.

Trump's next trade war with India; India's preferential trade status ended

INTERNATIONAL **TEHRAN** — It is official: U.S. President Donald Trump's next trade war is going to be with India, and his decision to end India's preferential trade status bears testimony to that.

The decision comes at a sensitive time with Narendra Modi-led government in India bracing up for the general election in May and the opposition mounting attacks on the nationalist government.

Trump administration has announced its plans to strip India of a preferential trade status which had allowed it to export many goods to the U.S. free of tariff.

"India is a very high tariff nation. They charge us a lot," Trump said this week. "When we send a motorcycle to India, it's a 100 per cent tariff. They charge 100 per cent. When India sends a motorcycle to us, we brilliantly charge them nothing."

Experts believe that if the trade tensions between the two countries escalate, India will respond with retaliatory tariffs, making it hard for the U.S. companies doing business in India.

While U.S. carries its ninth largest trade deficit with India, the country is still seen as an important growth market for powerful U.S. companies like Apple, Netflix, Facebook, among others, especially as China's economy slows down, said a report in CNBC.

Over the past couple of months, the report



added, U.S. and Indian officials discussed ways to level the trade imbalance, but New Delhi was not willing to budge, pushing the U.S. to respond with the GSP withdrawal.

"India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that create serious negative effects on United States commerce. Despite intensive engagement, India has failed to take the necessary steps to meet the GSP criterion," U.S. trade representative Robert Lighthizer said in a press statement.

Blake said the trade tensions have been building over time so GSP announcement

was not a big surprise for India.

Under its GSP status, India in 2017 exported over \$5.5 billion of goods to the U.S. without tariff. In the fall of 2018, India announced tariffs on \$240 million of U.S. goods, but did not follow up on it.

"India is not threatening retaliation immediately. But if they do, it will be the U.S. consumer that the added cost will be passed on to," Pravin Krishna, professor at Johns Hopkins University, was quoted as saying by Financial Times.

In February this year, India imposed new

rules that challenge Walmart's FlipKart and Amazon's aggressive drive into India, which according to analysts was aimed at protecting small businesses.

Chuck Grassley of Iowa, chairman of the U.S. Senate finance committee, backed the move.

"The Indian government hasn't engaged enough to address market access issues. For the sake of the many Americans and Indians who relied on GSP benefits, I hope that India will work to quickly address these legitimate concerns," he was quoted as saying.

Trade tensions between Washington and New Delhi have increased over the past one year with the Indian government announcing a range of tariff and regulatory policies hurting U.S. businesses.

U.S. government started the review of India's preferential trade privileges in April 2018, complaining that New Delhi had not sufficiently opened up its market to justify duty-free access to the U.S. market.

In a letter to the U.S. Congress, Trump accused India of shutting out American businesses.

"I am taking this step because, after intensive engagement between the United States and the Government of India, I have determined that India has not assured the United States that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to the markets of India," he said in the letter.

‘Quota system’ fanning ethnic prejudice in Afghanistan

1 → The latest case of discrimination and favoritism on the basis of tribe and ethnicity has sparked a debate in intelligentsia circles and prompted the country's civil society activists, academics and students to start a social media campaign in support of students like Alizada.

"Our demand from the government is to look into this issue with utmost seriousness, find the people responsible for it and impeach them," Khalid Pashtun, a member of Afghan parliament was quoted as saying by Tolo News. "That will set a right precedent and prevent such occurrences in future."

"We love our country and put forward our best talent to serve. But the response is ignominious and outrageous," Reza Sarvar, a student at American University of Afghanistan wrote on Twitter. "Please break this ugly cycle of discrimination and obstruction. We want the national wealth, privilege and pains to be equally shared."

Hazara community, which accounts for up to 20 percent of Afghanistan's 30 million population, has been persecuted and wronged throughout the country's history. In recent years, however, the persecution has mostly been in the form of lack of opportunities and blatant discrimination.

Alizada's case is a sad illustration of that deep-rooted prejudice, discrimination and official apathy.

The case was brought to light on Twitter and within no time it snowballed into a major controversy and a big embarrassment for the Ashraf Ghani-led government.

Many people wrote about it on Twitter and Facebook and unequivocally condemned what they termed 'blatant discrimination against the Hazara community'.

"No wonder there's a massive sense of marginalization among Hazaras despite the vaunted 'progress' they have made," tweeted Ahmad Shuja, Fullbright scholar at Georgetown University and a noted Afghan commentator. "The kind of systemic discrimination in a democracy reawakens memories of generations of racist policies that kept Hazaras on the margins."

Ghani's national security advisor (NSA) and former spokesman Hamdullah Mohib quickly reacted.

"This kind of discrimination is unacceptable. A full assessment will be conducted to ensure we put an end to any discrimination in ANDSF (Afghan National Defense Security Force) recruitment and appointments. The only acceptable criteria in ANDSF must be merit and patriotism," he tweeted.

With the controversy refusing to die down, President Ghani invited Alizada to the presidential palace and issued an order for his appointment in the military university. He also promised to review the admission process and introduce



necessary reforms.

Civil society activists have accused the Ghani-led government of discrimination and have called for the annulment of ethnicity-based quota system and favoritism in all sectors.

"Quota system is an apartheid regime feature which builds big walls in academic institutions," says Mohammad Jawad Borhani, a university teacher. "Only selected people are allowed this side of the wall while everyone else is asked to stay on the other side."

Ahmad Ghalib, a noted Afghan commentator, says the quota-based system does injustice to hard-working students and is unjustly tilted in favor of those who want everything served on the platter.

"It's an undeniable fact that students belonging to a particular tribe work hard to excel in education, and if this quota system did not exist, they would take all important positions in various government departments and military forces," says Ghalib. While the case of Alizada has resurrected the debate over ethnic discrimination, this issue has a long history and has prevented hundreds of students from moving forward, believe analysts.

"If the President is honest, he should ask the ministry of defense to disclose the list of applicants in the military academy with their Kankor score," says Asadullah Saadati, member of Afghanistan parliament, adding that the only criteria for admission should be merit.

A few months ago, the Afghan government approved a quota system for Kankor examination. According to it, 75 percent seats are allotted based on province's population and 25 percent seats are reserved for some special provinces.

In this 'flawed' system, talented students fail to make the cut as the quota allotted to their province more often happens to be insufficient.

This quote-based system has been widely denounced by

civil society, students and even political outfits.

"This quota-based system is against Article 22 of the Afghanistan constitution, as it affects the quality of education and discredits Afghanistan's academic and educational centers in international circles," Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan said in a statement recently.

Article 22 of the Afghan constitution says: "Any kind of discrimination between the citizens of Afghanistan shall be prevented. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and women, have equal rights and duties before the law".

Article 43 adds that the education is the "right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered up to the B.A. level in the state educational institutes for free of charge by the state."

This quota-based system applies to admission in educational institutes, military academies, governmental offices and other departments, with tribe and province as important criteria for selection.

"In our country, after the fall of Taliban regime and during the Karzai government, everyone sought power on the basis of their tribe and ethnicity, while merit, qualification and experience took the backseat," says Ahmad Saeedi, university teacher and political analyst.

"In Afghanistan, until the power distribution is based on tribe, language and religion, until the Pashtun people maintain unchallenged monopoly on everything, this specter of discrimination will continue to loom over us," he adds.

Etilaat-e-Roz, a vernacular newspaper published from Kabul, recently carried an investigative report on the institutionalization of ethnic bias in governmental offices.

According to the report, the majority ethnic tribe (Pashtun) has disproportionately high percentage of positions in government offices while other tribes are kept on the fringes.

For example in the office of president's chief of staff, Pashtun constitute 53%, Tajik 44%, Hazara 3%, Bayat 2% and other ethnic people like Uzbek, Turkman, Baloches, Pashae, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Noristani, Hindu, Gajar, Pamiri, Tatar and Arab have absolutely no presence.

Activists believe this quote-based system is the first step in dividing a nation and its geography.

"If things continue like this, we will go beyond the definition of a nation and a country, and it will bring a sense of pessimism, superiority and weakness among the ethnic groups of the country," says Ghalib.

"Here, the definitions of national value become obscure, giving rise to a sense of alienation among some ethnicities," he further adds.

India's war-crazy TV media stoops to new low

1 → Following the release of Indian pilot Abhinandan, who was captured by the Pakistan army after his jet was downed, Republic carried a self-congratulatory headline: "Titanic win for India: Pakistan to release IAF's Wing Commander Abhinandan tomorrow, crumbling under unprecedented pressure from India".

Without acknowledging the 'peace gesture' of Pakistani premier Imran Khan, who displayed exemplary statesmanship by announcing the release of captured pilot and extended an olive branch to Modi, Republic and other run-of-the-mill Indian news channels gave its credit to Modi.

During three days when war frenzy was at its peak, Indian television studios resembled the frontlines of war with news anchors donning army fatigues and brandishing toy guns. It was so preposterous that some people on social media suggested them to channelize their anger at the border by participating in the real war.

There was a shrill competition of who shouts and screams louder to pass the ultimate test of patriotism. Some of these TV anchors thundered that "Pakistan has to be taught a lesson", with decibel levels consistently shooting upwards.

'Pakistan's propaganda busted', screamed

a headline from a TV screen of one news channel as news anchor interviewed a retired army officer who 'analysed' the downing of Indian 'vintage jet'.

On Hindi news channel Aaj Tak, a special show was aired with half a dozen 'experts' dishing out their views on how to "bring Pakistan to its knees" and "remove the cancer once and for all."

Even before the news about the release of Abhinandan broke out, one Indian news channel anchor yelled from his air-conditioned TV studio - "Imran Khan, you bloody well return our pilot, and do it with an apology".

Amidst the frenzy and drumbeating for war, India's well-known media personality Pritish Nandy tweeted about his perennial confusion: "I am a little confused as to who is fighting the war against Pakistan. The brave Indian army or the shrieking TV journalists out to show their fake nationalism?"

Writing in The Wire, senior journalist Sidharth Bhatia, said the aggressive campaign against perceived 'enemies of the nation' aligned closely with the agenda of Modi-led government.

"The television channels – at least some of them – appear to be in a coordinated effort to build up a particular mood and narrative, one which suits the government," he wrote.

Putting things into perspective, veteran Hindi journalist Ravish Kumar in a speech delivered on February 24 in New Delhi, before the surgical strikes, said the mainstream media in India launched its "national curriculum" as soon as the Modi government came to power in 2014.

"At its core was the idea of ensuring a continual process of Hindu-Muslim divide. For that, it was necessary to create a growing sense of division among citizens. So, the media has been trying to break the people's very awareness of the idea of citizenship," said Kumar, who is known for his independent views.

"Since information and questioning are the basis of citizenship, the possibility of either has been severely curtailed. Our mainstream media does not question the government; on the contrary, it interrogates the people on behalf of the government," he further said.

In his column for Bloomberg, globally renowned author and commentator Pankaj Mishra blasted India's 'jingoistic' television media.

"The jingoistic mass media brazenly dissembles, social media offers easy escape to many from deep feelings of inadequacy into grandiose notions of self and nation," he said. "Having a skillful self-publicist in power has

only accelerated a stunningly widespread descent in India into self-aggrandizing fantasy."

Indian film actress and social activist Nandita Das said the Indian (television) media has proved to be a "propaganda machine of BJP, referring to Modi's party.

Top filmmaker Mahesh Bhat also denounced the war hysteria generated by India's television media. "Cruelty has always fascinated man. The gladiators used to fill the entire colosseum with crazy people baying for blood. Our TV channels pander to that savage side of man," he tweeted.

"Of course, the anchors in their sickeningly uniform (pun intended) discourse will have none of this and neither will the old generals to whom they pay handsome honorariums along with tea and biscuits to sound the war bugle in their studios," wrote journalist Pamela Philipose in The Wire.

During Hitler's time, Joseph Goebbels served as the head of the 'Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda', which controlled all forms of media and severely punished those who didn't follow the 'dictum'.

In India, there is no need of a Goebbels, as media willfully toes the official line and turns truth into lies and lies into truth, thus making mockery of the sacrosanct values and principles of journalism.

Europe not to support any military action against Iran: UK pundit

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A political analyst based in London highlighted the European Union's unwillingness to back U.S. President Donald Trump's position on Iran and said the EU does not support any military action against Tehran or any move to "asphyxiate the Iranian economy".

"...I am told in the private meetings with the American representatives that Europe does not support any sort of military action against Iran or any action designed to try to asphyxiate the Iranian economy," Marcus Papadopoulos said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

Papadopoulos is a political expert and the publisher and editor of Politics First, a non-partisan publication for the UK Parliament. He earned his MA in Modern History and his Ph.D. in Russian history from Royal Holloway, University of London. His comments and interviews have appeared in various news outlets, including RT, Al Jazeera, Rossiya 24, TASS and RIA Novosti.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Tensions have grown in recent months between the U.S. and its closest allies in the EU over various issues, including Iran, which was underlined at a recent U.S.-backed conference on the Middle East in Poland that was largely sidestepped by many European governments. What do you think about U.S. President Donald Trump's foreign policy that has strained the transatlantic relations?

A: Well, it's certainly the case that Donald Trump is polarizing both America and Europe and he is polarizing both continents in terms of his domestic policy and his foreign policy. Now, regarding the latter, his foreign policy, when it comes to his antagonistic stance on Iran, Europe does not wish to follow him in what could eventually end up being a military crusade led by America against Iran. So, the most recent example of Europe's unwillingness to back Trump's position on Iran was the conference in Poland which we can say was quite simply an anti-Iran conference. This conference was a miserable abject failure because the only countries who sent senior representatives were the (Persian) Gulf dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia. The European representatives there were low level and the European representatives did make it clear during the meeting and also I am told in the private meetings with the American representatives that Europe does not support any sort of military action against Iran or any action designed to try to asphyxiate the Iranian economy. Indeed, the host nation of this conference, Poland, said that the Polish government supports the Iran nuclear deal. So that leaves Trump in somewhat of an awkward position because yes, he has the backing of the (Persian) Gulf dictatorships against Iran, yes, he has the backing of Israel against Iran but he doesn't have the backing of Europe.



So, what can he do next? Well, there are a number of steps available to him and probably the most powerful option at his disposal is to threaten those companies in Europe, for example, Germany and France to threaten them in order to deter them from trading and investing in Iran and he could be successful on that count. How? Because American representatives who say privately and in no uncertain terms to those European companies which are doing a lot of business with Iran that they have a choice: they either keep on trading with Iran or they trade with America. If they keep on trading with Iran then they could very well jeopardize their access to the American market. Now, of course, that is bully-boy tactics that is not in accordance with international law (and) not in accordance with the United Nations Charter. However, if push comes to shove my fear and my suspicion is that a lot of those companies operating in as I say Germany, for example, could decide that the American market is just far too important to them than the Iranian market. That's not to be disrespectful to the Iranian market. The Iranian economy is quite a robust one and it offers a lot in terms of trade to other countries in the world. However, you can't compare the Iranian market to the American market. The American economy is a superpower. The American market has 300 million people. So Europe does not support Trump's stance on Iran. Europe is most unlikely to support any military campaign that Trump could launch against Iran but Europe is vulnerable to American pressure to stop trading with Iran.

■ The Trump administration's foreign policies are also slammed by top US officials. Recently, Speaker of the U.S. House of

Representatives Nancy Pelosi described the administration's general approach toward Iran, including Washington's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, as "completely wrong". Do you believe other U.S. officials would cooperate with the Trump administration in implementing its policies?

A: Well, I find it refreshing to know that there are people on Capitol Hill who are still steadfast in their support to the Iran nuclear deal though these people have no love through Iran but nonetheless they are still supporting the Iran nuclear deal and they are speaking out against Trump's aggressive approach to Iran. That is something to celebrate. That is positive news in my opinion. However, if and this is a big if, if Trump was to try to bring about some sort of subversive act in Iran and if American media would back Trump on the pretext that this covert operation in Iran, this subversive operation, is designed to bring freedom back to the Iranian people, I do suspect that those people on Capitol Hill who are supportive of the Iran nuclear deal, will support Trump's actions against Iran in that scenario. Indeed, I believe one of the things that unite both Democrats and Republicans is their hostility towards Iran. I believe both parties given an opportunity would relish the chance to overthrow the Iranian government, to destroy the Iranian Revolution, and to return Iran to how it was in the days of the Shah namely a client state because that would massively boost America's influence in the Middle East (and) massively strengthen America's hold over the Middle East and of course, that sort of scenario would put quite a smile on the faces of Saudi Arabia and Israel. So yes, it is good news that there are people on Capitol Hill who are still supporting

the Iran nuclear deal but do I trust them when it comes to respecting Iran's independence and sovereignty? No, I don't. Do I trust them when it comes to speaking out, voting against any American attempts to intervene to interfere in Iran either directly or indirectly? No, I don't. America when it comes to Iran cannot be trusted. Indeed America can never be trusted when it comes to Iran.

■ The White House made a massive blunder after claiming European leaders applauded when Vice President Mike Pence dropped Trump's name in a speech. Pence was speaking at the Munich Security Conference in Germany when he passed on Trump's regards to the dignitaries gathered. The 59-year-old paused for several moments, waiting for a response, but the crowd remained silent. Do not you think that it is another sign of the strained transatlantic relations? How do you predict the European countries' future reactions to the conflicting policies adopted by the Trump administration?

A: Well it's certainly the case that the recent Munich conference did not go well for the Americans. It proved to be a very awkward embarrassing experience for Mike Pence and indeed, there was a lot of tension in the audience in particular from European representatives because Europe does not like being told what to do by Trump.

Europe does not like bully-boy tactics which are being employed against it by Trump. Europe does not want to jeopardize or damage its lucrative trade with Iran and of course, Europe is a lot closer to Iran than what America is and in the event of a war, an American-led war, against Iran which would return the region into a fireball, which would have horrendous consequences for Europe, European leaders do not wish to see European security threatened by that scenario. So, the Munich conference was another reminder to the White House that all is not well in relations between America and Europe but that sense, however, when it comes to Venezuela, Europe largely speaking is supportive of America's stance, America's attempts to instigate a coup in Venezuela against a democratically elected president. So yes, we must applaud Europe when it comes to Iran but Europe will also support America when it comes to other countries in the world which perhaps Europe doesn't have such good close relations with and in that respect, I'm afraid to say that Europe can't be trusted because if Europe was sincerely committed to the United Nations Charter, an international law in general, then it would not be supporting America's stance on Venezuela, it would not be supporting the totally politically and electorally illegitimate Juan Guaido. Europe would be supporting Nicolas Maduro. So, you know it pains me to have to say this but once again Europe is playing a major role in the violation of international law and in stoking conflict in another country.

Saudi-Israeli ties serving U.S. regional interests: ex-UN official

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A former official at the United Nations and professor of international law highlighted reasons behind Saudi Arabia's recent overt and covert measures to develop its ties with Israel and said both Riyadh and Tel Aviv are, in fact, serving Washington's interests in the region.

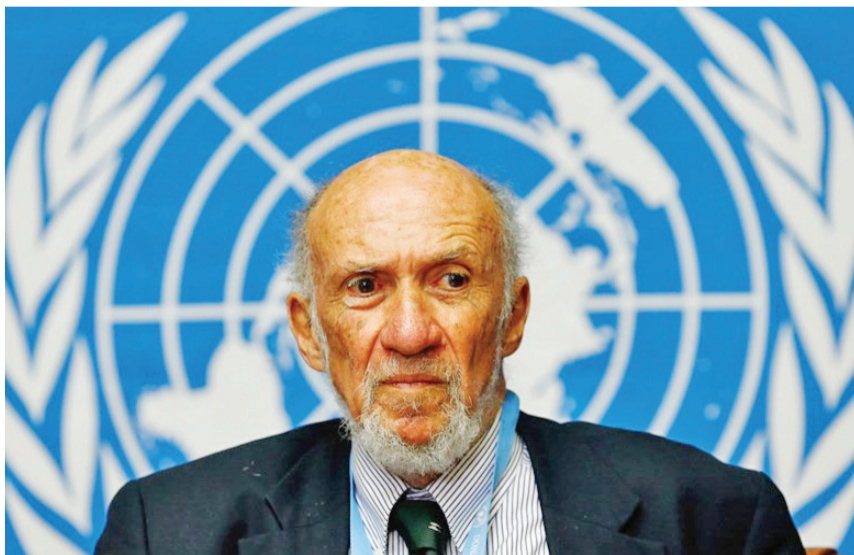
"...Since Trump became president in the United States, for the Saudis and Israelis to join forces was also a way of serving U.S. strategic interests in the region, which sought to end the Arab/Israel conflict and to build a coalition together with Riyadh and Tel Aviv that was aggressively hostile to Iran, dedicated to curbing its regional influence and destabilizing its internal governance structure," Richard A. Falk said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

Professor Richard Anderson Falk is the author or co-author of 20 books and the editor or co-editor of another 20 volumes. In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) appointed him to a six-year term as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on "the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967".

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you know, the Israeli and Saudi regimes do not have any official diplomatic relations but media reports have surfaced indicating extensive behind-the-scenes diplomatic and intelligence cooperation between the two. In your opinion, what goals is Riyadh pursuing by getting closer to Tel Aviv?

A: It has been clear to close observers for several years that the Saudi leadership perceived its vital national interests as served by developing positive relations with Israel. At the same time, it was politically risky for the Saudis to make this turn toward Israel too overt as the Palestinian struggle continued to have strong and intense support among the population, including in Saudi Arabia and



throughout the Persian Gulf. Israel was, of course, receptive to such Saudi initiatives. This receptivity reflected the strong shared interest of the two regimes in confronting Iran, and especially since Trump became president in the United States, for the Saudis and Israelis to join forces was also a way of serving U.S. strategic interests in the region, which sought to end the Arab/Israel conflict and to build a coalition together with Riyadh and Tel Aviv that was aggressively hostile to Iran, dedicated to curbing its regional influence and destabilizing its internal governance structure.

Furthermore, Riyadh is preoccupied, above all, with its own regime stability, and interprets every issue from this perspective. By moving closer to Israel, it also protects itself against standard Israeli policy of trying to weaken important states in the region by supporting radical opposition movements

through a variety of covert mechanisms of intervention.

■ Recently, some media reports revealed secret links between top Saudi officials, including Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir, and the Israeli spy agency, Mossad. Can we say that Israel has managed to infiltrate into Saudi Arabia and is dictating its policies to Riyadh? How do you see the future of relations between the two?

A: It is very difficult for an outsider like myself to have any real knowledge about such maneuvers involving transnational links among intelligence agencies. We do know that Israel is fully capable of both entering into positive inter-governmental relations with Saudi Arabia and at the same time hedging its bets by infiltrating its main governmental ministries. There are some indications that the anti-Palestinian assertions of Moham-

med bin Salman were encouraged by both Israeli and American intelligence, and were reinforced by a variety of incentives, including pledges made to Riyadh to assist in the development of a Saudi nuclear program, which would include at least a threshold capability to produce nuclear weapons in a matter of months.

■ Generally speaking, how do you think about Saudi policies in the Middle East, including normalization of ties with Israel, and do you believe that regional countries would follow suit? If they would do so, how much are they ready to pay?

A: I definitely believe there is a trend in the Arab world, especially among the (Persian) Gulf countries, to seek normalization of relations with Israel, and as suggested above joint action on behalf of common interests. These initiatives also reflect the view that Israel has prevailed in its struggle with the Palestinian national movement, an approach encouraged by a variety of U.S. anti-Palestinian moves, particularly the move of the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem in defiance of the international consensus. On this basis, Arab willingness to normalize relations with Israel can be interpreted as a realist adjustment to the outcome of the long conflict. I believe such an interpretation overlooks the persistence of Palestinian resistance, as recently expressed by the sustained Great March of Return, by the spreading BDS Campaign, and by the growing global solidarity movement that affirms the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for basic rights, especially the right of self-determination. The conditions throughout the Arab World are also vulnerable to a new series of uprisings, a Second Arab Spring, this time with a revolutionary vision of how to construct a more democratic governance structure and defend the process against internal enemies and external interveners.

Ambiguity in European economic leadership

1 → After the country's month-long demonstrations, Macron was forced to retreat from his decision on raising the fuel price. Besides, he had no way but to make promises to the French citizens on issues such as raising the minimum wages and reducing the income tax. This had but one meaning: Macron's economic reforms came to an end. Right now, European authorities know well that Macron is incapable of regaining his initial power in France and the Eurozone by 2022 (the time for the France general elections).

Therefore, Macron has to forget the dream of EU's economic leadership until the last moments of his presence at the Elysees Palace. Of course, this is if the young French president isn't forced to resign before 2022! The European authorities and the Eurozone leaders have no alternative for Macron and his economic reforms in Europe. That's why they're so worried about the emergence of anti-EU movements in countries such as France and Germany.

For example, they are well aware that if Marin Le Pen can defeat Macron and come to power in France during the upcoming elections, then the whispers of the collapse of the Eurozone, and even the European Union, will be clearly heard, this time with a loud voice, all over the Europe.

Joint logistics companies key to boost North-South Corridor's capacity

1 → The 164-kilometer-long stretch was a missing link in INSTC, which will connect Iran with Russia's Baltic ports and give Russia rail connectivity to both the Persian Gulf and the Indian rail network.

The minister added that concurrent with the inauguration of the Qazvin-Rasht railway, the construction of the Rasht-Asara railroad will commence, opening new opportunities for the entire Eurasian region. He added that the construction of Chabahar-Zahedan railway is currently underway, which will connect the country's northern and southern ports and borders upon the completion.

Eslami further said plans are high on the agenda to link the country's eastern and western points so as to multiply the corridor's capacity. INSTC is a major transit route designed to facilitate the transportation of goods from Mumbai in India to Helsinki in Finland, using Iranian ports and railroads, which the Islamic Republic plans to connect to those of Azerbaijan and Russia.

Once completed, goods could be transported from Mumbai to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and further to Baku. They could then pass across the Russian border into Astrakhan before proceeding to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and then on to Europe.

INSTC would substantially cut the travel time for everything from Asian consumer goods to Central Eurasia's natural resources to advanced European exports. The multimodal route is estimated to reduce the time and cost of transportation of goods between India and Europe from 40 to 15 days. The corridor is said to have the potential of delivering up to 10 million tons of India-Europe trade via its transportation network.

Hezbollah stronger, more successful than ever: U.S. scholar

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American political commentator said a decision by London to impose a full ban on the activities of the Lebanese Hezbollah was made because the resistance movement is bigger, stronger, and more successful than ever, a fact that "drives the Zionists (and their supporters) crazy".

"The Zionist-dominated West is panicking at the failure of their regime change project in Syria. And the Zionists are still smarting from the wounds of their 2006 defeat at the hands of Hezbollah. Now Hezbollah is bigger, stronger, and more successful than ever. This drives the Zionists crazy," Kevin Barrett told Tasnim in an interview.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid said recently that the government will designate the entire Hezbollah organization as a terrorist entity. The UK had previously blacklisted Hezbollah's military apparatus as a "terrorist group". What's your take on the move by the British government?

A: I am appalled but not surprised. The UK move ignores the definition of terrorism, which is: "a military tactic consisting of intentionally targeting civilians to induce fear." So a terrorist group is any group that uses this tactic. The British military, throughout history, has been a terrorist group—possibly the worst one ever. (Just ask the descendants of the millions of Irish who were intentionally starved in the 1845-1849 genocide, during which British troops stole and exported Ireland's food.) Hezbollah, by contrast, is an anti-terrorist group. Its whole purpose is to fight the systematic terrorism practiced by the Zionists and takfiris. In fighting the region's worst terrorists, Hezbollah does not itself use the tactic of terrorism. So labeling Hezbollah "terrorist" is an outrageous lie.

■ What is the main reason behind the decision given the fact that Hezbollah is a resistance movement against terrorism and Zionism?

A: The Zionist-dominated West is panicking at the failure of their regime change project in Syria. And the Zionists are still smarting from the wounds of their 2006 defeat at the hands of Hezbollah. Now Hezbollah is bigger, stronger, and more successful than ever. This drives the Zionists crazy. So they are lashing out ineffectually in various ways. Such childish name-calling, in which the spoiled British brat insults Hezbollah by using the T-word, communicates nothing except the desperation and immaturity of the British themselves. This move will have little effect other than to increase Hezbollah's popularity in the region, where people have had memories of the horrors of British and Western imperialism.

■ Israel and Saudi Arabia have hailed the move by London. Why?

A: Israel and Saudi Arabia are the worst terrorists in the region. The Zionists systematically target Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. And Saudi Arabia sponsors extremist takfiri groups that also systematically target civilians. So both of these two terrorist regimes are happy to see powerful Western countries lying about who the real terrorists are.

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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.

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Some 1,200 stem cell transplants performed in Iran annually

1 → Iran is also on the top list in the region for liver transplant with about 700 surgery per year nationwide, he said.

According to a statistic released by the Worldwide Network for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (WBM), a total of one million stem cell transplants (bone marrow, peripheral blood or umbilical cord blood) have been performed worldwide. This intervention is fundamental for thousands of people who every year fight against haematological malignancies like leukaemia, for example.

WBM has announced this milestone achieved at the end of 2012. The WBM is a non-profit scientific organization whose goal is to promote excellence in the fields of stem cell transplantation, hematopoietic donors and cellular therapy.

History of stem cell transplants
The first autologous stem cell transplant was undergone by Dr. E. Donnall

Thomas in 1957. Dr. Thomas, who passed away recently, received the Medicine Nobel prize in 1990 for the pioneer use of this treatment.

At the end of 1960, because the knowledge of histocompatibility needs between patients and donors evolved, allogeneic transplants (where the stem cells come from a donor) were already being performed successfully. The first allogeneic transplants were performed with a compatible sibling's stem cells.

In 1973, in New York, the first successful transplant between two non-related people was performed, when a young boy received a stem cell transplant from a non-related donor identified compatible through a Danish blood bank. In 1988, the first umbilical cord blood transplant was done effectively in Paris.

Today, more than 70 malignant and



Currently, 18 centers for stem cell transplantation are active in different parts of Iran offering services to patients.

non-malignant diseases are typically treated with a stem cell transplant. This intervention, which is perfected day by

day, has offered more and better opportunities for many patients, especially leukaemia and lymphoma patients.

Legal age to buy cigarettes should be raised from 18 to 21, MPs say

The legal smoking age should be increased to 21 according to MPs who are calling for a crackdown on tobacco giants and cigarette use in TV as part of efforts to build a smoke-free generation.

As well as raising the legal age for buying tobacco from 18, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Smoking and Health said the tobacco industry should face levies which reflected the habit's cost to society.

This funding should be funneled towards stop-smoking initiatives, while tobacco duty should be raised to make smoking less affordable.

Council-run cessation services have seen significant cuts in recent years and GP prescribing of nicotine products has also dropped, leading to fears that progress in reducing smoking could stall.

The APPG said the 2017 Tobacco Control Plan's reliance on cash-strapped local authorities to help bring about a



smoke-free generation was unrealistic.

The APPG chairman, Conservative MP Bob Blackman,

said: "Smoking remains the leading cause of premature death and health inequalities.

"Ratcheting up tobacco regulation further and faster is essential to achieve the government's vision for prevention, to increase healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035 while reducing inequalities between the richest and poorest in society."

Campaigners said that experimentation with smoking led to a fatal habit in two thirds of people, but was less common in people over the age of 21.

Campaigners also believe that "Big Tobacco" firms should be charged a levy to pay for the costs of tobacco control, which could raise £150 million, and taxes on tobacco should be raised to 5 per cent above inflation, with an equal surcharge added to both loose tobacco and manufactured cigarettes.

(Source: The Independent)

New parents don't get enough sleep for six years after a child is born

Those first three months with a newborn can be rough, but researchers say sleep deprivation is an issue with parents for years.

New parents are sometimes shocked to discover how little sleep they get in the first six months after a baby is born.

They might also be discouraged to learn that their sleep patterns might not return to normal until that newborn is ready for kindergarten.

A new study published in the journal Sleep found that both parental sleep satisfaction and sleep duration sharply declined after childbirth, hitting their lowest point when a baby is 3 months old.

Women's sleep duration and quality were far more affected than men, whether or not they breastfed their child.

Women lost an average of one hour of sleep nightly compared to what they got prior to pregnancy, while men lost about 15 minutes of sleep per night.

Sakari Lemola, PhD, an associate professor at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom and a corresponding author of the study, said this may reflect the reality "that mothers are still more often in the role of the primary caregiver than fathers."

Moreover, "following the sharp decline in sleep satisfaction and duration in the first months postpartum, neither mothers' nor fathers' sleep fully recovers to prepregnancy levels up to 6 years after the birth of their first child," concluded researchers from the German Institute for Economic Research, the University of Warwick, and West Virginia University.

Even four to six years after childbirth, mothers were getting 20 minutes less sleep per night than before they became pregnant, while fathers were still getting 15 minutes less sleep.

"The short-term effects of childbirth on parental sleep is well known. Our study just confirmed these effects," Lemola told Healthline. "However, it was largely unexpected to find decreased sleep duration and sleep satisfaction six years after birth."

"The long-term decrease by 20 minutes on average is not a major decrease, but still it can make you more tired," he added. "We expected that sleep would have normalized at that time."

Sleep was more affected among first-time parents than among parents with more than one child.

"Each adult should be getting between seven and nine hours of quality sleep per night," Bill Fish, a certified sleep science coach and co-founder of the website tuck.com, told Healthline. "The problem is that a newborn isn't quite aware of those recommendations."

The findings were based on interviews of 4,659 parents who had a child between 2008 and 2015.

(Source: healthline.com)



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Out of the 80 countries I've visited Iran was one of my all-time favorites

By Caroline Lupini

There are some great deals available from some U.S. cities to Tehran, Iran, right now. If you've been thinking about traveling to Iran this year, these are probably the best prices you're going to see! Iran doesn't make the top of the list for many people's vacation destinations, but it truly is a beautiful and fascinating country full of some of the friendliest people I have ever met.



Even though the country gets a bad rap in Western media, you'll find yourself feeling safe and welcome as a tourist, and you'll see some incredible sights like Shiraz's pink mosque and Persepolis. If you'll be traveling on a U.S. passport, Iran not only requires you to get a visa before your visit, but also requires you to travel on a pre-arranged tour with an approved tour operator — this requirement also holds for anyone traveling on a UK or Canadian passport. Getting a visa can be a bit of a process, but in general, if you allow yourself enough time you shouldn't run into any problems. Many other nationalities are offered a visa on arrival into Tehran International Airport.

(Source: Business Insider)

Japanese craftsman makes ancient art 'new' again

A hostess pours sake for Hiroto Rakusho in the private bar of one of Kyoto's long-established ochaya teahouses, where geishas entertain visitors with traditional song and dance. Suddenly Rakusho erupts into a belly laugh, eliciting elegant giggles from several kimono-clad women. This rarefied atmosphere might be incongruous for a laid-back contemporary artist wearing chic, flowing garb he has designed himself, were it not for Rakusho's family history. He is not only a guest at the bar, but a neighbor and member of the close-knit community of Kyoto artisans and custodians of its traditions. His abundant good humor belies a struggle to find a new direction for ancient artistic conventions -- specifically, he is redefining what it means to be a traditional gold-leaf artist certified by the government as a Master of Traditional Handicrafts. Born the eldest son of the Nishiyama artisan family in Kyoto's Nishijin district, Rakusho, now 57, was expected to assume his father's name and occupation -- creating ornate gold leaf brocade obi sashes, which form a crucial part of kimono dress. "The Nishijin area is located in northwest Kyoto and is the traditional weaving district, dating back many centuries," Rakusho explained over tea and sweet bean cakes at his studio worktable. "I was born into a world filled with gold and silver and surrounded by the beauty of Japanese arts."

(Source: nikkei.com)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Garamba National Park

Covering vast grass savannas and woodlands interspersed with gallery forests and marshland depressions, Garamba National Park is located in the north-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the transition zone between the dense tropical forests of the Congo Basin and the Guinea-Sudano savannas.



It contains the last worldwide population of the northern white rhinoceros, endemic sub-species of Congolese giraffe and a mixed population of elephants, combining forest elephants, bush elephants and individuals demonstrating morphological characteristics common to the two elephant sub-species. It is also characterized by an exceptionally high level of biomass of great herbivores as a result of the vegetation productivity of the environment. Extending over 490,000 ha and surrounded by 752,700 ha of three hunting grounds that contribute to an effective protection of the property against threats from the adjacent area, this property is an outstanding sanctuary with its unusual mix of large spectacular mammals. Garamba National Park is delineated to the east, south and west by major rivers that constitute natural and precise boundaries, recognized by all. To the north, it shares its boundaries with the Lantoto National Park in South Sudan, offering interesting possibilities of protection on the transfrontier and regional level. In a virgin landscape, no human presence or installations were indicated in the Park at the time of the nomination and the peripheral population was sparse.

(Source: UNESCO)

Holding joint exhibits can help nations promote peace: Iran tourism chief

TOURISM TEHRAN — People of the world can realize that Iranians are kind, peaceful and [deeply] rooted in history by the means of joint exhibitions which makes nations more acquainted with each other, brings them closer and [consequently] advocates global peace, Iran tourism chief Ali-Asghar Mounesan said on Tuesday. "Collective museum exhibits, in the turbulent atmosphere of today's world, are among measures that can help peace," Mounesan added. He made the remarks in a meeting with Madrid's ambassador to Tehran, Eduardo Lopez Busquets, CHTN reported. "Through reflecting cultural themes, nations can be brought closer together, and in this way, they can acquire real knowledge of each other... our country is unjustly propagated by negative views and [is under] economic pressure, because we want to be independent... one of our important missions is to demonstrate the facts." Mounesan, who doubles as vice president, said "We hope that the exhibition of Iranian historical relics in Spain, starting on March 14, to be welcomed by the Spaniards." The tourism chief also called for more cultural ties with Spain, noting "There are areas of cooperation between Iran and Spain in the



"Collective museum exhibits, in the turbulent atmosphere of today's world, are among measures that can help peace."

Tehran, Tokyo discuss organizing cultural events

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iran's tourism chief and Japan's ambassador to Tehran on Tuesday discussed organizing joint cultural events by the two countries, IRNA reported. Cultural cooperation among governments and nations can help global peace and friendship under current conditions, Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan said in a Tehran meeting with Mitsuo Saito. "I believe that cultural issues can bring governments and nations closer to each other and strengthen their relations." Mounesan stressed the need for deepening mutual ties, saying Iran and Japan have long-standing and excellent ties with each other and the Iranian nation has a good feeling

towards Japanese people... So they can continue their cultural cooperation. "We are interested to reciprocally organize cultural nights and our museum palaces, including Sa'adabad and Niavaran, are ready to host such events," Mounesan stated. The envoy, for his part, referred to significance of cultural ties between the two nations, saying that Japan is ready for cooperation in all fields, particularly culture. Saito further noted that common museum-related assistance and holding cultural festivals can be served as areas of mutual collaboration. "During the time I am in Iran, I concluded that the Iranian people are familiar with the Japanese people and have good feeling towards them," he said.

Museum displaying decades of archaeological discoveries in Iran



HERITAGE TEHRAN — Selects of objects unearthed in Iran over the four past decades have been put on show at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran. Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan opened the exhibit on Tuesday, CHTN reported. Running through April 9, the exhibit features historical relics from 31 provinces including Isfahan, Yazd, Tehran,

Gilan and Kerman. The enigmatic evidence of human presence on the Iranian plateau is as early as Lower Paleolithic times, according to Britannica Encyclopedia. The first well-documented evidence of human habitation is in deposits from several excavated cave and rock-shelter sites, located mainly in the Zagros Mountains of western Iran and dated to Middle Paleolithic or Mousterian times (c. 100,000 BC).

Iranian medical centers, travel marketers to attend Oman fair

International Medical Tourism Exhibition & Conference

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TOURISM TEHRAN — A number of Iranian medical centers and travel marketers will take part at Oman's upcoming International Medical Tourism Exhibition & Conference. The event, which will be held at Muscat's Al Falaj Hotel from April 22 to 24, will also host hospital groups and medical tourism organizations from Malaysia, Thailand, Germany and India, among other countries. The interesting part of this Inter-

national Medical Tourism Exhibition is more than being a B2B; it's a B2C, which would bring in more footfalls of locals and expats, Muscat Daily reported. Medical tourism made Iran an economic contribution of around \$1.2 billion in the last Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), attracting around 300,000 medical tourists. The country has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around two million in [calendar year] 1404.

Global travel industry seen 'resilient' despite slowing growth

The global travel industry is likely to expand by 4 percent in 2019 despite slowing economic growth in key areas such as China and Europe, but a no-deal Brexit could wipe out 700,000 travel-related jobs, a top industry association said on Tuesday. The travel and tourism sector grew 3.9 percent to \$8.8 trillion (6.7 trillion pounds) in 2018, accounting for 10.5 percent of global gross domestic product, and outpacing global GDP growth of 3.2 percent, Gloria Guevara, president and chief executive of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), told Reuters. Based on data from 185 countries, the group forecasts steady growth of 4 percent this year, given continued demand from China, the second largest travel and tourism market behind the United States, and other countries in Asia. "Every crisis impacts the numbers, but this sector is very resilient," Guevara said, noting that expansion in the travel and tourism sector traditionally outpaced global GDP growth. Britain and the United States were two of few countries in which travel and tourism underperformed economic growth,



Tourists are seen at St. Mark's Square in Venice, Italy, April 15, 2108. (REUTERS/Manuel Silvestri)

Travel and tourism's contribution to Britain's gross domestic product grew by just 1 percent in 2018, while overall GDP expanded 1.4 percent. The sector accounted for \$311 billion in GDP in 2018, or about 11 percent of overall GDP. If Britain leaves the EU without an agreement, it could lose 300,000 jobs, with an additional 400,000 jobs likely to disappear elsewhere in Europe, she said. A rebound would depend "on how soon they can fix the situation," she said, noting such a development would also keep Britain from benefiting fully from the expected creation of over 100 million jobs in the sector over the next 12 years. In the United States, travel and tourism as a percentage of GDP grew 2.2 percent last year, while the overall economy expanded 2.9 percent, the association reported. It said the travel and tourism sectors in Turkey, China, India, Thailand and France reported the highest growth rates in 2018, with Turkey reporting growth of 15 percent as it continued to recover from a sharp downturn after the 2016 failed coup.

(Source: Euronews)

American Airlines is considering direct flights to India and Africa

It's true, there are plenty of low-cost, no-name international air carriers that get the job done. But there's a level of quality, safety, and service you can expect when flying the three major U.S.-based, legacy airlines: Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and American Airlines. Via these airlines

and their partners you can travel the globe, but according to Skift this link opens in a new tab, American Airlines lacks the global footprint of its two competitors. That all may change in 2020, when 47 Boeing 787 Dreamliners begin to arrive and are put to use by American. Vasu Raja, the

airline's vice president for planning, told Skift, "That's the airplane that is going to take us eventually to India and into Africa, and into markets which are very different from the ones that we have been in historically, but ones we believe will be very profitable." This move is a long time coming for the

airline that has been more conservative than its competitors in building international reach. American Airlines has a robust flight schedule to Europe and South America, but hasn't had much success in new international markets.

(Source: travelandleisure.com)

Ocean heat waves are threatening marine life, new study suggests

When deadly heat waves hit on land, we hear about them. But the oceans can have heat waves, too. They are now happening far more frequently than they did last century and are harming marine life, according to a new study.

The study, in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, looked at the impact of marine heat waves on the diversity of life in the ocean. From coral reefs to kelp forests to sea grass beds, researchers found that these heat waves were destroying the framework of many ocean ecosystems.

Marine heat waves are said to occur when sea temperatures are much warmer than normal for at least five consecutive days.

Scientists estimate that the oceans have absorbed more than 90 percent of the heat trapped by excess greenhouse gases since midcentury. Humans have added these gases to the atmosphere largely by burning fossil fuels, like coal and natural gas, for energy.

An earlier study by some of the same researchers found that, from 1925 to 2016, marine heat waves became, on average, 34 percent more frequent and 17 percent longer. Over all, there were 54 percent more days per year with marine heat waves globally.

Warmer ocean temperatures

The most severe years tended to be El Niño years. Warmer ocean temperatures are one of the characteristics of an El Niño pattern.

"There's also some indication that El Niños have been getting more extreme with climate change," said Eric C. J. Oliver, an assistant professor of physical oceanography at Dal-



housie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, who was a co-author of the study. But regional marine heat waves can happen even without an El Niño, he said.

As ocean heat waves proliferate, problems will mount for people who depend on fishing

and fish farming, or aquaculture, said Gretchen Hofmann, chairwoman of the department of ecology, evolution and marine biology at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

"If you look at geography, lots of the world's population lives on the coast," said Dr. Hof-

As ocean heat waves proliferate, problems will mount for people who depend on fishing and fish farming, or aquaculture, says lead author Gretchen Hofmann.

mann, who was not involved in the study. "Commercial fisheries, but also aquaculture facilities on the coast, will face challenges as ocean water changes. Heat waves are not great for aquaculture production."

The study's authors found many parts of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans where aquatic life was especially vulnerable. These areas were home to a lot of biological diversity and had plants and animals that were already living in the warmer parts of their ranges. They were also affected by other human impacts like pollution and overfishing.

Marine heat waves

Even seabirds did not emerge from marine heat waves unscathed, most likely because their food sources either died off or moved in response to the warming.

But perhaps the biggest surprise was the significant loss of what biologists call foundational species, like coral reefs, sea grasses and kelp forests. They support the diversity of aquatic life by providing shelter from predators, moderating temperatures and acting as food sources. When they disappear, the entire ecosystem disappears along with them.

Climate change "may be a gradual process, but set on that backdrop are these extreme warming events that might be becoming more common that can have more dramatic consequences," said Robert Miller, an associate research biologist at the Marine Science Institute of the University of California, Santa Barbara, who was not involved in the study.

(Source: NYT)

Quantum monism could save the soul of physics, team finds

The "most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible," Albert Einstein famously once said. These days, however, it is far from being a matter of consensus that the universe is comprehensible, or even that it is unique. Fundamental physics is facing a crisis, related to two popular concepts that are frequently invoked, summarized tellingly by the buzzwords "multiverse" and "uglyverse."

Multiverse proponents advocate the idea that there may exist innumerable other universes, some of them with totally different physics and numbers of spatial dimensions; and that you, I and everything else may exist in countless copies. The "multiverse may be the most dangerous idea in physics" argues the South African cosmologist George Ellis.

Ever since the early days of science, finding an unlikely coincidence prompted an urge to explain, a motivation to search for the hidden reason behind it. One modern example: the laws of physics appear to be finely tuned to permit the existence of intelligent beings who can discover those laws — a coincidence that demands explanation.

Zillions of universes

With the advent of the multiverse, this has changed: As unlikely as a coincidence may appear, in the zillions of universes that compose the multiverse, it will exist somewhere. And if the coincidence seems to favor the emergence of complex structures, life or consciousness, we shouldn't even be surprised to find ourselves in a universe that allows us to exist in the first place. But this "anthropic reasoning" in turn implies that we can't predict anything anymore. There is no obvious guiding principle for the CERN physicists searching for new particles. And there is no fundamental law to be discovered behind the accidental properties of the universe.

Quite different but not less dangerous is the other challenge the "uglyverse": According to theoretical physicist Sabine Hossenfelder, modern physics has been led astray by its bias for "beauty," giving rise to mathematically elegant, speculative fantasies without any contact to experiment. Physics has been "lost in math," she argues. But then, what physicists call "beauty" are structures and symmetries.



If we can't rely on such concepts anymore, the difference between comprehension and a mere fit to experimental data will be blurred.

Both challenges have some justification. "Why should the laws of nature care what I find beautiful?" Hossenfelder rightly asks, and the answer is: They shouldn't. Of course, nature could be complicated, messy and incomprehensible — if it were classical. But nature isn't.

Quantum mechanics

Nature is quantum mechanical. And while classical physics is the science of our daily life where objects are separable, individual things, quantum mechanics is different. The condition of your car for example is not related to the color of your wife's dress. In quantum mechanics though, things that were in causal contact once remain correlated, described by Einstein as "spooky action at a distance." Such correlations constitute structure, and structure is beauty.

In contrast, the multiverse appears difficult to deny. Quantum mechanics in particular seems to be enamored with it. Firing individual electrons at a screen with two slits results in an interference pattern on a detector behind the screen. In each case, it appears that the electron went through both slits each time.

Quantum physics is the science behind nuclear explosions, smart phones and particle collisions — and it is infamous for its weirdness such as Schrödinger's cat existing in a limbo of being half dead and half alive. In quantum mechanics, different realities (such as "particle here" and "particle there" or "cat alive" and "cat dead") can be superimposed such as waves on the surface of a lake.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

Scientists show how new species arise in the sea

For a new species to evolve, two things are essential: a characteristic — such as a color — unique to one species and a mating preference for this characteristic. For example, individuals from a blue fish species prefer blue mates and individuals from a red fish species prefer red mates. If the two species interbreed, the process of sexual recombination is expected to destroy the coupling between color and mate preferences and form red individuals with a preference for blue mates and vice versa. This will prevent the two species from diverging, and this is one of the reasons why it has been thought for a long time that new species can only evolve in absolute isolation, without interbreeding.

However, the dynamics of this process depend on the exact number and location of genes underlying species characteristics and mate preferences, the strength of natural selection acting on these genes, and the amount of interbreeding between species.

In a new study, Professor Oscar Puebla from GEOMAR Helmholtz Center for Ocean Research Kiel in Germany together with colleagues from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama have found that natural selection can couple the evolution of genes for color pattern and mate preferences when species still interbreed.

The first challenge

To "address this question, the first challenge was to identify an animal group in which species are still young and interbreed, with clear species characteristics, and in which the bases of reproductive isolation are well understood", Oscar Puebla explains. The hamlets, a group of closely related reef fishes from the wider Caribbean, constitute exactly such a group. The hamlets are extremely close genetically, differ essentially in terms of color pattern, and are reproductively isolated through strong visually-based mate preferences.

A second difficulty is identifying the genes that underlie species differences and mate preferences. The authors of the



new study have assembled a reference genome for the hamlets and sequenced the whole genomes of 110 individuals from three species in Panama, Belize and Honduras. "This powerful dataset allowed us to identify four narrow regions of the genome that are highly and consistently differentiated among species in a backdrop of almost no genetic differentiation in the rest of the genome", co-author Kosmas Hench from GEOMAR says. In line with the ecology and reproductive biology of the hamlets, these four intervals include genes involved in vision and color pattern.

The data also show that vision and color pattern genes remain coupled despite the fact that they are located on three different chromosomes and that species still interbreed. Such a coupling had been previously reported when the two sets of genes are very close to each other on chromosomes, in which case they are protected from sexual recombination, but not when they are on different chromosomes. By capturing the very earliest stages of speciation in hamlets, the team shows how selection can contribute to the creation of new species.

"A lot of closely related coral reef fishes differ in little else but color and pattern," said Owen McMillan, co-author and academic dean at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. "I fully expect that the discoveries we have made in hamlets will apply to other forms of life and may ultimately explain the remarkable diversity of fishes on coral reefs around the world."

(Source: phys.org)

Nanotechnology and sunlight clear the way for better visibility

Anyone who skis, wears glasses, uses a camera or drives a car is familiar with the problem: if you come into a humid environment from the cold, your eyewear, camera lens or windshield can quickly fog up. Researchers at ETH Zurich have now developed a new transparent material coating that greatly reduces this effect. Just a few nanometers thick, their durable coating is made of gold nanoparticles embedded in non-conductive titanium oxide.

"Our coating absorbs the infrared component of sunlight along with a small part of the visible sunlight and converts the light into heat," explains Christopher Walker, a doctoral student in ETH Professor Dimos Poulikakos's group and lead author of the study. This heats the surface up by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius. It is this difference in temperature that prevents fogging.

Heat is also the answer to the problem of fogging on car windows. Warm air from the in-vehicle heating system heats the front windscreen, while the rear window is fitted with a grid of electrical heating elements. But unlike these methods, the ETH researchers' new coating works passively. Since the only energy source required is the sun, their coating is especially suitable for wearable items such as glasses and goggles.

Elfratros Mitridis, another doctoral student in Poulikakos's group, explains what makes the new surface coating so special: "Normally, it's dark surfaces that absorb light and convert it into heat," he says, "but we've created a transparent surface that has the same effect."

Condensation occurs on a surface whenever there is a sudden drop in temperature or increase in humidity, forming tiny droplets of water that disperse incident light in different directions in much the same way as atmospheric fog. As an alternative to using heat to prevent fogging, susceptible surfaces can be coated with hydrophilic agents. Because they attract water, these agents ensure that the condensation forms an even thin film of liquid over the surface rather than separate droplets. Anti-fog sprays for glasses usually work on this principle.

Now, tests have shown that when exposed to sunlight, fogged surfaces coated with gold nanoparticles and titanium oxide clear four times faster than surfaces treated with a normal anti-fog agent.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Passing stars may have kept a distant alien world tethered to its sun

We tend to think of our Solar System as a static, constant environment. The implications of the protoplanetary disc and the demarcation line between our inward rocky planets, the outer gas giants, and the farthest "ice giants" all combine to create a nifty little model in which the heaviest bands of material with the most rock coalesced in the inner Solar System, while large amounts of gas were diffused by the solar wind and blown into the outer reaches of the Solar System. But one of the most profound findings of the past few decades has been the dynamism inherent in these systems.

Planets don't just form statically and then remain in the same orbits for billions of years. Planets can migrate dramatically through a star system, thanks to interactions with each other and with their own stars. In one case, gravitational interaction with a passing binary may have actually saved a planet from being flung away from its host star.

HD 106906 b is an unusual world. It's 11x the mass of Jupiter and located 738 AU from its host star. Neptune, for reference, is just 30.1 AU from the Sun on average. Its orbit is tilted out of the plane of the ecliptic, by 21 degrees. These are all extremely unusual data points, and they indicated that something had a major impact on the planet's formation.

Scientists have been curious about HD 106906 b since we found it, and have worked out that a close binary passage about three million years ago may have impacted HD 106906 b's position around its host star in a way that kept the planet from exiting the system altogether.

These types of gravitational interactions may have been common in our own Solar System. Triton, the largest moon of Neptune, contains over 99 percent of the mass in the Neptunian moon system and is extremely similar to Pluto in size and bulk composition. It orbits retrograde, which means it couldn't have formed around Neptune in the first place.

(Source: extremetech.com)

Scientists levitate particles with sound to find out how they cluster together

Scientists have used sound waves to levitate particles, revealing new insights about how materials cluster together in the absence of gravity -- principles which underlie everything from how molecules assemble to the very early stages of planet formation from space dust.

Scientists from the University of Chicago and the University of Bath used sound waves to levitate particles, revealing new insights about how materials cluster together in the absence of gravity -- principles which underlie everything from how molecules assemble to the very early stages of planet formation from space dust.

"Much of the universe is made up of particles assembling," said Heinrich Jaeger, the Sewell Avery Distinguished Service Professor of Physics, who co-authored a new study that appears in *Nature Physics*. "With acoustic levitation, we have a beautiful model system to study assembly at scales visible to the human eye, where we can track each particle with precision, and then relate the results to a wide range of often much more microscopic phenomena."

Jaeger's lab conducts innovative studies of the laws governing the interactions of particles -- which they've used to create a robotic gripper to pick up almost any object and to explain a long-standing physics mystery that lets you run across the surface of a pool filled with water and corn starch.

In this case, the team was interested in the shape of prototypical clusters that form when, starting from a single particle, more are added one by one. They used sound waves to levitate plastic particles in midair -- each about one millimeter in diameter, about the thickness of a penny -- and studied how these particles interact with each other as they formed clusters, broke up and then reassembling into different configurations.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Record-breaking device uses sunlight to produce hydrogen at 15% efficiency

Scientists at KU Leuven in Belgium have developed a device that combines incoming solar energy and water vapor from the surrounding air to produce a record-breaking daily average of 250 liters (66 gal) of hydrogen throughout the year.

According to the researchers' estimations, an array of 20 such panels paired with an underground pressurized tank could provide the totality of a household's entire electricity and heating needs for a modest price.

Going solar comes with a couple of significant drawbacks, particularly when it comes to managing your reserves. First, storing an energy buffer for a rainy day is all but cheap: a home battery pack will run you up thousands of dollars, and its charge will keep you off the grid for a few extra days at most. Secondly, lithium-ion batteries lose capacity with use, and slowly self-discharge with disuse.

Professor Johan Martens and his team have turned to hydrogen for a cheaper, year-round green energy alternative. Their device has been under development for a decade, and can currently reach a energy conversion of 15 percent.

Commercial solar panels

Commercial solar panels can easily surpass that figure,



often reaching 18 or 20 percent, but the advantage of this approach is that large amounts of hydrogen can be stored in an underground pressurized tank (at a pressure of approximately 400 bar) without the inevitable losses in capacity that come with battery technology. Using fuel cells, the reserves from the tank can then be converted at will into heating, electricity, or fuel for a hydrogen-powered car with a 90 percent conversion efficiency.

Hydrogen is often produced from non-green sources such as gas and oil, and it's also expensive to produce and store. This project aims to buck the trend thanks to a combination of high conversion efficiency and the use of small-scale systems designed to work at the local scale.

"We wanted to design something sustainable that is affordable and can be used practically anywhere," says Martens. "We're using cheap raw materials and don't need precious metals or other expensive components."

The researchers estimate that an array of 20 panels and four cubic meters of pressurized storage would meet the energy and heating needs (in Belgium) of a household throughout the year, with the assumption that the reserves will build up during the summer months and last through the winter.

A prototype of this setup will soon begin field testing on a property in the rural Belgian town of Oud-Heverlee. Over the next two years, the researchers are will be focusing on testing the panels for household, agriculture and retail applications, with the eventual goal to mass produce and commercialize the system.

(Source: newatlas.com)

Child adoption website operational nationwide next year

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The child adoption website being piloted in Tehran will be operational all over the country in the next [Iranian calendar] year (starting on March 21), the Welfare organization director for children affairs has said. “There are some 10 adoptive applicants per child in the country,” ISNA quoted Montazer Shabar as saying on Tuesday.



Parents not having children or tending to adopt a child can refer to the website and sign up for adoption process, he added. He went on to say that applicants are then invited to ensure that they have the required qualifications, including being mentally healthy and not having criminal records or addiction. After the parent’s qualifications are approved, they will be on the waiting list to adopt the child, he noted, adding, the process has been cleared and easier through the website. Ahmad Khaki, deputy head of Tehran’s welfare organization for social affairs said that the number of children adopted in Tehran increased by 25 percent in [the past Iranian calendar] year 1396 (March 2017 – March 2018) compared to the year before, as some 500 children were adopted by Tehraners last year. Totally, some 3,600 individuals have registered for child adoption in the organization’s website, he highlighted. Iran’s adoption and foster laws which dated back to some 44 years ago were revised and modified in 2013. Within the new law kids could be adopted up to the age of 16 while the former law states that kids aged 12 or less could be adopted. In addition to families with no child now families with one kid and single women are able to apply for adoption. The law formerly authorized adoption only for orphans while the new law permit adoption for children with dysfunctional families as well in case the judge concludes that the new family is suitable for adoption. Earlier the adoptive families were required to sign over one third of their property to their child to-be but some could not afford to do so and now the judge gets to decide how a family, depending on their financial status, should be treated.

LEARN ENGLISH

Closing The Deal

Mr. Smith: I’m glad you could find time to meet with me, Mr. Johnson. I can’t think of a nicer environment for our meeting today, the **ambience** here is lovely!
Mr. Johnson: No problem, if possible I always combine business with pleasure. Now, let’s hear more about these chocolates you’re offering.
Mr. Smith: Well, as you know, I have recently become the sole **distributor** for Grangers Gourmet Bon-bons here in the United States. They’re a new **manufacturer** and are looking to **break into** the luxury market. Naturally, your restaurant **sprang into** my mind immediately. I think your brand **exemplifies** many of the same **traits** as Grangers and serving these chocolates would really add to your reputation for providing elegant, luxurious, first class dining.
Mr. Johnson: Hmmm, sounds interesting. . . . gourmet chocolates, where are they produced? Belgium?
Mr. Smith: Actually, the factory is located in Scotland.
Mr. Johnson: Really? I didn’t think they were **known** for their luxury chocolate production...
Mr. Smith: That’s what makes this such a fantastic opportunity! The government is one hundred percent supportive of creating new export markets and has guaranteed a low **tariff** for all **whole-sale** orders of over one thousand units. They’ve also reduced the **red tape** involved at customs as well. Here, I brought these especially for you, try one!
Mr. Johnson: Oh, thanks. Mmm, hmm, creamy texture, smooth. . . .
Mr. Smith: Unique aren’t they? I bet you’ve never tasted anything like it! Quality is assured as I personally visit the factory to make sure no one’s **cutting corners** with the ingredients. Only the crême de la crême make it through inspection.
Mr. Johnson: Yes, very interesting flavors... Slightly spicy, very unique, that’s for sure. Exactly what ARE the ingredients?
Mr. Smith: I have it on highest authority that this traditional secret recipe has been **handed down** in the Granger family for generations. I’m sure you can keep a secret. Buttermilk, cacao beans, sugar and Haggis.
Mr. Johnson: Haggis? What’s Haggis?
Mr. Smith: It’s a traditional Scottish delicacy; you take sheep’s liver, heart and lung and stuff it inside of the sheep’s stomach.
Mr. Johnson: Ah, get back to you.
Mr. Smith: Mr. Johnson? Mr. Johnson?
■ **Key vocabulary**
ambience: the atmosphere of a place
distributor: a person or business that sells to retail stores
manufacturer: a company that makes goods
break into: enter quickly
spring into: to appear or come into being quickly
exemplify: sets an example, a demonstration
trait: a characteristic feature or quality
known: famous for, easily recognized
tariff: a tax or amount of money to be paid
wholesale: the sale of goods in large quantities
red tape: procedures required to gain bureaucratic approval
cutting corners: to do something in the easiest or most inexpensive
hand down: to pass from one family member or generation
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
joint venture: legal entity created by two or more businesses joining together to conduct a specific business enterprise with both parties sharing profits and losses.
venture capital: a form of financing for a company in which the business gives up partial ownership and control of the business in exchange for capital over a limited time frame, usually 3-5 years.
merger: a joining together of two previously separate corporations
audit: an evaluation of a person, organization, system, process, enterprise, project or product.

Leader plants trees on national tree planting day

1 → He further noted that planting trees on National Tree Planting Day is a symbolic gesture aiming to promote the culture to safeguard trees and plant species. The Leader added responsible bodies should strictly prohibit a cutting of trees for constructing buildings. He also criticized sowing invasive plant species in order to fight desertification in some regions, calling on responsible

bodies to stop such plantations. In an attempt to protect the forests and rangelands, the Judiciary should also strive to stop deforestation, Ayatollah Khamenei suggested. National Tree Planting Day, is annually celebrated on the fifteenth day of Esfand, the last month on the Iranian calendar, which usually corresponds with March 6. The day marks the beginning of National Week of Natural Resources (March 6-13).



‘Further measures required to preserve forests’

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Iran’s forest area is approximately 12 million hectares with 0.2 hectares per capita, which is one quarter of the world average, so attention to preserve the forest areas must be four times the global attention, faculty member of the Research Institute of Forests and Rangelands has said.

Mohammad Darvish made the remarks on the occasion of the National Tree Planting Day, in which people are encouraged to plant trees across the country, held on the first day of the National Week of Natural Resources annually observed on March 6 to 13. Unfortunately, forests have been taken for granted in the country, as 2 million hectares of the northern forests has been depleted since 1330s (1950s), thus no serious protection measures have been taken, he said. Currently, 1.6 million hectares of the northern forests remain in the country, which was 3.5 million hectares in 1330s, so 2 million hectares of forest areas have undergone deforestation, he further lamented. According to the reports, large parts of the Hyrcanian forests are endangered, as 4 million boxwood particularly buxus hyrcana, Iran’s endemic plant species not being found in any other parts of the world, have been dried, he noted. He went on to add that since past two decades, some 15 million oak trees in Zagros forests have been depleted, adding, Arasbaran forest in East Azarbaijan province also has not survived due to construction and mining activities, as well as land grabbing and agricultural development. The country’s marine forests in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea are suffering as well due to contaminations made by fuel smuggling and releasing gasoline in mangroves (small tree growing in coastal saline or brackish water), which will have vast effects on the marine biodiversity, he also regretted. In the central regions of the country, overgrazing on rangelands has increased putting 2 million hectares of forest areas at risk of destruction, he said, adding 30 percent of the 6-million-hectare Zagros forests have



also disappeared. Referring to a law banning exploitation of endangered forests in northern part of the country, he noted that the law not being fully enforced due to lack of fund has led to greater smuggling of logs. In January 2017 in line with the laws regulating all aspects of policy making and project managements with regard to environmental factors Majlis [Iranian parliament] has prohibited any exploitation of endangered forests by the fourth year of implementing the sixth five-year national development plan. With 157 MPs voting for the bill, exploitation of forests for commercial and industrial purposes will be brought to a halt by 2020. By that time all exploitation contracts will be expired and none will be renewed. All exploitation projects will be banned with the exception of broken branches, fallen or damaged trees which can be only authorized by the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization. He highlighted that trees are one of the most valuable living organisms in the world, without trees we would have faced serious problems in oxygen production, carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, soil con-

servation, and accumulation of groundwater aquifers. “Forests covered 12 million hectares of the country’s surface constituting 0.2 hectares per person, while the world per capita of forest area is 0.8, so in Iran forest land per capita is one quarter of the world average,” he announced. So, we must take measures toward forest preservation four times the global measures, he highlighted. “We must quickly attract the public attention to forest protection, and find a solution to enforce the law banning exploitation of endangered forests, otherwise we will face numerous issues,” he concluded. Yousefali Embrahimpour, commander of the protection unit of natural resources and watershed management department of the province said that timber smuggling steadily proceeding in the forests in West Azarbaijan province poses a serious threat to the region’s ecology, as 450 tons of wood have been seized being smuggled. Referring to a lack of forest ranger forces, he noted that currently, a forest ranger is assigned on each 45,000 hectares of the forests in the province, while on average every 18,000 hectares of the country’s forest is being monitored by each ranger, while, in other countries, every ranger observes only 3,000 hectares of the forests. Moreover, an expert in the field of natural resources Reza Sheikhpour said that Hyrcanian Forest in northern Iran has undergone a 15 percent fragmentation due to land use changes for agricultural and residential purposes over recent years, while it already has been suffering from pests and disease. If deforestation process or illegal construction of roads and dams continue, undoubtedly, Hyrcanian Forest will disappear within the next 70 years, he added. Unfortunately, the country’s managing policies is not based on knowledge, as construction project must be based on sustainable development, not development regardless of environmental damages, he concluded.

Robot ‘shark’ that eats plastic waste launched to tackle pollution

An autonomous marine robot has been released at a Devon harbor in an attempt to clear it of plastic waste. With the ability to “swallow” up to 60kg of debris in one trip, the WasteShark has been proposed as a way to clean up coastal waters in the country’s most vital marine zones. Modelling their drone on the world’s largest fish, the whale shark, the creators say it emits no pollution and poses no threat to local wildlife. Unlike its enormous namesake, which swims around with its mouth open to capture plankton and small fish, the WasteShark consumes any plastic waste that crosses its path.

The robot has already been launched in five countries since it was created by Dutch environmental technology company RanMarine. Its inventors say a single WasteShark deployed five days a week has the capacity to clear 15.6 tons of waste from waterways every year. The launch at Ilfracombe Harbor in north Devon is part of an effort by WWF and Sky Ocean Rescue to protect Britain’s protected marine areas, which have been specially designated due to their important species and habitats. “The marine protected areas in north

Devon are home to some of the country’s most incredible coastlines and marine life, but plastic is having a devastating effect on our oceans,” said Dr. Jenny Oates, UK seas programme manager at WWF. “The WasteShark will help us fight the rubbish that enters the harbor, snapping it up before the tide takes it out to sea and it ends up threatening wildlife in other precious marine areas.” Dr. Oates said “major systemic change” was needed by businesses and government to curb plastic waste, but that innovative technologies like the WasteShark also had a role. The device must be powered up at a

charging station, and can roam for up to eight hours at a time. It can be programmed to seek out hot-spots where waste gathers, and can also collect important data on water quality as it travels. “WasteShark is cheaper, greener, more effective and less disruptive than other methods of dealing with marine litter,” said Oliver Cunningham, chief commercial officer at RanMarine. “We hope to see our drone in cities and towns – wherever humans live on water – around the world.” (Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

5,000 clunker garbage trucks move in Tehran at night

Some 5,000 clunker trucks, aged over 40 years, move across the city of Tehran during the night to collect wastes, Tehran Governor Isa Farhadi has announced. The renovation of the garbage collection fleet requires high amount of budget; this is while the Municipality of Tehran cannot afford the cost and the issue needs urgent measures, he stated.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“alti-, alto-, alt-”

- **Meaning:** high
- **For example:** High *altitude* has its most pronounced effect on the rising time of bread.

PHRASAL VERB

Muddle along

- **Meaning:** to continue doing something without having any clear purpose, or enough support
- **For example:** Many of the students complained that they were left to muddle along on their own.

IDIOM

Till the cows come home

- **Explanation:** to do something for a long time
- **For example:** You can ask me till the cows come home but I’m not buying you a scooter!

۵۰۰۰ کامیون زباله‌کش قدیمی شب‌ها در تهران تردد دارند

فرماندار تهران از وجود ۵۰۰۰ کامیون زباله‌کش که شب‌ها در تهران تردد دارند و عمرشان بیش از ۴۰ سال است، خبر داد. به گزارش خبرنگار اجتماعی خبرگزاری فارس، عیسی فرهادی گفت: نوسازی این ناوگان هزینه بسیاری دارد که از توان ما و سازمان شهرداری خارج است و باید فکری برای آن اندیشیده شود.

Barham Salih: Iraq will not be military base, foreign states must respect Iraq's sovereignty

I→ Iraq is an ally of both the U.S. and regional power house Iran, and its politics are often dominated by efforts to balance relations with the two.

The country should be used to serve as a lead peacemaker in a troubled region, the president said.

"We don't want to be part of these conflicts. Iraq is still not a very stable country, and putting an extra political burden on it is unacceptable," he said.

Trump's comments have raised Iraqi fears that Washington could draw it into conflict with Tehran.

"Do not burden Iraq with your own conflicts," the president warned.

It has also left the U.S. officials such as the acting defines secretary, Patrick Shanahan, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo rushing to reassure Iraqi officials that Washington does indeed respect Iraqi sovereignty.

"Everyone must respect Iraq's sovereignty," Salih said during a panel talk at The American University of Iraq.

Salih said that the U.S. troop must stick to their anti-ISIL mission.

"The victory we achieved against ISIS (ISIL) is important but we must not underestimate the dangers that ISIS still pose. We achieved a military victory and ended the Caliphate but ISIS pockets remain," Salih warned.

Iraq declared victory against the terrorist outfit in December 2017 after driving out enemy fighters from the large areas of Iraq they took in 2014.

But the terrorist group continues to carry out sporadic attacks around the country.

The president added that Iraq was about to undergo major economic transformations, and will begin to emerge from crises, referring to progress in the field of security and economy and relative political calm.

"From Basra to Baghdad to Sulaymaniyah, Iraqis share the same ambition to live a dignified life with a good government that provides basic services, operates with transparency," Salih said.



On the issue of the political deadlock that parliament has been facing for the last six months, Salih said he expects to be able to appoint the final ministers to complete his cabinet within a week or two.

The five remaining posts include interior and defense, seen as the most vital positions, are yet to be confirmed.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi has sworn in last October but has governed without a full cabinet after parliament approved just 14 of 22 ministerial appointments.

Corruption root cause of violence, insecurity

From years, Iraq has been suffering a lack of good government, public services and facing rampant corruption.

"Corruption is the economy of violence, if we can't end corruption we can't end violence. It hasn't been addressed institutionally," Salih stressed

Iraq is ranked among the world's most corrupt countries.

"If we cannot eradicate corruption it will destroy this state," the president said, adding that no country has gone through what Iraq

has endured during the last four decades.

Meanwhile, on a separate panel, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert said, that corruption is pervasive in all levels in Iraq.

"Only two countries in the world are more corrupt than Iraq," she told the audience, adding that donors are getting tired of fighting the system to help the country.

Hennis-Plasschaert stressed that political, community and religious leaders should play a central role to build tolerance and to counter extremism.

"The key to national recovery and progress is through building public trust and social cohesion," she said.

The Sulaimani forum is expected to discuss regional conflict dynamics and their resolution with various policymakers and experts.

The Sulaymaniyah Forum, is a gathering of Iraqi and international politicians and scholars at the American University of Iraq in Sulaymaniyah.

The conference, first held in 2013, was

cancelled last year amid a blockade imposed on Iraq's autonomous Kurdish-led region following a controversial independence referendum that angered Turkey, Iran, and Baghdad.

Relations have since improved with neighboring countries. But the Trump administration's scuttling of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran has put fresh pressures on Iraq, which shares a 900-mile border and deep economic and religious ties with Iran.

Washington has demanded that Iraq downgrade energy and other ties with Iran. But Salih warned that his country could be plunged into fresh crises if outside powers sought to use Iraq to settle scores.

Jon Wilks, British ambassador to Baghdad, urged Iraqi officials to define clear "parameters" with outside powers, and not let the country get dragged into others' conflicts.

Andrew Peek, a U.S. diplomat speaking at the conference, acknowledged that the Iraq should have a "normal relationship" with Iran, "not an Iraq that is a playground for outside powers."

The Iraqi former Prime Minister, Haidar al Abadi, said the abnormal situation was one created by the U.S.

Beyond Iraq's international problems, internal squabbling has also contributed to Iraq's problems. Baghdad has yet to name key Cabinet posts – including ministries of defense and interior – 10 months after general elections, amid a parliamentary deadlock that has further alienated the public from the political class.

"If you're weak, of course other countries will take advantage of you," said Laith Kubba, an adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

Failure to address the country's divisions and fractures could contribute to the resurgence of another insurgency, he warned.

"ISIS did not come from a void but from a lot of cracks that exist," he said. "There were hands that manipulated this issue and in the end resulted in disasters."

(Source: agencies)

Suicide bomber strikes near airport in Jalalabad, Afghanistan

A suicide bomber in Afghanistan attacked on Wednesday in the country's eastern city of Jalalabad, an official said, killing 16 employees of an Afghan company.

The attacker, who was on foot, detonated his explosives near the office of a construction company near the city's airport, said Attaullah Khogyani, a spokesperson for the governor of Nangarhar province, of which Jalalabad is the capital.

As well as the 16 dead at the company, including several of its guards, five attackers were killed - the two bombers and three gunmen, he said, adding a clearance operation was still ongoing. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

The bombings come as the United States and Taliban negotiations continue to hold ongoing peace talks in Qatar aimed at ending the nearly 18-year conflict.

The continuation of the talks follows a major attack on a joint U.S.-Afghan base in southwestern Afghanistan's Helmand province last week, with at least 23 security forces killed in the hours-long assault on one of the largest military installations in the country.

The U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly voiced his eagerness to end America's involvement in Afghanistan, where 14,000 U.S. troops are still deployed.

(Source: agencies)



Useful to keep them nervous': listen as top trump aide blabs us Venezuela plans

Vovan and Lexus, Russian telephone pranksters known for their trolling of politicians from around the world, have struck again, targeting the United States special representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams to find out more about the U.S.-backed effort to unseat that country's legitimate government. Sputnik got ahold of the full audio from the talks.

Posing as Swiss President Ueli Maurer, who also serves as the country's finance minister, the pranksters contacted Abrams on two occasions – in mid-February and early March, speaking to him for over 23 minutes about Swiss policy on the ongoing effort to freeze the Venezuelan government's assets as part of broader plans to replace President Nicolas Maduro with the U.S.-backed opposition leader Juan Guaido.

The highlight of the pair of conversations was when 'Maurer' asked Abrams about the chances of Washington following through with its threat to use military force to topple Maduro. Here is what he revealed:

"You know, we are not going to do that. Unless the regime does something completely crazy like attacking the U.S. embassy. But our information suggests that people in the regime and in the military are actually nervous about a U.S. invasion. And we think it is useful to keep them nervous, which is one reason why we will not say publicly 'no, no, no, this will never happen.'"

"In private briefings to members of Congress, this is exactly what I say to them, [that] 'we are not trying to make you in Congress

nervous. We are trying to make the Venezuelan military nervous. And we think that it is a mistake tactically to give them endless reassurances that there will never be American military action.' But I can tell you this is not what we're doing. What we're doing is what you see – financial pressure, economic pressure, diplomatic pressure, political pressure," Abrams said.

Assuring Bern that the U.S. asset freezes against Venezuelan government-related entities and individuals were aimed at "just trying to preserve assets," Abrams seemed particularly interested in Swiss efforts to block individual accounts, disclose their contents, and transfer them to Guaido's allies.

"Tell me if you would about the confidentiality questions here. For example, if you meet next week with representatives of Guaido in the national assembly and you say to them 'we have blocked this account or that account', are they then free to not only access the account, but are they free to announce things?" Abrams asked.

When the pranksters assured him that the answer was 'yes', the representative said he "didn't realize that," adding that "that's obviously great, frankly it's a great help to Guaido."

When asked by Abrams about the status of accounts belonging to Venezuela's PD-VSA state oil giant and other government accounts, the pranksters joked, posing as Maurer, that Swiss authorities knew about a number of Venezuelan accounts in Swiss banks, including one with a Russian con-

nection known as "Limpopo Bank."

The U.S. envoy didn't pick up on it, but 'Limpopo' was a reference to Vovan and Lexus's earlier trolling of the U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who was pranked into accusing Russia of meddling in the elections of the fictional African country of 'Limpopo.'

When asked for advice on how to Swiss regulators should act against Venezuelan accounts if no illegal activity was found, Abrams insisted that "everything should be frozen, absolutely frozen, just to make sure that they stay where they are. That's our view."

In what might be construed as a veiled threat, the Trump official also warned that because the U.S. and dozens of its allies have now declared that the "Maduro regime" is "an illegitimate regime," there was now a "risk for any Swiss bank that hands those assets over."

"There is the risk of future litigation from the future legitimate government of Venezuela that the bank allowed those assets to be, in essence, stolen," Abrams explained. At this point, a diplomat from the U.S. embassy in Caracas who was also on the line chimed in, saying that even without litigation, dealing with Venezuelan government "comes with high reputational risks."

In the latter phone call, when asked about the then-upcoming United Nations Security Council resolution on the Venezuela crisis, Abrams complained that despite support from nine of its members, he expected the Russians to veto the U.S. resolution, while

adding that Washington was particularly interested in China's stance.

"We are always interested in seeing whether the Chinese abstain or veto. Thus far, they have gone along with the Russians in vetoing, but their language is much more restrained, very different, very businesslike," he said.

As may be expected, Vovan and Lexus' conversation with Abrams garnered widespread attention in Latin America, including in Venezuela itself. On Wednesday, Venezuelan Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez did a bit of trolling of his own on Twitter.

"They [the U.S.] are the most powerful empire on Earth, and a pair of Russian jesters are laughing in the face of this specialist in regime change...If it were not so tragic, it would be comical," Rodriguez quipped.

Listen to the full audio of the pranksters' conversations with Abrams here:

The State Department has yet to comment on the authenticity of the recordings.

Elliott Abrams is a veteran Reagan and Bush-era Latin America policy expert brought on board by the Trump White House in January amid the escalating political crisis in Venezuela. Abrams played a major role in the abortive coup attempt against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2002, and acted as a lobbyist and unofficial spokesman for the U.S.-backed militias in Central America attempting to topple leftist governments in the region in the 1980s.

(Source: Sputnik)

UN rights chief seeks freedom of detained Saudi women activists

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), Michelle Bachelet, has called on Saudi authorities to release a group of women's rights activists, whom were detained in last year's crackdown and are being held for nearly a year without charge.

"Today, allow me to voice my concern at the apparently arbitrary arrest and detention, and alleged ill-treatment or torture, of several women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia," Bachelet said in a speech to the UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday.

"The persecution of peaceful activists would clearly contradict the spirit of the country's proclaimed new reforms," she added.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said on March 1 that the ultra-conservative kingdom's public prosecutor was preparing the trials of the detainees as it had concluded its investigation.

The prosecution office, however, did not specify the charges nor give a date for the court proceedings.

More than a dozen activists were arrested last May, and held on suspicion of harming the country's interests and offering support to hostile elements abroad.

At the time, international rights groups reported the detention of prominent female activists among the detainees, who had previously campaigned for the right to drive and an end to the kingdom's male guardianship system.

Some were later released, but activists have said several of the women were held in solitary confinement for months and faced torture and sexual harassment.

Among the jailed female rights activists are Aziza al-Yousef, a retired professor at Riyadh's King Saud University, and Loujain al-Hathloul, who was arrested and held for more than 70 days in custody back in 2014 after she attempted to drive from the neighboring United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Saudi Arabia.

Loujain was one of the activists who faced sexual harassment and torture during interrogation, according to her family and rights groups. Following their arrest, regime-backed newspapers published front-page pictures of some of the activists with the word "traitor" stamped across them in red.

The House of Saud regime overturned the world's only ban on female motorists on June 24, 2018. The lifting of the prohibition followed a sweeping crackdown on prominent women's rights activists, who had staunchly advocated for the right to drive.

European countries will urge Saudi Arabia on Thursday to release activists and cooperate with a UN-led probe into the brutal murder of distinguished Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. "This initiative at the UN Human Rights Council offers a rare opportunity for states to take a strong public stand against the catalogue of human rights violations by the government of Saudi Arabia. States who stay silent risk abdicating responsibility at a crucial moment and sending a dangerous message that Saudi Arabia can continue to commit egregious abuses without being held to account," Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said.

She added, "States, including key allies of Saudi Arabia, must use the joint statement to demand the immediate and unconditional release of the group of detained women human rights defenders and all others who have been detained solely for their criticism of the government."

Khashoggi was murdered at the Saudi regime consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, by a group of Saudi agents on October 2 last year.

The United States spy agencies reportedly believe Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) ordered the murder – an assertion that Saudi officials fiercely deny.

The Saudi regime has lately stepped up politically-motivated arrests, prosecution and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

Saudi regime officials have also intensified security measures in the Shia-populated Eastern Province. Eastern Province has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the oil-rich region.

The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown by the regime, with security forces increasing security measures across the province.

Over the past years, Riyadh has also redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

In January 2016, Saudi authorities executed Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, who was an outspoken critic of Riyadh. Nimr had been arrested in Qatif, Eastern Province, in 2012.

(Source: Press TV)

Guardian: Rumors of rift between Saudi King Salman and MBS

The relationship between the House of Saud regime King Salman and his son and heir, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), has been increasingly strained as they disagree on a number of issues, including the war in Yemen, according to a Guardian report published on Tuesday. Tensions are said to have come to a head during King Salman's visit to Egypt last month when his advisors warned of a potential move against him by the crown prince, the report said, citing an anonymous source.

The king's loyalists were reportedly so alarmed by the threat that his security detail during the trip was replaced by a team of 30 hand-picked loyalists. Egyptian security guards were also dismissed, the source told the Guardian.

On King Salman's return, Prince Mohammed was not among the dignitaries who received the monarch.

The source said the pair disagreed over King Salman's hard line on protesters in Algeria and Sudan, as well as the treatment of Yemeni prisoners of war.

While MBS has consolidated power domestically by purging rivals within the royal family and repressing civil society activism, he has earned notoriety abroad for his aggressive foreign policy.

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last October risked rupturing the decades-old alliance between Riyadh and Washington.

The journalist was murdered by a Saudi hit squad. Saudi officials said the hit squad had gone rogue, but western intelligence agencies and politicians have insinuated it was acting under Prince Mohammed's orders.

Senior members of Congress have not let the Washington Post columnist's death fade into obscurity and are working on ways to punish Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi crown prince, however, has cultivated strong ties with the Trump administration, which has been reluctant to take action against him.

(Source: agencies)

Top U.S. gen.: Don't give Turkey F-35 jets if they buy Russian S-400

The top United States general and the head of American forces in Europe has said the U.S. should not sell its high-tech F-35 fighter jets to Turkey if Ankara moves ahead with plans to buy advanced missile defense systems from Russia.

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday, General Curtis Scaparrotti said it would be his "best military advice" that the United States not sell Lockheed Martin Corp F-35 jets to NATO ally Turkey

unless Ankara drops plans to purchase Russia-built S-400 surface-to-air missile defense systems.

"If they accept the S-400 to establish it in Turkey, there is first the issue that it's not interoperable with NATO systems, nor is it interoperable inside of our integrated missile defense system. The second has to do with the F-35. It presents a problem to all of our aircraft, but specifically the F-35, I believe," Scaparrotti said during the Senate hearing.

The U.S. general also warned that there could be po-

tential consequences in the wake of the purchase deal with Russia, namely, no future foreign military sales between Washington and Ankara.

Additionally, the U.S. State Department later in the day said Washington has made clear to Turkey that Ankara's participation in the F-35 fighter program would be reassessed if it preceded with the purchase of Russian air defense systems.

(Source: agencies)

Andy Murray ‘pain-free’ but unsure over future after hip surgery

Andy Murray says he is no longer in pain but the former world number one is unsure whether he will be able to play top-level tennis again following a second hip operation.

The 31-year-old underwent hip resurfacing surgery at the end of January in a final throw of the dice to try to overcome the problem that first became a serious issue in 2017.

“I want to continue playing, I said that in Australia,” Murray said at a sponsorship event at London’s Queen’s Club. “The issue is I don’t know whether it’s possible.”

“I’m a lot happier now than I was, certainly the last 12 months, because I have no pain in my hip now and I was in pain for a long time,” he added.

“The rehab is slow but it’s been going pretty well. I just need to wait and see how things progress. If it’s possible, I’d certainly love to compete again.”

Murray, who has won three Grand Slams, announced at an emotional press conference ahead of the Australian Open in January that he planned to retire after Wimbledon but was more hopeful following a remarkable five-set defeat by Roberto Bautista Agut in the first round.

No player has come back from the same operation to play singles but American Bob Bryan recently returned in doubles and won an ATP Tour title in Delray Beach last month with his brother Mike.

Bryan said in Australia that he no longer felt any pain and backed Murray to follow him by making a comeback.

(Source: AFP)

Chinese swimming world champ Ning Zetao quits at 26

China’s former 100m freestyle world champion and swimming pin-up Ning Zetao announced his retirement from the sport on Wednesday, his 26th birthday.

A fan favourite in China because of his ability and looks, Ning won the 100m free world title in 2015 and was a four-time gold medalist at the Asian Games a year earlier.

But his career has been on the slide since and he hangs up his trunks with the reputation of a talent never fulfilled.

Ning, who served a one-year suspension after testing positive for clenbuterol in 2011, announced his retirement on Weibo, China’s equivalent of Twitter.

“Don’t be afraid of the past and the future! Say good bye to the swimming pool and blue water and restart my own new life,” Ning wrote.

“Thank you, my dear fans! I wish you all the best.”

He added in English: “The way to success is never easy, push yourself and DO NOT SETTLE.”

After his feat at the world championships the colourful Ning looked set to star at the Olympics.

But he bombed at Rio 2016, where he failed to qualify for the 100m freestyle final.

In February 2017 he was thrown out of the China team for “violating the rules” over sponsorship.

He was unable to defend his world title later that year after failing to qualify for the showpiece, citing an abdominal injury.

(Source: France24)

Pochettino given two-match ban after ref outburst

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino was Wednesday handed a two-match touchline ban and fined £10,000 (\$13,000) by the Football Association following an angry clash with a referee.

The Argentine, whose side reached the Champions League quarter-finals with a 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday, was sanctioned over the incident involving referee Mike Dean after last month’s 2-1 Premier League loss at Burnley.

It means he will have to sit in the stands when Spurs visit his former club Southampton on Saturday and also for the league game against Liverpool on March 31.

“Mauricio Pochettino has been fined £10,000 and will serve a two-match touchline ban following an Independent Regulatory Commission hearing,” said a statement from the FA.

“The Tottenham manager accepted an improper conduct charge from the FA, which resulted from his language and/or behaviour -- both on the pitch and in or around the tunnel area -- at the end of the game against Burnley on February 23.”

Pochettino, whose side have slipped out of the title picture after dropping eight points in their past three matches, apologised to Dean after the incident, saying he would accept the charge.

(Source: Goal)

Jaap Stam to be next Feyenoord coach

Feyenoord are to appoint Jaap Stam as their coach from next season, Dutch media reported on Wednesday.

The former Manchester United defender will replace Giovanni van Bronckhorst, who is leaving at the end of this campaign after four years at the helm of the Rotterdam club.

The 46-year-old Stam has been coaching at PEC Zwolle since the turn of the year.

He was previously manager of English club Reading, where he led them to the second-tier Championship playoffs in his first season but was then fired before the end of his second.

Van Bronckhorst, who took the Rotterdam club to their first championship in 18 years in 2017, announced in January he was seeking other challenges when his contract expires.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Here lies the team that made history’- end of an era for Real?

Real Madrid’s 1,011-day reign as European champions is over.

Two years, nine months and five days since they beat fellow Spaniards Atletico Madrid in the 2016 final in Milan, they have finally been eliminated from Europe’s premier club competition after three titles in a row.

Santiago Solari’s team saw their 2-1 first-leg lead overturned in emphatic fashion, as Dutch side Ajax claimed a stunning and deserved 4-1 victory at the Bernabeu.

Despite only being in charge for 113 days, Solari has overseen Real’s two heaviest home Champions League defeats, with this coming after the 3-0 defeat by CSKA Moscow in December. And Tuesday’s exit comes six days after they were eliminated from the Copa del Rey by fierce rivals Barcelona, whom they trail by 12 points in La Liga.

BBC Sport looks at the stats behind Real’s remarkable run and the fallout from Tuesday’s chastening loss...

■ No Ronaldo, no Champions League

For the first time since May 2015 - a run stretching 46 months - Real Madrid are out of the Champions League.

They have a remarkable record since the start of the 2015-16 season, in which they claimed the first of their three successive titles.

Real had reached at least the semi-finals in every season since they were knocked out in the last 16 by French side Lyon back in 2010, in Cristiano Ronaldo’s first season



with the club.

So what has gone wrong? Too much to sum up in one paragraph, but obviously losing the goals of Ronaldo has been a major problem.

This year, Real’s top scorer in Europe was striker Karim Benzema with four - some way off the pace of Bayern Munich’s Robert Lewandowski (eight), Barcelona’s Lionel Messi (six) or Ajax’s former Southampton forward Dusan Tadic (also six).

■ Reaction at home and abroad

Spanish newspapers AS and Marca went

into overdrive at the full-time whistle, with several articles calling for the exits of manager Solari, president Florentino Perez, and numerous players - including Gareth Bale - who are “many of them in an undeniable end of cycle.”

Captain Sergio Ramos - who missed the game through suspension having been booked deliberately in the first leg - watched from a box while being filmed for an upcoming documentary. Now a must-watch...

Spanish football journalist Guillem Balague

Warriors’ 33-point loss at home worst of Kerr era



The Golden State Warriors suffered the worst home loss of the Steve Kerr era in a 128-95 defeat to the Boston Celtics on Tuesday night at Oracle Arena.

“Right from the beginning, just the level of competition wasn’t where it needed to be,” Kerr said after the game. “It was 11-to-nothing in about three minutes, four minutes. And it looked to me like we were jogging up the floor. You can’t play basketball jogging. You got to sprint. Your cuts have to be hard. You got to be going all out. And we did not go all out. And it was embarrassing.”

The 33-point defeat came after the Warriors, who have now lost five of their past eight games, repeatedly talked about getting off to better starts over the past few weeks.

“From the very beginning we were not flying around,” Kerr said. “We were not giving the sort of effort that it takes to win an NBA game. The other stuff I’ve got to do a better job with. Making sure we’re in a position to succeed. ... It starts with a passion, with an anger, and an intensity.

And it wasn’t there tonight.”

Warriors star Kevin Durant, who struggled to find a rhythm throughout the night, shooting just 5-for-16 from the field, pushed back on the idea that his team needs to play with more anger.

“I thought we move off of joy,” Durant said, referring to a common Kerr mantra of playing with joy. “Now anger? I disagree with that one. I think all around, top to bottom, coaches, players, we just got to be better.”

The Warriors, who played without Klay Thompson (right knee soreness), Kevon Looney (pelvic inflammation) and Shaun Livingston (neck spasm), remain convinced they will be able to flip the proverbial switch to focus better on both ends once the playoffs begin, but Warriors guard Stephen Curry acknowledged that his group has a lot of work to do over the last month of the regular season.

“We got to want it,” Curry said of his team’s defensive issues. “We got to want to figure it out.

(Source: ESPN)

Ferrari removes all Mission Winnow branding for Australia



Ferrari will remove all branding by tobacco giant Philip Morris’s “Mission Winnow” initiative for the opening Formula One race of the year in Melbourne after concerns about cigarette advertising, officials said Wednesday.

Mission Winnow was removed from Ferrari’s official name for the Australian Grand Prix on March 17 after local authorities launched an investigation into whether the team breached laws over tobacco advertising. A Philip Morris International spokesperson told AFP that Mission Winnow will also not appear on the car or team uniforms in Australia.

“Mission Winnow will remain the title sponsor of Scuderia Ferrari in 2019,” the spokesperson said.

“However, our activation will be different in Australia than in other countries. We will announce additional details in the lead-up to the race in Melbourne.”

A Scuderia Ferrari spokesman told AFP the team expected to return to using the Mission Winnow logo in the Bahrain Grand Prix, the second race of the season, in late March.

The sport’s governing body, the FIA, is

on BBC Radio 5 Live: “Just wait until the summer! There are big big problems at Real. One of the top players, one of the captains at Real, said that they only need to play well for four games a season to win the Champions League. That attitude in the long term is a massive problem.

“It’s the worst defeat at home in their European history. There was resignation from the fans - they just went home without making any noise.

“They cannot compete in the market like they used to; they stopped getting Galacticos in 2014 and the squad is thinner and thinner. Who would you say is a superstar in this team? Everyone has disappointed.

“Gareth Bale did not start, which is frustrating him big time, but they do not see him as one of them. When he has been given the responsibility he hasn’t shone but he won’t shine if he’s only given 15 or 20 minutes.”

Former Manchester United and Real Sociedad boss David Moyes on BBC Radio 5 Live: “Real needed this game tonight, but they were well beaten. It should have been by more. A lot of people will be wanting to know what is going to change at Real Madrid. It is the end of an era.

“Cristiano Ronaldo left over the summer and you’ll now be looking at a Luka Modric, maybe a Toni Kroos or Sergio Ramos leaving. It would not surprise me if there is a complete change at Real Madrid in the summer.

(Source: BBC)

Ladies first: Italy, China and Scotland hand men World Cup lesson

They missed out on the men’s World Cup in Russia last year, but the good news for fans in countries from Italy to China and Scotland is that they will be present at the women’s tournament in France in June and July.

In football-mad Italy, who hadn’t missed the men’s tournament since 1958, the presence of the “Azzurre” should be great news. For the women, it is a first World Cup appearance since 1999. But not everyone seems so impressed.

“Ah girls, go and play at the World Cup, but do not talk tactics,” wrote Inter Milan captain Regina Baresi -- daughter and niece of two great Italian players, Giuseppe and Franco -- in a recent tweet.

It was a sarcastic reference to controversial comments by Fulvio Collovati, a member of Italy’s 1982 World Cup-winning side and now a pundit with state broadcaster RAI.

“When I hear a woman speak about tactics it turns my stomach,” he said, adding that “a woman doesn’t understand like a man.” He was suspended by the channel as a result.

In an interview with AFP just before Collovati’s outburst, the Italy women’s team coach, Milena Bertolini, said this year’s World Cup was “an important opportunity” for the game’s development in the country.

“It can help little girls, as well as all Italians, understand how normal it is for girls to play football,” she remarked.

There are only around 23,000 registered female players in Italy, compared to over 200,000 in Germany and over 100,000 in England.

Italy’s achievement in qualifying therefore deserves to be hailed, especially coming so soon after the men’s failure to do so.



“Of course, we benefited from that, in terms of media interest,” said Bertolini.

“I am sorry that the boys were not at the World Cup. It was a defeat for all Italian football, but the girls probably drew extra strength and motivation by being able to say ‘look, we are here, we have done something great.’”

■ Debut for Scotland

Scotland have also achieved something great, qualifying for the women’s World Cup for the first time, just two years after making it to a debut European Championship.

There is a certain sense of destiny with Scotland featuring at a World Cup on French soil -- the men’s team have not been back to a major tournament since the 1998 tournament in France.

Former Aberdeen and Borussia Dortmund striker Scott

Booth was part of Scotland’s squad then, and is now coach of Glasgow City, the dominant women’s club in the country who have won the last 12 domestic titles.

In a nation where infrastructure is often poor and clubs are cash-strapped in the men’s game, it is not easy for the women. But things are improving, with leading men’s clubs like Celtic investing more and more in women’s teams.

“The whole thing surrounding women’s football has improved and become a much bigger thing over the last three, four years,” Booth told AFP.

“Every season there is another major club that are bringing out a women’s version of their side, and I think that has really helped.”

It is the same in Italy, with Juventus, AC Milan and Roma recently joining the women’s Serie A.

■ China: Need ‘true backing’

The question is different in China, where the women -- World Cup runners-up in 1999 -- have always performed far better than the men.

Despite that, interest in them is limited, much to the frustration of Wang Shuang, the Asian women’s player of the year. Wang, of Paris Saint-Germain, posted on China’s popular Weibo social media platform calling for more Chinese support for the country’s female footballers.

“The Chinese women’s football team needs true backing, not just lip service,” said Tencent Sports in support of Wang. It is a big issue in Italy too, and Bertolini knows the stakes.

“If we play well and win, get to the last 16, I think that will provide an impetus and lots of girls will want to get involved.”

(Source: AFP)

Sitting volleyball start journey to win Paralympics’ seventh gold

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran’s men’s sitting volleyball team have started their preparation for winning their seventh gold medal at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Iran have already claimed six gold medals at the 1998 Seoul, 1992 Barcelona, 1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney, 2008 Beijing and 2016 Rio.

The Dream Team now train for the 2019 ParaVolley Asia Oceania Sitting Volleyball Zone Championships, scheduled for June 10 to 15 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Iran will hold a joint training camp with Russia prior to partake in the Asia Oceania championship and also travel to Russia in July for some friendly matches with the European team.

Iran will also host Men’s World Super 6 event in October, however the host city has yet to be confirmed.

“We have started our preparation for the Tokyo 2020 with 16 players. Six players have been invited to the national team for the first time. It’s our policy to rejuvenate the sitting volleyball team,”



Iran coach Hadi Rezaei, who also is Chef de Mission for next year’s Paralympic Games, told Tehran Times.

“We have found the talented players across the country. A total of 35 teams are

participating in league and we are going to hold an annual knockout competition with participation of 200 teams. It helps we discover the new players for the next international competitions,” the former

sitting volleyball team captain said.

Iran sent a record number of competitors to Rio 2016, being represented by 110 athletes in 12 sports, however Rezaei says they will send the para athletes who have chance of winning medal to Tokyo.

“We have four groups of participants in the Paralympic Games. The first group are capable of winning gold medals as a team and individual. The second and third groups will participate in the event with the aim of winning silver and bronze medals. We also have a fourth group. They have no chance of winning medal but are capable of taking medal in the next Asian Para Games and Paralympics,” Rezaei added.

Iran’s best performance at the Paralympic Games since they made their debut at Seoul in 1988 was at London 2012 when they finished 11th with a total of 24 medals, including 10 gold.

They won the same number of medals at Rio 2016 but only eight of them were gold, meaning they slipped to 15th.

Persepolis coach satisfied with performance against Pakhtakor

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis missed two home points against Pakhtakor of Uzbekistan but Branko Ivankovic says he is satisfied with what his players performed in this match.

The Iranian giants came back from a goal down to salvage a 1-1 draw with Pakhtakor in the 2019 AFC Champions League Group D opener on Tuesday.

The visitors got off to a flyer, leaving the crowd at Azadi Stadium stunned as Marat Bikmaev tapped in from point-blank just five minutes into the match.

Last year’s finalists drew level in the 25th minute after Bashar Resan found Mario Budimir inside the box. The Croatian advanced and drilled one into the bottom corner of Sanjar Kuvvatov’s net. “First, I would like to congratulate my players for their performance against Pakhtakor. According to the statistics, we were the better team but failed to score



the winner. I had already said Pakhtakor are a strong team, however many people think they cannot advance to the knockout stage. My players should forget this match and concentrate on our next matches,” Ivankovic said.

“Pakhtakor take advantage of eight Uzbekistan national team players. They are second in their league and will be better in the future,” he added.

“From now on, we just think about facing Nassaji Mazandaran in Iran Professional League. Afterward, we will travel to face Al Sadd and we know that how strong they are,” Ivankovic stated. Bikmaev’s goal was in an offside position but Adham Makhadmeh accepted the goal and Persepolis have filed a complaint against the Jordanian referee.

“It was very clear their goal was in an offside position. But it’s our destiny and we should focus on our work,” Ivankovic concluded.

Real Madrid boss in dark over future amid Jose Mourinho speculation



Real Madrid coach Santi Solari told ESPN “if we knew the future we would all play the lottery” in response to questions about his tenure at the club after they crashed out of the Champions League on Tuesday night to Ajax.

The defending champions suffered a shock 4-1 defeat at the Bernabeu -- a third home loss in seven days -- to go out of the competition 5-3 on aggregate despite leading 2-1 from last month’s round of 16 first leg in Amsterdam, and former Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho is linked with a return to replace Solari.

When quizzed on his future, Solari told ESPN: “Who knows [what the future holds]. If we knew the future we would all play the lottery.”

“It was a tough week for us. Three important games in a row and it didn’t turn out the way we wanted. Sometimes football is that way. I don’t have much more to say.

“We need to dedicate ourselves to work, and not give up. In this tough year, which we knew may be tough and it is proving to be tough, but here we are playing with our hearts.

Mourinho, who has been out of work since being sacked by Manchester United in December, recently said that he wouldn’t have a problem returning to the Spanish capital for a second spell at the club.

When asked whether he would like to see Mourinho return to the Bernabeu, former Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon told ESPN: “Absolutely not. I’ve already mentioned the amount of damage he caused here.

“His style of play is not what the Bernabeu wants. What the fans want is what we’ve just seen from Ajax; bravery, aggression with a lot of speed and boldness. Mourinho doesn’t do this.

(Source: ESPN)

Jose Mourinho tops Real Madrid’s list of managerial candidates



Jose Mourinho is the first choice to take over at Real Madrid and has already been approached by the club, according to former president Ramon Calderon.

Santiago Solari, Real’s head coach, looks to be under pressure at the Bernabeu after losing back-to-back games to Barcelona and being knocked out of the Champions League by Ajax in the last week.

Madrid crashed out of the Champions League at the last-16 stage after a humiliating 4-1 trouncing at home to Ajax on Tuesday, less than a week after they were knocked out of the Copa del Rey by Barcelona and fell 12 points behind the Liga leaders after losing to them again on Saturday.

Mourinho, who left Real in 2013, said last week he was flattered to be linked with a return to Real, and appears to be a popular choice among fans, who were chanting his name after Tuesday’s humbling 4-1 defeat by Ajax.

Real’s president Florentino Perez needs a “bombshell” to keep calm among the supporters and is set to call on Mourinho – the “only coach he respects”, according to Calderon.

He told Sky Sports News: “I have no doubt Mourinho is the first option for the president. He’s been called in the last weeks.

“It was when Zinedine Zidane left, Mourinho was with Manchester United and he said it was not the right moment to come back, but maybe now he’s free.

“I think there will be many chances he will be on that bench next season.”

Asked about other potential candidates, he added: “Maybe Mauricio Pochettino, they are talking about him. But there will be many in the next days because fans can’t accept this situation.

“There’s been three or four months moaning now, lamenting and regretting what we did planning this team.”

(Source: Sky Sports)

First goal was crucial, says Benatia

Medhi Benatia drew on his FIFA World Cup experience with Morocco and admitted that it was vital Al Duhail made their dominance count with a goal against Esteghlal in Group C of the 2019 AFC Champions League on Tuesday, before they went on to record a 3-0 victory.

After a scoreless first half against the Iranian side, Benatia headed home the first goal as the hour approached to ease any opening-day nerves, before Youssef El Arabi and substitute Ali Afif both got on the scoresheet as the Qatari champions got off to a perfect start.

For Benatia, who was making his AFC Champions League debut after joining from Juventus, the game brought back memories of when he last faced Iranian opposition, back in June.

Morocco dominated against the Islamic Republic of Iran in their opening match at the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018, only to concede deep into stoppage time and suffer an agonizing 1-0 defeat.

“As long as you don’t score the first goal it’s always going to be difficult, the first goal unlocks the game a little bit,” said Benatia, who reached the 2016-17 UEFA Champions League final with Juventus.



“We knew that Iranian teams are really hard to play against. I remember a bad experience we had at the World Cup with Morocco when we dominated the whole game but lost 1-0 in the end.

“The Iranian teams are like that so we had to score that first goal and then we could build on it, but I think in the first half we still had control of the game.”

Al Duhail began last year’s AFC Champions League

in stunning fashion, winning all six of their group games and then their first three knockout round matches to equal Ulsan Hyundai’s record of nine successive victories in the 2012 competition.

The wheels came off in the second leg of the quarter-finals, though, when another Iranian team, Persepolis, recorded a 3-1 win in Iran to eliminate the Qatari side.

Now under new head coach Rui Faria and with quality acquisitions such as Benatia and Japanese international Shoya Nakajima, the Doha side return as one of the favorites to lift the title.

“It’s good to start with a win, especially at home, and if you want to go far in this competition, you have to start like that,” added the 31-year-old defender, whose new team currently sit four points behind table-toppers Al Sadd in the Qatar Stars League.

“The coach is doing a very good job but he only arrived a few weeks ago and we need results quickly; that’s what we have been doing since he came and we are trying to give it our all.”

Al Duhail will travel to Riyadh to face Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal in their next Group C game on Tuesday.

(Source: the-afc)

Iranian women karateka team crowned champion at Int’l Fajr Cup

IRNA — Iranian women were crowned champion in karate competitions of International Fajr Cup in southern Iranian island of Kish.

Iran bagged 3 gold medals and 5 silver medals to collect 641 points and rank first in the tournament.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan ranked 2nd and 3rd, respectively. The competitions were participated by some 252 karatekas from different countries, including Azerbaijan Republic, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Russia, Syria, Sweden, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Poland, Nigeria and India.

Iran wins bronze at Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing C’ship

TASNIM — Iran’s sabre team claimed a bronze medal at the Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing Championship in Amman, Jordan on Wednesday.

The Iranian team, consisting of Shahriar Golzar, Miad Abedini and Amir Hossein Shaker, failed to book a place in the final match after losing to South Korea 45-32.

Iran had defeated host Jordan 45-36 and Chinese Taipei 45-37 before losing to the Korean team.

The Sabre is one of the three disciplines of modern fencing. The sabre weapon is for thrusting and cutting with both the cutting edge and the back of the blade.

Iran has participated in the competition with 10 fencers.

Albion’s Alireza Jahanbakhsh backed to get goals

ALIREZA JAHANBAKHSH has been backed to boost Albion’s goals tally.

The £17 million record signing was top scorer in the Dutch top flight with AZ Alkmaar last season.

He almost broke his duck for the Seagulls when striking the bar against Huddersfield during what manager Chris Hughton regarded as the Iranian winger’s best performance for the club so far.

“Yes and I am hoping we are going to see more,” Hughton told The Argus. “He is a goalscorer and that is why we brought him in.

“Particularly in a 4-3-3, you know you can get goals from your number nine but we are missing Jose’s goals from last year from the left.

“Jurgen is a different player, Anthony hasn’t been a big goalscorer for us, so you like to think that with Alireza in the team we can get more goals.”

Jahanbakhsh and the recalled Bernardo behind him at left-back face a test from Crystal Palace’s potent combination of Wilfried Zaha and Aaron Wan-Bissaka at Selhurst Park on Saturday after Hughton played them together against Huddersfield for the first time in the Premier League.

Hughton said: “Bernardo was in good form before he got injured, and I don’t think Gaetan has done badly at all, but on balance Bernardo got the nod.

“Alireza is now back from the Asian Cup, he has been with us a while and he is a player we value and brought here for big money.” (Source: The Argus)

Tokyo 2020: Venues will be smoke-free

The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee announced that smoking will not be permitted at any of the Olympic or Paralympic venues for the duration of the Games. The ban will be extended to heated tobacco products and other vaping devices.

At the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Games, smoking was not permitted inside indoor competition venues, but smoking areas were provided around these.

Tokyo 2020 has decided to adopt a stricter non-smoking policy to protect the health and safety of athletes, spectators and officials and will ban smoking in indoor venues, outdoor venues and in venues’ secure perimeters operated by Tokyo 2020.

This is a similar policy to that enacted during at the Pyeong-Chang 2018 Winter Games. Tokyo 2020 aims to leave a legacy of improved public health for the country at large.

An amendment to Japan’s Health Promotion Law will be fully enacted on 1 April 2020, together with Tokyo’s new regulations to reduce the incidence of passive smoking.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games will take place between 25 August and 6 September and will feature 4,400 athletes competing in 22 sports across 540 medal events.

Badminton and taekwondo will be the two sports making their Paralympic debut in Tokyo.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Preidler’s attempted doping is ‘high treason’, says team leader

PARIS (Reuters) — Georg Preidler’s doping confession has left his Groupama-FDJ team leader Thibaut Pinot in shock after the Austrian left the French outfit on Monday.

Preidler admitted he had his “blood taken out” amid an investigation into a blood-doping ring that brought down five skiers last week.

The 28-year-old Preidler was a member of Pinot’s close lieutenant and had been expected to ride alongside the Frenchman in this year’s Tour de France.

“It has been very difficult, I even cried because to me it is high treason,” Pinot, third in the 2014 Tour and fourth in the 2017 Giro d’Italia, told French sports daily L’Equipe on Tuesday.

Preidler, who admitted to intended doping but said he never actually went through the whole blood transfusion process, joined Groupama-FDJ in 2018, winning a stage in last year’s Tour of Poland.

“He was a crucial ally for me. I would like to understand. He had become a friend,” added 28-year-old Pinot, who last season won a Monument one-day race, the Tour of Lombardy.

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■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
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GUIDE TO
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Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian photographers win awards at Indian contests

A R T **TEHRAN** — Seven Iranian photographers have won awards at the 12th NBPC International Salon of Photography in India, the organizers have announced.

Mehdi Zabolabbasi won the FIAP Ribbon for his single



“In the Wind Direction” by Saeid Arabzadeh won the NBPC Ribbon at the 12th NBPC International Salon of Photography in India.

photo “Bondage” in the Open Monochrome Section.

Amin Dehqan for “Khara Desert” and Reza Amelipur for “Sare” received NBPC honorable mentions in this section.

In the Travel Section, Saeid Arabzadeh won the NBPC Ribbon for his photo “In the Wind Direction”, while Mohammadreza Masumi received an honorable mention for “Realism Abstract”.

Sahar Hasanazadeh won the FIAP Ribbon for “Autumn” and Ali Dormiani-Bozorg received the NBPC Ribbon for “Sorrow” in the Theme – Motion Section.

In addition, Shahriar Dabiri’s photo “Milky Way Reflection” won the Best Landscape Award at the 2nd Pune International Digital-Photography Salon, which was also held in India.

Both contests are organized by the Photographic Society of America (PSA) and the Federation Internationale de l’Art Photographique (FIAP).

Mohammad Aqebati to stage “Apart-ment” in New York Emruz Festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mohammad Aqebati plans to stage “Apart-ment” in New York on April 19 and 20.



A poster for Emruz Festival.

Written by Iranian dramatist Keyvan Sarreshteh, the play will be performed at the first edition of the Emruz Festival, an Iranian festival of films, and theatrical and musical performances.

The play is a production by Maaa Theater, a company working in New York and Tehran.

The festival, which is designed to illuminate the work of independent contemporary Iranian artists living inside and outside the United States, will run from April 19 to 21 and 26 to 28.

Tehran Chamber Orchestra to resume with vocalist Shahram Nazeri

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Chamber Orchestra plans to resume its concerts after almost a six-year hiatus along with world-renowned vocalist Shahram Nazeri.

The concert will be conducted by Bardia Kiaras at Milad Tower on March 13, the organizers have announced.

Songs from Nazeri’s latest album “Arash the Archer” released by Qoqnus Art and Culture Institute on Monday will be performed during the concert.

Pejman Taheri is the composer of the album that features “Night”, “Tale”, “Hope”, “Arash” and “Farewell” selected from a poem collection of the same name by Siavash Kasrai.

Director and theater expert Qotbeddin Sadeqi, who is also a prominent actor, has collaborated with Nazeri and Taheri in this project as a narrator.

“Arash the Archer” is based on the story of the Persian mythical character Arash the Archer.

Legend has it that Arash shot an arrow from the peak of Damavand, Iran’s highest peak, to mark the border of Iran and Turan after the long-lasting war between the two countries.

The arrow fell on the bank of the River Oxus in what is now Central Asia. Arash, who had pulled his bow with all his strength, collapsed to the ground on Mount Damavand and passed away.

The Tehran Chamber Orchestra was established by former Tehran Symphony Orchestra conductor Nader Mashayekhi in 2008.



Vocalist Shahram Nazeri performs in an undated photo. (Tasnim/Hossein Tahavvori)

“Last Fiction” director says migration affects Iran animation development



Animator Ashkan Rahgozar attends a press conference for his movie “The Last Fiction” during the 37th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran’s Milad Tower on February 1, 2019. (FFF/Milad Payami)

A R T **TEHRAN** — Ashkan Rahgozar, the director of the acclaimed Iranian animated movie “The Last Fiction”, has said that his fellow colleagues’ migration affects the development of animation in the country.

He is the director and founder of Hoorakhsh Studio, an animation studio in Tehran, which has produced “The Last Fiction” that has been honored at several Iranian and foreign events, including the 20th Bucheon International Animation Film Festival in South Korean and the 3rd Ajayu International Animation Festival in Peru in 2018.

“Our studio organizes animation courses to discover promising young persons,” Rahgozar told the Persian service of ISNA on Wednesday.

“However, when they achieve high academic standards and they can play a

positive role in animation production, they migrate to work in other countries,” he added.

“We haven’t found any solution to the problem of migration, because it is really extensive,” he lamented.

“The Last Fiction” is currently competing in the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival.

“‘The Last Fiction’ is the first feature-length animation produced at our studio,” he said and added, “The major experience that I want to share with other animators is that there are big differences between making a short animation and a feature-length one.”

“Those animators who want to do a feature-length movie should spend more time in the pre-production stage and also scrutinize how compelling their story is and work in a well-planned manner.”

Arbor Day inspires talks with painter Manuchehr Niazi on his “Trees” series



A painting by from Manuchehr Niazi’s series “Trees”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Veteran artist Manuchehr Niazi has talked about his “Trees” collection on the occasion of Arbor Day in Iran.

March 6 is celebrated as the National Tree Planting Day in Iran. Trees have been the central theme of art collections by many renowned Iranian artists, including Sohrab Sepehri, Hossein Mahjubi and Davud Emdadian.

Paintings from Sepehri’s “Tree Trunk” series have been top sellers at the Tehran Auction several times.

The 82-year old artist said that he and Sohrab worked at a joint atelier in Tehran located across from Shahr-e Farang Theater in the Abbasabad neighborhood.

“Sohrab worked on tree trunks too, but his trees were painted in an amber color while mine were mostly colorful,” he told the Persian service of Honaronline on Wednesday.

“These days, my main focus is still on the ‘Trees’ collection. Of course, they have changed and this change of process is quite clear in my recent works. In my old paintings, there was

no sign of individuals among the trees, and the trees themselves looked like people. However, in my recent works human-like shapes and figures are wandering among the trees,” he explained.

He said that the silver screen has been the source of inspiration for his “Trees”.

“When I used to go to the cinema on Lalezar St., (once known as Tehran’s Broadway), the silver screens were very interesting for me. I used to look at the screens repeatedly for a long time and used to see some forms, which later became sources of inspiration for my ‘Trees’,” he added.

He further added that he believes there is no must in art and artists can paint their own trees.

“There are those who paint trees with all their details, the branches and leaves. But I follow my own tastes and ethics, which tell me to focus more on tree roots,” he concluded.

A collection of Niazi’s works is on display at Tehran’s Boom Gallery in an exhibition, which will come to an end on Friday.

“Damascus Time” hits silver screens in India

A R T **TEHRAN** — “Damascus Time”, Ebrahim Hatamikia’s drama on the atrocities of the Daesh war in Syria, is currently on screen in several Indian cities, the Owj Arts and Media Organization, which is the producer of the film, announced on Wednesday.

Hatamikia attended several special screenings in the cities to promote his film.

“Damascus Time” is about an Iranian pilot and his copilot son who are captured by Daesh forces in Syria while they are in the country to deliver a cargo of humanitarian relief supplies to people in a war-torn region.

Hadi Hejazifar and Babak Hamidian from Iran and several Syrian and



A scene from “Damascus Time” by Ebrahim Hatamikia.

Lebanese actors star in the movie that brought Hatamikia a Crystal Simorgh for best director at the 36th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in 2018.

The film was previously screened in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Japan.

Hello Kitty to make her big screen debut

NEW YORK (AP) — Hello Kitty might not have a mouth but she’s got a movie deal.

Warner Bros.? New Line Cinema announced Tuesday that it has acquired film rights to Hello Kitty from the Japanese corporation Sanrio. The 45-year-old iconic feline has never been turned into a movie despite its merchandising ubiquity.

New Line said it will quickly begin work on a script to put a film into production. Sanrio also granted film rights to other characters including Gudetama, My Melody and Little Twin Stars.

Warner Bros. has had success with toy adaptations before, including “The Lego Movie.” That film’s sequel, however, has underperformed at the box office since opening last month.



In this Oct. 30, 2014, Keith Nunez, left, takes pictures of his wife, Carolina, at the first-ever Hello Kitty fan convention, Hello Kitty Con, at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA in Los Angeles.

Hello Kitty presents potentially steeper challengers, though. She doesn’t talk or, for the most part, change facial expressions.

Backlash begins over “Leaving Neverland” Jackson abuse documentary

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Some radio stations in Canada and the Netherlands stopped playing Michael Jackson’s music and fans bombarded Oprah Winfrey with hateful messages after the broadcast of a documentary about alleged child abuse by the late singer.

“Leaving Neverland,” in which two adult men say they were befriended by Jackson and were abused by him from the ages of 7 and 10 in the early 1990s, was met with a mixture of horror and disbelief after a two-part airing on U.S. cable channel HBO on Sunday and Monday.

Winfrey, herself a sexual assault survivor, conducted

her own follow-up interview with accusers Wade Robson and James Safechuck in a special that was broadcast on Monday night in front of an audience of assault victims.

Winfrey was aware of the attacks they might face.

“All the anger - you guys are going to get it,” she said during the interview. “You’re going to get it. I’m going to get it. We’re all going to get it.” Robson told Winfrey he had already received death threats.

Jackson’s family has called the documentary and news coverage of the accusations in it a “public lynching” and said he was “100 percent innocent.”

His estate has called the documentary a “rehash of dated and discredited allegations,” and filed a lawsuit against HBO in February, saying it breached a 1992 agreement that the cable channel would not disparage Jackson.

The “Thriller” singer, who died in June 2009, was acquitted at a 2005 trial in California on charges.

“Leaving Neverland,” which features detailed interviews with Robson, Safechuck and their mothers and wives, will be shown in Britain and in other nations later this month.

Dutch station NH radio said it would stop playing Jackson’s music for a few weeks.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Audio version of “The Orange Tree” released in Persian

C U L T U R E **TEHRAN** — An audio version of the Persian translation of “The Orange Tree” by Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes has recently been released in Tehran. Published by Novin Ketab Gooya Publications, the audiobook has been narrated by voice actor Manuchehr Zendedel.

The book was translated into Persian by Ali-Akbar Fallahi and published by Qoqnus Publications in 2013.

“The Orange Tree” is composed of five novellas, which explore the theme of cultural conflict.