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India seeking extension of waiver on Iran's oil imports

New Delhi is negotiating with Washington about extending a waiver of U.S. sanctions on imports of oil from Iran which will expire in early May, two sources in India with knowledge of the matter said. The major Asian buyer of Iranian oil wants to keep buying crude from Iran at its current level of about 300,000 barrels per day (bpd), the sources said, Reuters reported.

India is among eight countries with the

U.S.' 180-day waivers allowing them to keep importing Iranian oil through May 4.

All transactions under the U.S. State Department's current "significant reduction exemptions" must be completed by May 4.

Fresh waivers would start on May 5 for countries that the U.S. determines have met their promises to significantly reduce Iranian imports in the previous six months. **→4**

Pakistan president, PM send letter to Ayatollah Khamenei

TEHRAN — On Thursday, Pakistan's minister for railways carried a joint letter from his country's President Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Sheikh Rasheed handed over the written text to Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to the Leader.

During the meeting, Rasheed hoped for development of ties between Tehran

and Islamabad and underlined that Imran Khan is willing to enhance Pakistan's relations with all countries, including Iran.

Velayati, for his part, said, "Relations between Iran and Pakistan are brotherly, good and constructive," adding that promotion of economic cooperation and establishment of a railroad linking Iran, Pakistan and China could further strengthen ties. **→2**

Iran calls Arab Quartet Committee statement 'invalid'

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Thursday that a statement issued by the Arab Quartet Committee is "invalid" and "counter-constructive".

The Arab Quartet Committee issued a statement on Wednesday accusing Iran of making "provocative" statements against Arab countries and

alleged that Tehran was interfering in Yemen, according to the Asharq al-Awsat newspaper.

The committee is comprised of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain. The committee was meeting on the sidelines of the 151st session of the Arab League Foreign Ministers. **→2**



PERSPECTIVE

Heshmatollah Rahnama
Latin American expert

The collapse of American empire is a warning to Europe

The wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and threats and violence against Latin America, and imposition of sanctions on various nations, all can deface the United States and its unpopular policy in the international community, set to protect U.S. financial institutions.

Although the U.S. empire has already begun to crumble, U.S. President Donald Trump's policy has sped the process. The wrong policy of the U.S. administrations has brought the nations to stand against the U.S. led-world order.

The U.S. has turned into the biggest threat to the world peace with its dual policies, violence in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and support for Saudi Arabia and Israel. Obviously, the "regime change" in Venezuela, on the pretext of democracy, is nothing but a cover-up in the U.S. policy to seize Venezuela's oil reserves.

American democracy means supporting U.S. foreign policy, privatization of public infrastructure, non-compliance with domestic laws and compliance with U.S.-dominated global institutions. Decades of war and U.S. military intervention, have brought nothing but violence, killing, and destruction on planet earth.

To the U.S., a country is considered democratic that follows its leadership such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, otherwise that country is non-democratic and a foe. This policy is challenged by states like Iran, Russia, China, Venezuela and others which don't bow down to Washington's policy and seek to defend their own national interest. Any international control system requires the rule of law to mediate in the world challenges. However, the U.S. diplomacy contradicts the international law. The American diplomats claim their better judgement on the world allows other nations to adopt a more prosperous lifestyle, and they don't allow the intervention of international laws in the U.S. policy and diplomatic system.

The U.S. has the "power of veto" in the United Nations that enables Washington to prevent the adoption of any "substantive" resolution. In the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), they can easily veto any policy or loan. Without such powers, no international organization will join the United States. **→7**

Diplomatic protection for Nazanin Zaghari 'against international law'

The Iranian ambassador to London, Hamid Baeidinejad, has responded to Britain's decision to grant Nazanin Zaghari-Ratliffe diplomatic protection, calling it illegal.

Zaghari, who is serving a prison sentence in Tehran for "espionage", was on Thursday extended the protection - the first such time in the British history.

The British government's exceptional decision

"contravened international law", Baeidinejad tweeted in response, The Telegraph reported on Friday.

"Govts may only exercise such protection for own nationals," he said. "As UK Govt is acutely aware, Iran does not recognize dual nationality. Irrespective of UK residency, Ms Zaghari thus remains Iranian."

Britain has not afforded diplomatic pro-

tection to anyone in living memory prior to Zaghari, Sky TV reported.

The last time the UK government is known to have used this power is in 1951, in support of a British-Iranian oil company.

Zaghari, a dual British-Iranian national who had been living in London with her husband Richard and daughter Gabriella, was arrested during a visit to Tehran in 2016. **→2**

36 nations, including Europeans, rap Saudi Arabia for 1st time at UN rights body

As many as 36 countries, including all 28 members of the European Union (EU), have taken Saudi Arabia to task for the first time at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) over Riyadh's glaring rights violations.

It was the first time states had ever confronted the kingdom over its human rights record in the UNHRC, where Saudi Arabia is one of 47 members.

The group of countries expressed concern about Riyadh's rights records in a statement issued on Thursday and read out by Iceland which occupies

the Human Rights Council seat vacated by the United States when it quit the body last year.

The statement drew applause from human rights groups, which said it broke Saudi Arabia's apparent impunity from condemnation in the council, and urged the Saudi regime to release all those held for exercising their right to protest.

"It sends a strong signal that Saudi Arabia is not untouchable, and that council members should be held to a higher level of scrutiny," said Salma El Hosseiny, an advocate for the Geneva-based

International Service for Human Rights.

The rebuke condemned Saudi Arabia's "continuing arrests and arbitrary detentions of human rights defenders" and its use of counterterrorism laws to silence peaceful dissent.

"It is a success for Europe to be united on this," an envoy of an EU country told Reuters.

The United States, which considers the House of Saud regime to be one of its allies in the Middle East and maintains strong economic and military cooperation with Riyadh, however, opted out of signing the statement. **→13**

Assassination reports compound amid rift among Saudi royals

The House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has escaped an assassination attempt by his brother Bandar bin Salman, an Israeli newspaper reports.

Bin Salman's brother had promised an officer in charge of protecting the crown prince 10 million Saudi rials if he assassinated the powerful heir to rule the kingdom, Makor Rishon reported earlier this week.

The plot, however, was uncovered beforehand by bin Salman who ordered the arrest of his brother and the security officer, it added.

The report cannot be independently verified. According to the Israeli newspaper, a new security team described as a rapid response unit had been formed to protect the crown prince inside the kingdom and abroad following the plot.

The alleged assassination attempt came after

the British daily The Guardian reported rising tensions between bin Salman and his father, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, over important policy issues.

A source told the newspaper that tensions between the king and the crown prince dramatically increased late February when the former visited Egypt for a joint summit between European Union (EU) and Arab League (AL) leaders at Sharm el-Sheikh. **→13**

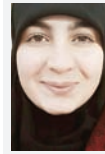
"This Magnificent Cake!" tastes good at Tehran animation festival

TEHRAN — "This Magnificent Cake!", a joint production of Belgium, France and the Netherlands, was named best film at the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival, the organizers announced on Thursday.

Co-directed by Marc James Roels and Emma De Swaef, the story of the film is set in colonial Africa in the late 19th century. The anthology film tells the stories of five different characters, including a troubled king, a middle-aged Pygmy working in a luxury hotel, a failed businessman on an expedition, a lost porter and a young army deserter. **→16**



Iranian animator Ashkan Rahgozar accepts the award for best feature-length movie for his "The Last Fiction".



ARTICLE

Sondoss Al Asaad
Political analyst from Beirut

Hezbollah a national resistance not a terrorist organisation

The British government said on Monday it plans to ban all wings of the Lebanese Resistance, aka Hezbollah "due to its destabilising influence in the Middle East," classing it as a 'terrorist organisation.'

Hezbollah has been a topic of internal political controversy in the U.K., which had already proscribed the resistance's external security unit and its military wing in 2001 and 2008 respectively.

On Friday, the ban will come into force subject to parliamentary approval. Accordingly, Hezbollah members and supporters would be prosecuted on charges of committing 'a criminal offence,' with up to 10 years jail sentence.

The Home Secretary (U.K. Interior Minister), Sajid Javid, an extreme right-wing politician of the Pakistani origin, said in a statement, "Hezbollah is continuing in its attempts to destabilise the fragile situation in the Middle East - and we are no longer able to distinguish between their already banned military wing and the political party." Javid added, "Because of this, I have taken the decision to proscribe the group in its entirety."

The UK Labour Party has allowed its MPs freedom in a vote in parliament on banning the political wing of the Hezbollah, stating that there is 'not sufficient evidence' that the organisation meets proscription.

In a statement, the Labour Party statement said, "The Home Secretary must therefore now demonstrate that this decision was taken in an objective and impartial way, and driven by clear and new evidence, not by his leadership ambitions."

For decades, Jeremy Corbyn, the opposition party leader has been a fierce critic of the Zionists' practices and has famously once called officials in Hamas and Hezbollah as friends.

Lebanon's Hezbollah-allied Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil, said the U.K. move would not have a negative impact on Lebanon and that Britain had informed Lebanon of its commitment to the bilateral relationship. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



JCPOA did not improve people's livelihood: Cleric

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Despite promises, the nuclear deal did not improve people's livelihoods, the Friday prayer leader of Tehran said.

"This is while it was said that [with the deal] both [nuclear] centrifuges and people's lives will be running fine," Hojjatoleslam Kazem Seddighi said, Mehr reported.

Before Seddighi's speech, Hojjatoleslam Qolamreza Mesbahi Moqaddam, a member of the Expediency Council, told worshippers that Iran's interests are important in ratifying or rejecting FATF.



Zarif, Swaraj hold talks on regional developments

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj exchanged views about a range of issues, including the latest developments in the region, according to a report by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

During a phone conversation on Thursday afternoon, the two chief diplomats conferred on bilateral ties as well as regional issues.

Zarif also underlined the need for peaceful settlement of differences in the region through dialogue.

In early January, Zarif headed a business and diplomatic delegation to India, meeting top Indian officials, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Araqchi meets South African officials

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi held separate talks on Thursday with South African Parliament Speaker Baleka Mbete and International Relations and Cooperation Deputy Minister Reginah Mhaule in Cape Town on Thursday.

Conveying warm greetings of Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, Araqchi explained to Mbete the latest situation surrounding the JCPOA (the official name for the nuclear deal) and the EU countries' financial mechanism for trade with Iran.

Mbete, for her part, underlined significance of bilateral relations and highlighted South Africa's readiness to promote economic cooperation with Iran.

During Araqchi and Mhaule's meeting, the South African official said despite constraints, her country will remain committed to continue to support Iran in face of U.S. sanctions.

"...today's meeting will add further momentum to our bilateral relations, such that South Africa and Iran will weather the storm together," she said, according to The South African.



Bahram Qassemi named Iran's ambassador to France

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's Foreign Ministry has named Bahram Qassemi as Tehran's new ambassador to France.

The official website of the ministry reported on Friday that Qassemi, a former envoy to Spain and Italy who in recent years has acted as Foreign Ministry spokesman, has been given the mission to serve as Iran's top diplomat in Paris.

Qassemi has been serving as spokesman and head of the Foreign Ministry's Public and Media Diplomacy Center since mid-2016.

In the other way round, Philippe Thiebaud, a former French envoy to Pakistan who once represented France at the UN atomic watchdog, was appointed this week as the new French ambassador to Iran.



Tehran after facilitating Syria-Kurds talks: MP

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran is trying to facilitate talks between the Syrian government and its Kurdish population, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has said.

Speaking to IRNA on Thursday, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh said the Kurds and the Syrian government have already held some rounds of talks, adding that the situation is ripe to push the negotiations forward.

Elsewhere in the interview, Falahatpisheh warned that a war in northern Syria would trigger humanitarian crisis, especially as there are about 100,000 terrorists in Idlib.

Iran calls Arab Quartet Committee statement 'invalid'

I → Qassemi said, "This committee's invalid and counter-constructive statements have no result but deepening distrust and division among the regional countries. Member states to this committee are well aware that this statement does not express all the regional countries' view and reflects view of certain countries."

Qassemi added that all these four countries are aware that Iran is not affected by such hostile actions which are based on delusion.

"Iran will not change its independent policy in opposing aggression against Yemen, fighting terrorism and countering extra regional forces in the Persian Gulf," he noted.

He also urged the regional countries to take moves in line with long-lasting security based on collective cooperation.

Rouhani says Iran ready to deepen ties with Iraq

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Iran is ready to expand ties and cooperation with Iraq in various areas.

During a meeting with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohamed al-Halbousi, Rouhani said Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah, the government and parliament are also determined to establish close and brotherly cooperation with neighboring Iraq.

Stability and security in Iraq affect Iran's security and stability as well, he said.

"Iran is ready to expand cooperation (with Iraq) in the areas of economy and infrastructure," he added.

Rouhani is set to pay an official visit to Iraq on March 11 in order to boost ties between the two neighbors amid U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic. A high-ranking delegation is set to accompany the president.

Halbousi highlighted the necessity of expanding relations.

He also praised Iran's help in fighting terrorism.



Iraqi Parliament Speaker Halbousi (L) meets President Rouhani in Gilan, March 6, 2019

Ayatollah Khamenei appoints Raeisi as Judiciary chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In a decree issued on Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Hojjatoleslam Ebrahim Raeisi as the new head of Iran's Judiciary.

The Leader cited the knowledge, experience, and competence displayed by Raeisi at various junctures and his long-term service in the Judiciary as the basis of his decision.

Following is full text of Leader's decree posted on the khamenei.ir:

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful,

Your excellency Hujjatul-Islam wal-Muslimin Haj Sayyid Ibrahim Ra'eesi,

The onset of the fifth decade of the revolution and the completion of forty years after the formation of the judiciary based on Fiqh and Islamic laws necessitates that relying on the experiences, achievements and guidelines that have been gained during this period of time, a change in accordance with the needs, advancements, and shortcomings be applied within the Judicial Branch, so that with fresh energy and increased motivation as well as wisdom-based discipline and management, the department of Justice vigorously starts a new era, which deservedly fits the second phase of the Revolution.

To this critical end, I have appointed you, as you have many years of experience in various levels of the Judiciary; and have a command of its various aspects. Moreover, besides your studies in Fiqh, you are a graduate in law, with relevant knowledge and expertise in this essential area, and you have proven your honesty, sincerity and efficiency in different positions you have served.

I have read the Document for Judicial Change you have proposed. Based on expert consultations and opinions, I find it useful and effective. Meanwhile, I strongly recommend you to take into consideration the following points:

1.Determine a deadline for every chapter and subsequent articles in the document; and oblige yourself and your colleagues to meet the deadline. While arranging for deadlines, neither rush nor delay should be allowed.

2.In all the chapters of the document, you should make sure that it is applied in a democratic, revolutionary and anti-corruption fashion.

3.Regard the power of righteous human resource as the top factor for change and progress. Non-corrupt and honest judges represent the first and foremost condition for your success. Never hesitate to uproot corruption from within the Judiciary, which is the reason for your being esteemed and honored by the majority of the

judges in the courts.

4.To put as top priorities on your agenda the promotion of justice, restoration of the rights of the common man and legal freedoms, as well as the supervision of the execution of the law which are among the goals of the Judiciary in the constitution. This will bring about the trust of the people and their assurance by the Judiciary in the course of events and conflicts.

5.To juridically confront with hesitation and compromise.

To employ righteous, revolutionary and wise young individuals in positions within the Judiciary.

6.To dignify the judge and the court. The sense of dignity and honor in a judge is a strong obstacle against temptation, and against factors of infiltration and deviation.

7.To remember cooperation and collaboration with the Executive, and the Legislative Branches, as has always been my advice. They are also bound to cooperate and collaborate with you.

In the end, I thank and honor Ayatollah Amoli for his valuable efforts, and ask God to grant you and your colleagues complete success, and supplicate to Imam Mahdi, may our souls be sacrificed for him, for his attention and prayers.

Iran not afraid of negotiations but U.S. must first return to nuclear deal, Rouhani says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that Iran is not afraid of the negotiating table but noted that the U.S. should return to the 2015 nuclear deal and make up for the past.

During a session of the Administrative

Council of Gilan Province, Rouhani said that Iran has the power to negotiate and is not afraid of the negotiating table.

"We have strong logic and reasoning, to the extent that we have gained victory against the U.S. in the international courts. We have no fear of the negotiating

table, legal discussion and (even) war," he stated.

On May 8, 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump officially withdrew his country from the international nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and reinstituted sanctions

against Iran.

On July 31, Trump offered to meet Iran's leaders with "no preconditions" and "any time they want"

"I'd meet with anybody. I believe in meetings," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Diplomatic protection for Nazanin Zaghari 'against international law'

I → The issue of citizenship has created an impasse between the two countries and has meant Zaghari has been denied British consular help.

However, her husband Richard Ratcliffe said he had pushed for the move as they had exhausted all other avenues.

"Two foreign secretaries have been out to try to solve her case, an ambassador has been summoned, and plenty of promises have been made but not delivered on," he told The Telegraph. "Particularly the continuing lack of health treatment. So it is time to signal enough is enough."

The protection means her case will now be treated as a formal, legal dispute between the two states involved. It will also give the UK new ways of raising her case in international forums like the United Nations.

Asked about Iran's allegation that the UK had broken international law, Jeremy Hunt, Foreign Secretary, said he "would expect some sort of negative reaction"



from the country.

He defended the move, saying it is unlikely to be a "magic wand" to get her released but was an "important diplomatic step".

"It's difficult to know exactly what the impact will be," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "But we do want the world to know the UK will not stand by while its citizens are unjustly treated."

Pakistan president, PM send letter to Ayatollah Khamenei

I → However, he said, incidents like a recent attack on Iranian forces by terrorists who entered Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province from Pakistan do harm to the relations.

Velayati called on Pakistan to make more efforts to ensure the security in common borders and put an end to terrorist attacks against Iran by groups based in Pakistan.

Pakistan should not allow other countries like Saudi Arabia and the Zionists to undermine Tehran-Islamabad ties and foment crises along the common border, Velayati pointed out.

He said the terrorist groups that recently killed a number of Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) forces receive equipment and financial support from Saudi Arabia and Israel.

On Feb. 13, a suicide bomber targeted a bus carrying IRGC personnel on Khash-Zahedan road in the border province of Sistan-Baluchistan. 27 IRGC



Ali Akbar Velayati Sheikh Rasheed
soldiers were killed and 13 others injured. The so-called Jaish ul-Adl group, which is based in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Iranian military forces along the south-eastern border areas are frequently attacked by terrorist groups coming from Pakistan.

Tehran has frequently asked Pakistan to step up security at the common borders to prevent terrorist attacks on Iranians.

Unwarranted sanctions have caused inequalities, Iran says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN office in Geneva, said on Wednesday unwarranted sanctions have caused or contributed to inequalities.

"While each and every State has responsibility in providing equal opportunities... foreign interventions and manipulations, in particular in the form of unilateral coercive measures and unwarranted sanctions, have caused or contributed to such inequalities," Hamaneh told the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Following is full text of his speech published by IRNA: My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of NAM, OIC and LMG.

My delegation thanks Madame High Commissioner for her update report.

We commend Madame High Commissioner for her critical and pragmatic thinking about human rights challenges and the ways and means to tackle them by ensuring constant progress.

We concur that 'gross inequalities' in its various manifestations risk sustainable and inclusive development and

jeopardize peace and human rights by stirring grievances and fueling hatred and xenophobic sentiment. While each and every State has responsibility in providing equal opportunities, in its true meaning, for all, we need to be cognizant of the fact, too revealing to be contradicted, that foreign interventions and manipulations, in particular in the form of unilateral coercive measures and unwarranted sanctions, have caused or contributed to such inequalities.

The coercive policies and measures, seemingly relentless, have caused economic hardship for the targeted populations and resulted in serious humanitarian consequences by violating the human rights, notably the right to food and the right to health of the targeted populations and jeopardizing their rights to life. What we are witnessing in Latin America, for instance, is a shocking case in point. Whether the imposed sanctions have acted as an 'exacerbating' element or employed as the 'generating' factor in this situation, one thing is clear and that is the broad adverse effects of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

I would also like to highlight the key importance of the 'right to development' as a driving force for addressing

massive inequalities, to be seen in this context.

Imposing economic hardship on people to the extent that innocent men, women and children are starved even to death, being in the occupied Palestinian territories, or in Yemen or elsewhere is more than simple violation of human rights. They are genocidal and criminal amounting to serious crimes of international concern and should be treated as such. The proliferation of different blockades, here and there, including against people in Gaza, against a neighboring country in our own region, and elsewhere is a disgrace for humanity and a setback for human civilization. This is an alarming indication of the high level of impunity the perpetrators of such devastating measures continue to enjoy in pursuing their discriminatory and repressive policies.

Mr. President,

We agree with the High Commissioner that 'human rights build hope'; so we would not back down in the face of gloomy pictures of human rights violations. We should stand ground and work together to ensure a brighter future for human beings, free from stereotypes, clichés and scapegoating.

U.S. bombs Syrian town with internationally-banned white phosphorus munitions

The United States warplanes have again bombed a town in Syria’s eastern Dayr al-Zawr province with internationally-banned white phosphorus munitions, killing several people, the official SANA news agency says.

The attack took place in the town of Baghouz on Thursday, leaving an unknown number of civilians including women and children dead, it added.

The so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is supported by Washington, claims that is fighting the last remaining pocket of land controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists in Baghouz.

Thursday’s bombing marks the third reported the U.S. attack with white phosphorus bombs after the SDF announced it had resumed operations following a break in the fighting to facilitate civilian evacuation last week.

Washington has long been providing the SDF -- a predominantly Kurdish alliance of militants -- with arms and militants, calling the group a key partner in the purported fight against ISIL.

The U.S. and its allies have been conducting airstrikes against what they call ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus or a United Nations mandate.

Damascus has repeatedly denounced the U.S. military presence in the country and its aerial assaults which have repeatedly targeted civilians and its critical infrastructure.

The U.S. has previously used internationally-banned munitions in Syria, particularly in the Dayr al-Zawr province.

In June 2017, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the U.S.-led coalition was deploying white phosphorous bombs in both Iraq and Syria.

■ **Syria rejects OPCW report on Douma chlorine attack as ‘distortion of facts’**

Meantime, the Syrian government says it “categorically rejects” a report by the global chemical weapons watchdog that banned weapons were used in a Damascus suburb last year, accusing the West of fabricating lies through its mercenaries in the country.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) announced on March 1 that based on the findings of its inspectors, a “toxic chemical” containing chlorine was used in clashes between the Syrian military and anti-government militants in the town of Douma, near the capital



Damascus on April 7, 2018.

“The Syrian Arab Republic categorically rejects the conclusions of the mission team,” the Syrian Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by state news agency SANA. “(The report) was no different to previous reports from the mission, which were full of blatant distortion of facts.”

The statement criticized the OPCW for ignoring eyewitness accounts that terrorist groups had staged the chemical attack scenario with the help of the so-called White Helmets aid group, which has known ties to Britain.

“In fact what attracts attention now is that the authors of the report ignored the statements of witnesses who lived with that incident and described the allegations of using chemical weapons in Douma as a play performed by armed terrorist organizations,” it added.

The statement blasted the U.S., Britain and France for using the alleged attack as a pretext to conduct aerial and missile raids in Syria “that destroyed scientific centers which include laboratories for peaceful purposes.”

The ministry said Syria provided the OPCW mission with all the necessary facilities hoping that it would make a logical and professional conclusion with giving in to political pressure from Western countries.

“Syria calls on the member countries at the OPCW to uncover such fake reports which don’t enjoy any credibility, and calls upon the technical secretariat of the OPCW to appoint fact-finding mission members who are professional, fair and neutral,” the spokesman said.

At the time Douma was held by rebels

but besieged by pro-government forces. It came back under government control later that month after years of siege.

The OPCW investigation did not assign blame and confirmed that it had found no traces of banned chemicals but said the information gathered offered “reasonable grounds that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon has taken place on 7 April 2018.”

“This toxic chemical contained reactive chlorine,” the Hague-based organization said, noting that it had found no evidence of the use of nerve agents in the Syrian town.

A joint UN-OPCW team appointed to assign blame for alleged chemical attacks in Syria found that ISIL terrorists had used sulfur mustard in their attacks from 2015 to 2017.

Syria surrendered its entire chemical stockpile in 2013 to a mission led by the OPCW and the UN.

■ **Russia, Syria urge Jordan to admit refugees from Rukban camp**

Elsewhere, the Russian and Syrian coordination centers on returning refugees have urged Jordan to open its border to displaced Syrians, who have been stranded in a camp near the frontier with the country.

“Jordanian authorities, citing security issues and difficult economic situation in the country, refuse to open the border to let refugees into their territory. The refugees are left with the only way to salvation, that is the humanitarian corridor provided by the Syrian authorities,” the centers said in a joint statement published on Thursday.

They added, “We hope our Jordanian partners will further implement humanitarian initiatives on returning Syrian refugees and

participate in resolving the Rukban camp issue, thus contribute to overall stabilization of the situation in the region – something Jordan is interested in.”

The centers then called on the United Nations to demand Washington’s contribution to the resolution of Rukban issue.

■ **Russia ready for dialogue on Rukban camp with all parties**

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at a news briefing on Thursday that Moscow is ready to engage in unconditional dialogue on the Rukban camp with all interested parties, including the U.S.

On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the U.S. needs the Rukban refugee camp in order to justify its illegitimate military presence in Syria.

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.

The UN 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.

Last October, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 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.

■ **Turkey, Russia ‘to hold joint patrols’ in Syria’s Idlib**

Separately, Turkish and Russian patrols are set to begin in Idlib province, the last stronghold held by rebels in Syria, as part of a deal agreed last year.

The launch of the operation on Friday marked a significant sign of cooperation between Ankara, which backs the rebels, and Moscow, an ally of Damascus.

Turkey’s Defense Minister Hulusi Akar told state-owned Anadolu news agency that the move followed an agreement made in September last year.

According to the deal, Russia’s forces will patrol on the edge of rebel-held Idlib province while Turkish army will operate in the demilitarized zone.

He separately warned the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against violating the truce in Idlib.

(Source: agencies)

Malaysia denounced over detention of Egyptian president’s critics

Human rights organizations have criticized Malaysian authorities for detaining four Egyptians critical of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi with the intention of returning them to Egypt.

Describing the move as a violation of human rights law and legal procedure, the groups expressed fear the Egyptians will face severe punishment back home.

An official at Malaysia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed on Friday that four Egyptians had been detained in an operation by Special Branch, the intelligence arm of the country’s police, and the immigration department.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the men were not registered as refugees.

“We can confirm the four have been arrested under SOSMA,” the official said. “They are in the hands of the immigration department and the Egyptian embassy has been informed.”

SOSMA, the Security Offences (Special Measures Act), replaced Malaysia’s Internal Security Act in 2012, and is

supposed to be used to “fight terrorism”. Critics say it is draconian and open to abuse.

Eyewitnesses said one of the men, Mohammed Fathi, had his vehicle stopped and he was taken away by three masked men in Malaysian military uniform, along with several others in civilian clothes.

The wife of Abdullah Hisham Mustafa, another man facing deportation, said she had no idea about his fate. She said her husband could face torture or execution if handed over to the Egyptian authorities.

Ahmed Azzam, deputy secretary-general of the Union of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Islamic World, accused Malaysian authorities of attempting to cover up the deportations.

Calling the move “shameful”, Azzam alleged Malaysian police and Egyptian intelligence may have plotted the renditions without the knowledge of government officials.

He told Al Jazeera Malaysia’s anti-terror law authorizes

the security services and police to act without informing the government.

Sisi led the overthrow of Egypt’s first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood in mid-2013.

The state has since arrested thousands of dissidents, including activists and journalists, as well as Muslim Brotherhood supporters. Egypt has also been accused of arbitrary detention, disappearances and torture, and has silenced most independent media.

Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein was arrested in December 2016 after returning to Egypt to visit family. He’s been imprisoned without charge ever since.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates Egypt has imprisoned as many as 60,000 political activists. In an interview late last year, Sisi denied Egypt was holding any political prisoners.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

U.S. House overwhelmingly passes broad measure condemning hate

The United States Democrats engineered a House vote broadly condemning hatred on Thursday in an attempt to move past alleged anti-Semitic comments by a freshman Muslim congresswoman — a battle that has torn the party apart and stymied attempts to present a unified agenda.

The 407-to-23 vote capped days of frustration and anger over the comments by Rep. Ilhan Omar that have overshadowed Democratic policies — both legislation and investigations of the U.S. President Donald Trump — and raised questions about whether Speaker Nancy Pelosi could keep her fractious caucus together.

Debates over climate change, health care and how the government spends money loom for the House Democratic majority — and are likely to cause fierce internal strife in the coming months.

Even crafting the generic resolution against bigotry proved difficult for Democrats on Thursday, after some groups objected to being omitted from an initial version. The resolution was revised shortly before the vote to add Latinos, Asian Americans and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people to a list of groups subject to hate.

The resolution condemned anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims in equal measure, a shift from a draft circulated on Monday that rebuked only anti-Semitism. Neither mentioned Omar nor her comments specifically.

Republicans mocked the Democrats and



their internal struggles in trying to respond to Omar. Rep. Douglas A. Collins described the resolution as something that “all of us should’ve learned in kindergarten: Be nice.”

On the vote, Democrats were unified, but Republicans splintered. Reps. Lee Zeldin and Liz Cheney, the GOP (Grand Old Party) conference chairwoman, said the resolution should have dealt only with anti-Semitism. Rep. Peter T. King and others objected to language dealing with law enforcement profiling, and Rep. Mo Brooks said he was “shocked” that the measure “refused to similarly condemn discrimination against Caucasian Americans and Christians.”

Omar drew intense scrutiny last week when she suggested that Israel’s supporters have an “allegiance to a foreign country,” remarks that angered many who saw them as hateful

tropes. Her defenders argued that leadership was applying a double standard in singling out one of the two Muslim women in Congress.

The resolution posted on Thursday indirectly repudiates Omar’s comments, saying that “accusations of dual loyalty generally have an insidious and pernicious history” and noting that such an accusation “constitutes anti-Semitism because it suggests that Jewish citizens cannot be patriotic Americans and trusted neighbors.”

It also includes language condemning anti-Muslim bigotry “as hateful expressions of intolerance that are contrary to the values and aspirations of the United States,” and condemns incidents of mosque bombings and planned domestic terrorist attacks targeting Muslim communities.

Omar, a Somali American immigrant, has

spoken about religiously motivated verbal attacks and threats she has been subjected to. Last week, a sign posted in the West Virginia state Capitol falsely linked her to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The decision to sanction Omar for her “allegiance” comments without mentioning the hatred she had faced — as well as incidents of intolerance concerning President Trump and other Republicans — infuriated many Democrats and prompted a backlash at the initial plan to condemn anti-Semitism specifically.

That forced Democratic leaders to confront the divide while dealing with the sensitivities of their caucus.

After the vote, Omar issued a statement with fellow Muslim Reps. André Carson and Rashida Tlaib calling the vote “historic on many fronts” for denouncing “all forms of bigotry.”

Pelosi, meanwhile, gave Omar tentative words of support.

Numerous Democrats expressed hope earlier Thursday that the resolution would put the Omar controversy behind them. It had festered for days, with some Democrats tweeting pointed remarks at each other and others sharing their views in a frank exchange behind closed doors.

Several lashed out at reporters for covering the controversy surrounding Omar rather than the legislation Democrats worked toward passing on Friday.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Venezuela in darkness after major dam ‘sabotage’, Maduro blames U.S.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro says the United States has declared an “electric energy war” against his country amid a widespread blackout that has left the capital Caracas and several other states in almost complete darkness.

The blackout affected 23 of the country’s 24 states on Thursday evening after an “attack” on the Guri Dam, a large hydroelectric facility in east Venezuela, according to the minister of electrical power, Luis Motta Dominguez.

The power failure stopped subway service in the capital Caracas and caused many problems around the country.

“The electric energy war declared and directed by the U.S. imperialists against our people will be destroyed,” Motta wrote in a Twitter post on Thursday. “Nothing and nobody will win over” the people of Venezuela, he added.

Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez also accused right-wing “criminals” of committing “sabotage” to the dam’s system of generation and distribution.

“They sabotaged the central generator... it’s part of the electric war against the state,” the electric company CORPOELEC said, adding it was working to re-establish the service.

Rodriguez also accused the U.S. Senator Marco Rubio of being involved in the “sabotage”, claiming that he “predicted” the power outage before it happened.

“My apologies to [the] people of Venezuela,” Rubio responded on Twitter. “I must have pressed the wrong thing on the ‘electronic attack’ app I downloaded from Apple. My bad.”

The U.S.-backed opposition figure Juan Guaido, who declared himself president, took advantage of the power outage, accusing Maduro’s government of “inefficiency”.

“Venezuela is clear that the light will return with the end of usurpation,” he said. The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also accused Maduro of “incompetence,” saying the responsibility rested with his government.

However, Pompeo denied Washington was behind it. “Power shortages and starvation are the result of the Maduro regime’s incompetence.” The U.S., which has long been pushing to oust the elected government of Maduro, has threatened several times to take military action to topple him.

Washington has also recognized Guaido as the interim president and imposed economic sanctions on the country. The U.S. recently confiscated Venezuela’s state oil assets based in the U.S. to channel them to the opposition.

On Thursday, Trump’s special representative for Venezuela threatened to “expand the net” of sanctions on the country.

“There will be more sanctions on financial institutions that are carrying out the orders of the Maduro regime,” said Elliott Abrams.

■ **China’s stern warning**

Meantime, China’s top diplomat on Friday warned against interfering in Venezuela and imposing sanctions, saying the sovereignty and independence of Latin American countries should be respected.

“The internal affairs of every country should be decided by their own people. External interference and sanctions will only exacerbate the tension situation, and allow the law of the jungle to once again run amok,” State Councilor Wang Yi said.

“There’s already enough of such lessons from history, and the same old disastrous road should not be followed,” he said at his annual news conference on the sidelines of China’s parliament meeting. The U.S. is unhappy about China’s warming relations with Latin American countries. Last month, the U.S. national security adviser John Bolton called on El Salvador to cooperate on what he called the “predatory” expansion of China.

■ **Venezuela blames opposition leader Juan Guaido and the U.S.**

Elsewhere, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Thursday blamed “American imperialism” for a prolonged power outage which affected most of the South American country.

The embattled president blamed the blackout on “the electrical war announced and directed by American imperialism against our people,” he said on Twitter.

Maduro has presided over a massive economic crisis since he succeeded Hugo Chavez as president in 2013. The prolonged crisis has seen large numbers of people facing food and medicine shortages forcing millions to leave the country.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey to start deploying Russian S-400 missile systems in October

The process of deploying Russian advanced S-400 air defense missile systems in Turkey will begin in October, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said at a meeting with editors of the Anadolu news agency on Friday.

“The deployment of S-400s will begin in October and the Air Force is studying, in which regions it is better to deploy them,” the defense minister said.

Turkey’s defense chief reiterated that the acquisition of precisely Russian air defense systems was not “Turkey’s preference, but was a forced measure.”

As Akar stressed, the S-400 surface-to-air missile systems are needed “to protect the country’s population.”

The Turkish defense minister also said that Ankara and Washington “are continuing their negotiations on the delivery of U.S. Patriot air defense missile systems to the republic.”

It was reported in November 2016 that Turkey was in talks with Russia on purchasing S-400 air defense missile systems. The contract’s signing was confirmed by the Russian side on September 12, 2017 and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced at the time that Turkey had already made an advance payment under the contract.

In mid-June 2018, a source in military and diplomatic circles told TASS that Russian defense enterprises had been assigned the task of completing the production of S-400 surface-to-air missile systems in May 2019 for their delivery to Turkey.

The S-400 Triumf is the most advanced long-range air defense missile system that went into service in Russia in 2007. It is designed to destroy aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles, including medium-range missiles, and can also be used against ground installations.

The S-400 can engage targets at a distance of 400 km and at an altitude of up to 30 km.

(Source: TASS)

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	\$65.10/b
WTI	\$55.71/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.04/b
Gold	\$1,294.45/oz
Silver	\$15.16/oz
Platinum	\$821.65/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Annual trade between Iran, U.S. rises 155% in 2018

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of trade between Iran and the U.S. has risen 155 percent in 2018 compared to its previous year, Tasnim news agency reported on Friday citing the latest statistics released by the American Statistical Association (ASA).

As reported, trade between the two countries stood at \$508.4 million in 2018, rising from \$199.1 million in 2017.

In 2018, Iran imported \$440.5 million worth of commodities from the U.S., an increase of 223 percent from \$136 million in 2017.

The country exported \$67.9 million of goods to the U.S. in the past year, with a seven-percent rise from \$63.1 million in its preceding year.

Iran, Lebanon consider expansion of bilateral trade

Iran and Lebanon considered ways to develop trade ties between the two countries.

Iran's Ambassador to Beirut Mohammad Jalal Feirouznia discussed the issue with Lebanese Minister of Transportation and Public Services Youssef Fenianos here on Thursday.

In the meeting, the two sides underlined Tehran and Beirut intention to strengthen ties and discussed ways to develop trade and economic cooperation, especially in the field of executing infrastructures and transportation plans in Lebanon.

The meeting was in the framework of ambassador consultations and visit with new Lebanese government members.

In the past two weeks, Feirouznia met and considered issues of mutual interests with Minister of Youth and Sports Mohammad Fneish, Defense Minister Elias Bou Saab, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Hassan Mourad and Lebanese Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil.

Lebanese cabinet including 32 ministers received confidence vote from parliament on February 16, 2019.

(Source: IRNA)

U.S. job growth seen slowing in February after outsized gains

U.S. job growth likely slowed to a five-month low in February as the weather-related boost in the prior two months faded, workers became more scarce and tighter financial conditions began to weigh on the labor market.

Still, the pace of hiring was probably strong enough to push the unemployment rate back below 4 percent.

The U.S. Labor Department's closely watched monthly employment report on Friday could show moderation in employment growth, in line with a slowing economy that in July will mark 10 years of expansion, the longest on record. It is likely to support the Federal Reserve's "patient" approach toward further interest rate increases this year.

Nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 180,000 jobs last month, according to a Reuters survey of economists. This would be the smallest gain since September. Payrolls increased by a total of 526,000 jobs in December and January as mild temperatures boosted hiring at construction sites and in the leisure and hospitality industry.

Temperatures turned chilly in February, which economists said could have reversed employment gains in these weather-sensitive industries. Economists also believed the effects of a stock market sell-off and jump in U.S. Treasury yields in late 2018 restrained February hiring, as household wealth plunged by a record \$3.8 trillion and many sources of capital for companies froze up, according to Federal Reserve data.

"We are due for some pay back after strong job growth over the last couple of months," said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania. "I also think the timing is right for the tightening in financial market conditions last year to begin to affect the employment data."

First-time applications for jobless benefits were elevated, a hint that February payrolls could surprise on the downside. Also, the Institute for Supply Management surveys showed measures of manufacturing and services sectors employment dropped in the month, while the Federal Reserve on Wednesday reported "modest-to-moderate gains" in employment in a majority of the U.S. central bank's districts.

(Source: Reuters)

India seeking extension of waiver on Iran's oil imports

1 → India has reduced its purchases of Iranian oil, but has been in talks on extending a sanctions waiver, known as a significant reduction exception, a senior India official said in January.

The United States reimposed sanctions against Iran last November in a dispute over Tehran's nuclear program, after President Donald Trump pulled Washington out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers.

Although the United States granted Iran's biggest oil customers - China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece - waivers that have allowed them to continue limited imports, Washington is putting pressure on governments to eventually reduce purchases of Iranian oil to zero. The first round of waivers expires around May 4.

Vincent Campos, a spokesman at the U.S. State Department's energy bureau, would not confirm that India was asking the United States to renew its waiver, but said talks are ongoing with the eight consumers of Iran's oil that



received waivers in November with the aim of eventually cutting imports to zero.

"We continue to have bilateral discussions" with each of the countries, including India, Campos said, Reuters reported.

A U.S. State Department official is this

week visiting South Korea, Iran's fourth largest oil customer in Asia, to talk about sanctions, Seoul said.

David Peyman, a deputy assistant secretary for counter threat finance and sanctions, met on Wednesday with Hong Jin-wook, an official

specializing in African and Middle Eastern affairs at South Korea's foreign ministry.

Peyman offered "to continue to closely consult on the extension of sanctions exemption and Korean companies' technical issues regarding trade with Iran," a statement from Seoul's foreign ministry said.

The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to questions about their talks.

Talks with Washington on extending the waiver slowed due to the U.S. government shutdown that extended through January, one of the Indian sources said. Talks have now resumed and India wants to get clarity before general elections scheduled in May, the source said.

No immediate comment was available from India's oil or external affairs ministries.

Iran was India's seventh biggest oil supplier in January, as compared with its position as third-biggest a year ago before the reimposition of sanctions.

(Source: staff & agencies)

Iran sets up marketing, exports center in Baghdad

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran has established a center in Baghdad for marketing its products in the Iraqi market and also expand the exports of its products to the neighboring country, the official website of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) published.

The center has been set up by Iran's Exhibition Projects Management Company to hold Iranian exhibitions in Iraq in a bid to increase Iran-Iraq bilateral trade, boost Iranian production level, and exchange information and technical knowledge between the two countries.

The Iranian center will be active by the end of next autumn based on Iranian calendar

(December 21, 2019).

Relations between Iran and Iraq have increased greatly since the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003. Iran was the first country that recognized the governing system in Iraq after the Saddam fall.

On March 4, the secretary general of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce said Iraq has expressed readiness to establish a joint bank with Iran.

"The Issue was discussed during Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's talks with the Iraqi side and the Iraqi Rafidain Bank expressed its readiness to establish branches in Iran," Hamid Hosseini said.

Iran is one of the major trading partners

of Iraq. Baghdad has resisted pressure by the Trump administration to cut economic ties with Iran since Washington reintroduced sanctions against Iran last May. Iran and Iraq have agreed to trade in euros.

Also, the number of Iranian exhibitions held in Iraq is on an increasing trend.

The first specialized exhibition of Iranian electricity and related industries kicked off at Baghdad International Exhibition Center on last Tuesday.

Iraqi Electricity Minister Louay Al Khateeb along with Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi accompanied by a handful of officials from both sides attended the opening ceremony.



Speaking in the ceremony, Al Khateeb expressed satisfaction with holding such exhibitions in his country, calling Iranian companies capable trade partners.

‘Britain eager to expand trade ties with Iran’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Senior British trade commissioner, Simon Penney said the British government is attempting to expand its economic relations with Iran, IRIB reported.

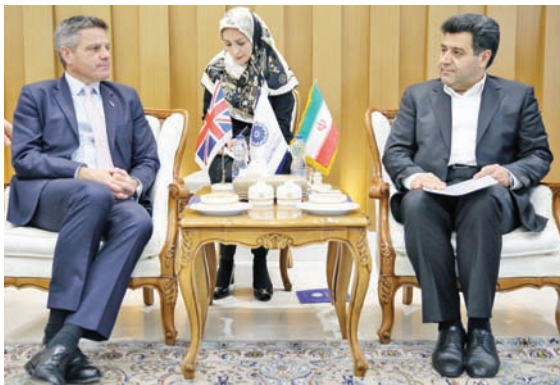
The official made the remarks in a meeting with Hossein Selahvarzi, the deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), in Tehran on Wednesday.

The British official further pointed to exports to Iran and importing Iranian products, investment in various areas such as real estate, industry as well as defining terms and conditions for facilitating trade, as axes that the two countries could focus on in order to expand trade.

Penny further mentioned the EU financial mechanism –known as INSTEX – saying, "Europe is eager for trade with Iran and that is the reason the INSTEX was created."

He emphasized communicating with British companies and institutions in order to make them acquainted with the Iranian market as one of his top responsibilities, adding "One way in which you can provide information to people is through exchanging delegates and attending exhibitions."

"A health-related delegation is scheduled to travel to Iran



British trade commissioner, Simon Penney (L), held talks with Hossein Selahvarzi, the deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), in Tehran on Wednesday.

in June and also some British companies which attended the food industry fair held in Dubai were able to meet with

Iranian counterparts there. These companies are looking for ways to develop business ties with Iran." He said.

■ **A practical financial mechanism**

Salahvarzi for his part mentioned the two countries long history of trade and once again emphasized the need for a practical banking mechanism through which Iranian companies could be able to keep their trade ties with their long-lasting trade partners in Europe.

"As long as the mechanism for financing and transferring funds and in fact the banking and insurance relations between Iran and Europe is not realized, any form of economic relation cannot be planned." The Iranian official said.

Referring to some ambiguities in INSTEX, Salahvarzi said, "Iranian traders are uncertain about the implementation of INSTEX. They do not know if the European private sector which has not played a role in creating this mechanism is willing to use it. Or not."

"There are lots of such ambiguities and questions, that's why a group of major European nations including France, Germany and Britain are working on this issue," said Rob Macaire, the UK ambassador to Iran, in response to what was said by the Iranian official.

Daily gasoline consumption at 88m liters

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iranians consumed 88 million liters of gasoline per day on average since the beginning of current Iranian calendar month of Esfand (February 20, 2019), IRNA reported on Friday citing the data released by the Oil Ministry.

Oil Ministry's data also show that 85 million liters of gasoil was consumed on average per day during the mentioned time span.

Iran's gasoline production has significantly increased since inauguration of the third phase of Persian Gulf Star Refinery. President Rouhani inaugurated the third

phase of the refinery in a ceremony on February 18 participated by Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh.

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

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

China Feb. exports tumble the most in 3 years, heighten global slowdown fears

China's exports tumbled the most in three years in February while imports fell for a third straight month, pointing to a further slowdown in the economy despite a spate of support measures.

While seasonal factors may have been at play, the shockingly weak readings from the world's largest trading nation added to worries about a global slowdown, a day after the European Central Bank slashed growth forecasts for the region.

Asian stock markets and U.S. futures extended early losses after the data. Chinese stocks sank over 3 percent.

Global investors and China's major trading partners are closely watching Beijing's policy reactions as economic growth cools from last year's 28-year low.

February exports fell 20.7 percent from a year earlier, the largest decline since February 2016, customs data showed. Economists polled by Reuters had expected a 4.8 percent drop after January's unexpected 9.1 percent jump.

"Today's trade figures reinforce our view that China's trade recession has started to emerge," Raymond Yeung, Greater China chief economist at ANZ, wrote in a note.

"Chinese exports already registered negative growth in December. The strong figures in January were not reliable due to distortions from the Lunar New Year holiday period."

Imports fell 5.2 percent from a year earlier, worse than analysts' forecasts for a 1.4 percent fall and widening from January's 1.5 percent drop. Imports of major commodities fell across the board.

That left the country with a trade surplus of \$4.12 billion for the month, much smaller than forecasts of \$26.38 billion.

Analysts warn that data from China in the first two months of the year should be read with caution due to business dis-



ruptions caused by the long Lunar New Year holidays, which came in mid-February in 2018 but started on Feb. 4 this year.

But many China watchers had expected a weak start to the year as factory surveys showed dwindling domestic and export orders and the Sino-U.S. trade war dragged on.

■ **Trade war**

The poor China data comes amid months of intense negotiations between Washington and Beijing aimed at ending their trade dispute.

On Wednesday, the U.S. reported its goods trade deficit with China surged to an all-time high last year, underlining one of the key sticking points in the talks.

China's data on Friday showed its surplus with the United States narrowed to \$14.72 billion in February from \$27.3 billion in January, and it has promised to buy more U.S. goods such as agricultural products as part of the trade discussions.

U.S President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that trade talks were moving along well and predicted either a "good deal" or no deal between the world's two largest economies.

Trump postponed a sharp U.S. tariff hike slated for early March as the talks progressed, but both Washington and Beijing have kept previous duties in place.

At the same time, global demand has been weakening, particularly in Europe. China's exports to all of its major markets fell across the board last month.

The Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councillor Wang Yi, said on Friday that trade talks had made substantive progress, and that the two countries' relations should not descend into confrontation.

China's economy was already slowing last year before trade tensions escalated, due in part to a regulatory clampdown on riskier lending that starved smaller, private companies of financing and stifled investment.

The government is targeting economic growth of 6.0 to 6.5 percent in 2019, Premier Li Keqiang said at Tuesday's opening of the annual meeting of China's parliament, a lower target than set for 2018.

Actual growth last year slowed to 6.6 percent, and is expected to cool further to 6.2 percent this year. Many analysts expect a rocky first half before a flurry of stimulus measures start to stabilize activity around mid-year.

China's slowdown and the trade war are having an increasing impact on other trade-reliant countries and businesses worldwide.

Japan's exports in January fell the most in more than two years as China-bound shipments tumbled.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC Feb crude oil output falls 60,000 bpd to 30.80 mil bpd: Platts survey

Saudi Arabia's continued output discipline and Venezuela's struggles under U.S. sanctions led OPEC's crude oil production in February modestly lower to 30.80 million bpd, an S&P Global Platts survey of industry officials, analysts and shipping data found.

The figure is a 60,000 bpd drop from January and is OPEC's lowest output level since March 2015, when Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Congo had yet to join the organization but Qatar was still a member.

Despite the fall, OPEC still has more cutting to do to fully comply with its supply accord that went into force in January. The 11 members with quotas under the deal achieved 79 percent of their committed cuts in February, and remain 170,000 bpd above their collective ceiling. This is a slight improvement on January's 76 percent, with Nigeria and Iraq producing far in excess of their cap, according to Platts calculations.

Venezuela and Iran, both under U.S. sanctions, and Libya, where instability continues to impact output, are exempt from the deal.

The agreement, which runs through June, calls on OPEC and 10 non-OPEC allies, including major producer Russia, to cut a combined 1.2 million bpd in supplies to help shore up oil prices.

The February output figures will be reviewed by a six-country monitoring committee of the OPEC/non-OPEC coalition, which meets March 18 in Azerbaijan to discuss market conditions and assess compliance with the deal. The committee is co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Saudi Arabia, OPEC's largest producer, has



made good on its pledge to lead the coalition by example, slashing its output to 10.15 million bpd in February, the survey found. That is 160,000 bpd below its quota of 10.31 million bpd and the kingdom's lowest output level since May 2018.

Energy minister Khalid al-Falih has signalled that the kingdom may go even lower in March, to 9.8 million bpd.

Venezuela, whose oil production has been declining for years due to underinvestment, technical problems and labor issues, pumped 1.10 million bpd in February, down 60,000 bpd month on month, as it has struggled to sell its crude since U.S. sanctions were imposed in late January.

At the end of February, Venezuela had

10.8 million barrels of crude sitting dockside without a buyer. The country's output is down 910,000 bpd in two years and the lowest since an industry strike in late 2002 and early 2003, according to Platts survey data, with analysts projecting further erosion due to the sanctions.

Iran managed to keep production steady in February, at 2.72 million bpd, the survey found, as several buyers in the month took advantage of sanctions waivers the U.S. granted to eight countries to purchase Iranian crude.

The waivers expire in May, and the Trump administration has not provided any indication whether they will be extended or amended.

Iraq produced 4.67 million bpd in February, according to the survey, 160,000 bpd above its quota.

The country has consistently lagged in compliance with its committed cap, both under the current deal and under the previous accord, which ran from 2017 to 2018. Iraqi officials have sought exemptions from the deal, saying their war-torn country needs oil revenues to rebuild from its devastating fight against the Islamic State. But other members have pressured the country -- largely to no avail -- to conform to its quota.

Nigeria, which was exempt from the previous deal but agreed to a quota under the current accord, pumped 1.88 million bpd in February, the survey found, 190,000 bpd above its cap.

The West African country has started production from new field Egina, though its oil minister has suggested that he may seek to have those barrels classified by OPEC as condensate, which is not subject to the quotas. Assays of the crude from the field, however, show an API gravity of 27.5, significantly heavier than typical condensates.

Nigeria also considers Agbami grade as a condensate, while S&P Global Platts and some other secondary sources used by OPEC to monitor production classify it as crude.

Libya, which this week lifted the force majeure at its 300,000 bpd Sharara field after almost three months, pumped 870,000 bpd in February, a slight rise from January, according to the survey.

The first cargoes of Sharara crude since production restarted are expected to be lifted this weekend. (Source: Platts)

UAE's Pearl Petroleum plans new \$700m Iraq Kurdistan investments



Pearl Petroleum Company Limited, the consortium led by Crescent Petroleum and Dana Gas of the UAE, has signed a new 20-year gas sales agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The agreement will enable production and sales of an additional 250 MMscf/day that the consortium aims to produce by 2021 as part of their expansion plans in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to boost much needed local domestic electricity generation.

The agreement was signed by Ashti Hawrami, Minister of Natural Resources on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government, and Majid Jafar, CEO of Crescent Petroleum and managing director of Dana Gas, on behalf of Pearl Petroleum. All approvals for the agreement have been granted, with project work now under implementation.

Hawrami said: "This agreement is an important step for us as we deliver improved services to the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq through enhanced electricity generation from the increase in gas pro-

duction by the consortium."

Jafar added: "This gas sales agreement opens a new chapter in the expansion of the Kurdistan Gas Project that will see a further investment of over \$700 million in coming years to expand production up to 900 MMscf/day.

The Kurdistan Gas Project was established in 2007 as Dana Gas and Crescent Petroleum entered into agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government for certain exclusive rights to appraise, develop, produce, market, and sell petroleum from the Khor Mor and Chemchemal fields in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The \$700 million expansion underway at the Khor Mor plant will include the addition of two new production trains at the Khor Mor plant, as well as drilling of new wells with plans to raise production.

Total investment in the Kurdistan Gas Project to date exceeds \$1.6 billion, with total cumulative production of over 260 million barrels of oil equivalent (boe).

(Source: arabianbusiness.com)

Renewables to overtake fossil fuels in UK power generation by 2030



The UK government launched on Thursday a joint government-industry Offshore Wind Sector Deal, which is expected to significantly raise the share of renewable energy generation by 2030 and help it overtake fossil fuel-powered generation for the first time in UK history.

By 2030, the UK government expects 70 percent of the electricity generated in the UK to come from low-carbon sources, with offshore wind power in the country's generation rising to 30 percent by 2030.

According to the latest quarterly figures from the UK's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the share of low carbon electricity generation accounted for a record high 56 percent in the third quarter of 2018, up from 54 percent in the same period of 2017, thanks to higher power generation from renewable sources.

Renewables share of electricity generation jumped to a record 33.1 percent in Q3 2018, from 30.0 percent in Q3 2017, with renewable electricity capacity at 43.2 GW at the end of the third quarter of 2018,

up by 10 percent, or 3.9 GW, compared to a year earlier.

According to the new Offshore Wind Sector Deal unveiled today, the share of offshore wind of the annual UK power generation rose from just 0.8 percent in 2010 to 6.2 percent in 2017, and is expected to further rise to around 10 percent by 2020.

The UK government and the industry are committing to long-term certainty in renewable power contracts and investments in infrastructure, respectively, to boost the offshore wind industry in the UK.

The sector will deliver total infrastructure investments of over \$52.5 billion (£40 billion) by 2030, based on the sector's estimates, according to the deal. The UK government, for its part, will provide up to \$732 million (£557 million) available for future Contracts for Difference.

The deal is also expected to triple the number of jobs in the UK offshore wind sector to 27,000 by 2030.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Oil drops by over 1% as economic outlook weakens, U.S. supply surges

Oil prices dropped by more than one percent on Friday as clouds gathered over the global economy after the European Central Bank (ECB) warned of continued weakness and fresh data showed Chinese exports and imports slumped last month.

With surging U.S. supply also unsettling markets, international benchmark Brent crude futures were at \$65.42 per barrel at 0803 GMT, down 88 cents, or 1.3 percent from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$56.03 per barrel, down 63 cents, or 1.1 percent.

Financial markets, including crude oil futures, took a hit after ECB President Mario Draghi said on Thursday the European economy was in "a period of continued weakness and pervasive uncertainty". Europe's economic weakness comes as growth in Asia is also slowing down.

So far oil demand has held up, though, especially in China where imports of crude remain above 10 million barrels per day (bpd). Yet a slowdown in economic growth will at some point likely dent fuel demand, putting pressure prices.

China's February dollar-denominated exports fell 21 percent from a year earlier, the biggest drop in three years and far worse than analysts' expectations, while imports dropped 5.2 percent, official data showed on Friday.

On the supply side, crude oil has been receiving support this year from output cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Together with some non-affiliated producers like Russia, the producer group has pledged to withhold around 1.2 million bpd of supply to tighten markets and prop up prices.

But these efforts are being undermined by soaring U.S. crude oil production C-OUT-T-EIA, which has increased by more than 2 million bpd since early 2018, to an unprecedented 12.1 million bpd. That makes America the world's biggest producer, ahead of Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Investment bank Jefferies said on Friday that U.S. output growth was largely being fuelled by onshore shale production, which had recently benefited from investments by oil majors Exxon Mobil and Chevron.

"The majors bring scale, steady capital investment and science to the play and could lead the basin to a higher growth trajectory - which in turn could cap the upside in oil prices," the U.S. bank said.

U.S. crude exports have also been chasing new records, reaching 3.6 million bpd in February - more than OPEC members like the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iran produce.

"The United States will soon export more oil and liquids than Saudi Arabia," consultancy Rystad Energy said this week. Liquids include non-crude oil products like natural gas liquids (NGLs).

"The (Saudi) kingdom currently exports some 7 million bpd of crude oil plus about 2 million bpd of NGLs and petroleum products, compared with the U.S. now exporting approximately 3 million bpd of crude oil and 5 million barrels of NGLs and petroleum products," Rystad said.

"U.S. oil production ... will grow by close to another 1 million bpd in 2019," the consultancy said.

Rystad said this export surge would have huge benefits for the U.S. economy.

"The U.S. trade deficit will evaporate, and its foreign debt will be paid quickly thanks to the swift rise of American oil and gas net exports," said Rystad Energy senior partner Per Magnus Nysveen. (Source: Reuters)

Oil and gas advertising spree signals industry's dilemma

It has been nearly 20 years since BP launched its "beyond petroleum" advertising campaign, which included a new sunburst logo and a plethora of videos about making solar panels. The logo endured; the solar manufacturing business did not. Now BP and other global oil majors are again embarking on advertising sprees — but this time with a twist. Unlike previous efforts to burnish their green credentials, these new ads reflect the existential crisis the fossil fuels business is in. The multimillion dollar campaigns in recent months from groups including Equinor and Royal Dutch Shell come at a time when the industry is facing increasing investor pressure to act on climate change, difficulty in recruiting talent, and mounting legal challenges related to greenhouse gas emissions.

The new BP campaign, in particular, is indicative of a pervasive theme across the industry — how to produce more energy with fewer emissions. The UK major highlighted its legacy oil and gas business as well as new investments into wind and solar power.

"We wanted to communicate the challenge we saw but also that we're doing something about it," said Duncan Blake, director of brand at BP, adding that the ads were the company's first global campaign in 10 years. "We're not just focusing on the new, interesting shiny stuff, but the core business that keeps the world moving day-to-day," he said.

Blake said this was not a disingenuous attempt to cover up the dirtier parts of the business, as companies had sought to do in the past, but a reflection of the current debate.

Norway's Equinor has also tried to show the benefits of its gas business as well as its offshore wind venture. Shell meanwhile is promoting its "Sky" scenario — a way it believes the world could achieve the Paris climate targets but one that still sees a place for oil and gas.

As energy executives gathered recently in London for International Petroleum week, they praised the oil and gas industry for helping to improve the livelihoods of the world's population — a message they felt had become lost in the climate debate.

However, cutting emissions was the topic on everyone's lips. "Our ambition is to gradually reduce the carbon intensity of the energy products we sell to our customers over their full life cycle," said Arnaud Breuille, president for exploration and production at French energy major Total.

But no matter how polished the advertising and convincing the talk, some believe the energy companies have a bigger hill to climb. Climate change is seen as a "near and present danger" for the world that can't be fixed with ad campaigns, said Manfredi Ricca, chief strategy officer of brand consultancy Interbrand. "Short of a significant overhaul in business strategy, these companies will fail to meaningfully change public opinion," he said.

For most energy majors, it is unclear how they plan to evolve their businesses — if at all — and whether they can reduce emissions significantly while also maintaining shareholder returns. Simply put, BP and its peers have yet to find ways to generate revenues from renewables and low carbon technologies that match their legacy businesses. A year of bumper profits has left them with plenty of cash but their investments are still primarily in maintaining fossil fuel production. On aggregate, the oil majors, allocated just over 1 per cent of their total 2018 capital expenditure to low-carbon ventures, according to CDP, an environmental non-profit.

(Source: Financial Times)

Oil price volatility weighs heavily on energy investors

Concerns about oil market volatility and its impact on companies and consumers are part of a narrative stretching back long before the rise of the "lower for longer" era for crude prices.

But volatility has come into sharper focus due to a series of significant market changes, led by the shorter development cycle of shale, the increased sway from OPEC's partnership with Russia and other producers, and the growing willingness of the U.S. to utilize energy sanctions to meet its foreign policy goals. The result has been oil price swings that have unsettled investors.

For those looking to put money into oil projects, heightened volatility can have a huge impact on investment decisions, especially in an environment where lower long-term prices mean the margin of error for investments has become much smaller.

Given the effects on producers, traders and communities that depend on oil revenues, a view of volatility needs to move beyond the binary and directionally descriptive, and towards its potential multi-fold impacts.

It is no longer enough to say that oil market volatility is rising or falling — a key factor for the profitability of traders — but it needs to be understood in the context of the new market reality.

The character and impact of oil volatility has changed since the initial 2014 price decline from above \$100 a barrel.

The annualized price range over the course



of the four years prior to the 2014 price fall averaged \$30.27 a barrel, while the average in the four years since 2014 has been just \$20.59 a barrel.

But a \$20 price range is felt far more keenly when the average annual price is closer to \$60 than \$100. This focus on volatility is borne out in the data of the 30-day implied volatility index, which rose sharply in late 2018, in tandem with the dramatic fourth-quarter price decline, when Brent crude tumbled from above \$86 a barrel to below \$50. This elevated level still fell far short of the 2016 levels — the year of the beginning of the initial price recovery — and has subsequently fallen as price choppiness

has abated since the beginning of the year. Over the longer term, implied oil volatility has grown 12 percent in the four years since the price decline relative to the four years prior to it. There have been more fundamental changes to how volatility influences behavior.

Prior to 2014, changes in oil prices largely affected end user choice such as whether to buy an SUV or a smaller car, or an industrial end user deciding to reduce oil costs through efficiency investments or transitioning to another fuel. But since the 2014 price fall these volatile price changes more directly impact producers and particularly smaller, marginal producers as they make decisions about

specific projects.

Put more broadly, before the price fall of 2014, price volatility would impact on the relative profitability of a project as well as how much producers were willing to spend, but often not cause the project to be uneconomic. When the price swung around a \$100 pivot point it did little to slow the industry's overall rise in upstream investment.

Yet in the past four years, nearly all project types — from short-cycle shale to the traditional megaprojects once favored by the supermajors — have had to weather prices below investment levels for at least some of the year.

While fewer project types were affected in 2018, this type of volatility is likely to remain elevated even as cost discipline may help to drive break-even levels lower.

This dynamic may have less of an impact on the largest companies which have balance sheets and longer-term planning and strategy horizons that are less disturbed by short term oil price swings. But it impacts smaller producers — particularly U.S. shale producers, as well as the communities that rely on the investments to sustain growth.

Ultimately, merely describing or forecasting volatility as higher or lower is now insufficient, and instead defining what that means for the industry, affected communities, and end users is necessary for the future understanding of oil market dynamics.

(Source: Financial Times)

Delaying publication of the settlement blacklist exposes the UN’s false narratives on human rights



Michelle Bachelet

By Ramona Wadi

The UN is openly flaunting its priorities and, sadly, human rights are far from a major concern for the international organization. Since its creation post-World War Two, and having established itself as the platform which determines what constitutes a human rights violation and which countries can be considered as perpetrators, several trends have emerged within the UN which reduces the seriousness of people being deprived of their legitimate rights.

This has been achieved by creating ample space for reports on human rights violations to be disseminated, while refusing to insist upon accountability and justice. Ironically, the increasing awareness regarding human rights violations is actually creating widespread impunity, as the UN promotes itself as a platform for reporting about violations while intentionally failing to take action.

Last month, for example, a UN report said that Israel “may have” committed war crimes against Palestinians participating in the Great March of Return demonstrations; it was publicized heavily, despite a predictable outcome. Israel will not be held accountable and those celebrating the UN’s recognition of Israel having possibly committed war crimes will not be vindicated by a thorough follow-up and prosecution. Another wave of silence will descend until the UN issues another report that reaches the same conclusion. We will never see an international court having the opportunity to test the evidence from both sides to judge whether “may have” is to become “has”, and appropriate action is to be taken.

On Tuesday, it was revealed that UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet has delayed the publication of a report exposing companies and institutions that do business with Israeli settlements due to “factual complexity”. According to Bachelet, “Further consideration is necessary to fully respond to the [human rights] council’s request.”

In response to Bachelet’s decision, PLO Committee Member Hanan Ashrawi noted, “The issue of corporate responsibility to respect human rights is neither a novelty nor an anomaly in the rules-based international system.”

Publishing the UN blacklist of companies had already been delayed by Bachelet’s predecessor in 2017. Israel has lobbied extensively for the report to remain unpublished, fearing the repercussions if firms listed in the report were to be targeted by boycotts.

The Times of Israel described the report as “highly controversial”, yet neither Israel nor its apologists deem colonialism and its nefarious activities to be controversial, which is the least that can be said about the shocking level of violence unleashed by the Israelis on Palestine and the Palestinians. The truth is that there is nothing at all “controversial” about publishing a report detailing how companies and colonialism thrive upon human rights violations, unless you have something to hide.

What is controversial, though, is Bachelet’s decision to delay publication. The former President of Chile is no stranger to controversy when it comes to her country’s human rights record, despite her own suffering at the hands of the Pinochet dictatorship. The application of the anti-terror laws to the indigenous Mapuche communities was most widespread during her two terms of office. As UN High Commissioner, she also failed to voice any substantive statement over the murder of Mapuche youth Camilo Catrillanca, killed on his own land by a special force known as the Comando Jungla.

Israel might find it has an ally at the UN in Bachelet, who is clearly no novice when it comes to the targeting of indigenous populations. Her expression of “regret” at Israel’s dismissal of the UN report documenting Israel’s use of violence at the Great March of Return protests is meaningless.

When it comes to human rights violations, rhetoric stands alone, especially when it comes to premeditated violence. There is no other institution like the UN that can create a spectacle out of violence and human rights rhetoric which fuels international attention, knowing full well that any reactions — any expressions of “regret” — will be temporary and have no effect.

The blacklist is another matter altogether. Bachelet is contributing to the impunity desired by Israel in order to retain its economic benefits from the occupation of Palestine. Settlements and human rights violations are an acceptable rhetorical subject, whereas settlements and the profits for the state therefrom as collaborators in violations are a red line for Israel and the UN. By delaying publication of this report, Bachelet is sending a clear message to the Palestinians: Israel and its business links are to be protected at all costs, even if that means sacrificing more of the indigenous Palestinian population.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

Ironically, the increasing awareness regarding human rights violations is actually creating widespread impunity, as the UN promotes itself as a platform for reporting about violations while intentionally failing to take action.

Saudi investment fund hires U.S. PR firm to create distance from crown prince

By Julian Pecquet

Saudi Arabia’s \$200 billion public investment fund has signed a New York public relations firm to try to distance the fund from the country’s embattled crown prince as it seeks to overhaul the kingdom’s oil-based economy.

The fund’s managing director, Yasir al-Rumayyan, signed a \$120,000-a-month contract with KARV Communications on Feb. 16, according to newly uploaded lobbying filings. The firm is tasked with providing “investor and public relations advice and counsel by providing outreach and relationship-building to various stakeholders in business and the media.”

Tellingly, the first communication goal listed in an appendix to the contract is to “create a clear distinction” between the fund “and its investment-driven mission” and “the political leadership in Saudi Arabia.” This may prove a tough sell with Prince Mohammed chairing the investment fund, while Saudi ministers make up six of the remaining eight board members.

The Saudi public investment fund (PIF), launched in 1971, passed from the Saudi Ministry of Finance to the Prince Mohammed-chaired Council of Economic and Development Affairs in 2015. Under his leadership, “The PIF shifted its investment strategy from being a silent shareholder of major companies in Saudi Arabia to new investments in global technology firms,” said Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Persian Gulf Arab States Institute in Washington.

“The change in institutional oversight of the sovereign wealth fund, the structure of the fund’s board and its new investment strategies suggest that the crown prince is playing central role in the PIF,” Mogielnicki said.

“Vision 2030, considered the brainchild of the crown prince, likewise describes the PIF as the engine behind economic diversification efforts in Saudi Arabia. Thus, it will be a difficult task to draw a clear distinction between the PIF and the political leadership



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of Saudi Arabia.”

Other priorities for the contract with KARV include enhancing the “reputation and image” of the fund and its senior executives “while underscoring the business-only purpose and focus” of fund; to build “trust and improve relations with key international stakeholders” such as “current and potential investors and portfolio companies,” business leaders and media; and to ensure the fund “is well prepared for any potential negative developments and future external scrutiny that it may encounter.”

“KARV Communications will be providing strategic communications counsel to the Public Investment Fund’s Managing Director, Yasir al-Rumayyan, and his professional senior management team as they work to identify new international investment opportunities,” KARV founder and President Andrew Frank

told Al-Monitor in an emailed statement.

The hire comes as Saudi Arabia — and its investment arm — is still reeling from the fallout from the Oct. 2 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. Prince Mohammed, who had been heralded as the youthful face of reform during a triumphant tour of Washington, Wall Street and Silicon Valley in the spring of 2018, has become persona non grata in all three places.

Days after Khashoggi’s death, dozens of Western firms bailed on Prince Mohammed’s “Davos in the Desert” investment conference, despite a strong showing of thousands of executives and investors. Two months later, the Wall Street Journal reported that several Western executives had left the fund, with one allegedly complaining that the fund was “dominated” by the crown prince. The prince oversees Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030

Questions for and about Jared Kushner

It is apparently legal for the president’s son-in-law to serve as a top White House adviser. But that is not a grant of immunity.

For President Trump, the era of congressional oversight is shaping up to be a family affair, with his three eldest children — Donald Jr., Ivanka and Eric — at risk of getting swept up in multiple investigations. But none of the Trump clan may face a more thorough going-over than Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and top White House adviser.

Kushner last week was among a long list of Trumpworld intimates asked to provide documents to the House Judiciary Committee as it looks into possible presidential misdeeds.

This request landed just as the continuing tussle was heating up between Kushner and the House Oversight and Reform Committee, which is examining claims that Trump arranged to have his son-in-law granted top-secret security clearance over the objections of intelligence officials.

In both cases, the White House has signaled its intent to defy Congress, arguing executive privilege and legislative overreach. On Monday, the White House counsel, Pat Cipollone, sent a letter to the oversight committee chairman, Elijah Cummings, rebuffing his request and effectively daring him to start issuing subpoenas. Cummings said he would confer with colleagues to determine what comes next.

However Democrats proceed, Kushner’s peculiar role in his father-in-law’s White House has prompted widespread concern that is both broader and more specific than the generic questions of accountability and competence often raised by raw nepotism.

Unease about Kushner’s access to secret information appears to go beyond politics. Trump’s own intelligence officials are said to have balked at the idea of giving his son-in-law such access, as did Donald McGahn during his stint as White House counsel.

Trump overrode such advice and ordered Kushner’s clearance granted, which it was last May.

These were not casual, offhand objections. After the president made his decision, McGahn was reportedly so troubled that he wrote an internal memo detailing the concerns about Kushner — including from the CIA — and making clear that he had recommended against the move.



Unease about Kushner’s access to secret information appears to go beyond politics.

John Kelly, at that time the White House chief of staff, is said to have felt similarly moved to write a memo stating that he had been explicitly “ordered” by the president to grant Kushner’s clearance.

If true, this is yet another point on which Trump has misled the public, insisting in January that he had played no role in arranging his son-in-law’s clearance. Just last month, Ivanka Trump made a similar claim, asserting that her father “had no involvement pertaining to my clearance or my husband’s clearance, zero.”

Those untruths are nowhere near as troubling as the fact that intelligence and administration officials were reportedly loath to grant Kushner access to the government’s deepest secrets.

What was the CIA’s specific hesitation concerning Kushner

and top-secret information? Why does the agency continue to deny him access to “sensitive compartmentalized information”? Why did the FBI raise questions about foreign influence over Kushner?

As The Times reported last month: “The full scope of intelligence officials’ concerns about Kushner is not known. But the clearance had been held up in part over questions from the FBI and the CIA about his foreign and business contacts, including those related to Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Russia, according to multiple people familiar with the events.”

Kushner’s inaccurate statements to the FBI about his foreign interactions are cause for additional concern.

And many, many eyebrows have been raised over Kushner’s special friendship with Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia — a coziness strategically and aggressively cultivated by the Saudis. Out of fear that Kushner, naive in the ways of diplomacy and foreign affairs, was susceptible to manipulation by the prince, Kelly attempted to curtail the two men’s private talks by reinstating a requirement that National Security Council officials participate in calls with foreign leaders.

No matter: Kushner and Prince Mohammed’s bond grew, even withstanding the conclusion by American intelligence agencies that the prince ordered the torture and murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Amid global outrage over the killing,, Kushner has been among the prince’s fiercest defenders.

Kushner is not a low-level White House functionary. He has been charged with bringing peace to the Middle East, and he is the president’s star emissary to the Saudi government. The public has a compelling interest in knowing what made the intelligence community so nervous about him.

Putting a member of the president’s family in the investigatory hot seat is a delicate business. Voters can get squeamish watching a politician’s wife or daughter or son-in-law field tough questions. That’s no excuse for letting them avoid accountability.

(Source: The NYT)

Sudan’s protests: Demanding and deserving better

Months of protests have demonstrated the scale and scope of anger with Omar al-Bashir’s regime. But the risks are growing.

Many of the Sudanese protesters demanding an end to Omar al-Bashir’s regime have known no other rule. They were not yet born when he seized power in a coup three decades ago — their country’s median age is just below 20. But they are certain they want something better.

The Sudanese president is now facing a sustained and unprecedented challenge. The killings of more than 50 peaceful protesters, the beating and arrests of hundreds more and the declaration of a state of emergency last month have, if anything, spurred on demonstrators. The protests were triggered in December by a subsidy cut which sent bread prices soaring, but fuelled by anger

going far beyond the country’s dire economic straits to corruption, government sclerosis and brutality.

They are more geographically widespread than previous protests against him; they are also younger, more female, and more socially and politically diverse. The outlawed Sudanese Professionals Association has played a leading role, with opposition parties playing catch-up. Disparate groups are finding — for the moment at least — unexpected common ground, with demonstrators from his strongholds participating alongside rebel groups; when Bashir blamed Darfuris for destabilizing the country, others marched chanting: “We are all Darfur.” Social media has played a key role, despite government censorship.

Successful revolts unseated authoritar-

ian regimes in 1964 and 1985. But those succeeded after a few days, and Bashir has created a strengthened National Intelligence Security Service, broader security apparatus and militias. Few in his position choose to give up. The outstanding international criminal court warrants on charges of genocide and war crimes over the conflict in Darfur give him even more reason to hold tight — though he transferred the party leadership, to a man facing similar charges.

Increasing and frequently violent repression has been served with meagre carrots: promises to end subsidy cuts and postpone constitutional changes allowing him to run again in 2020 (he won two previous, dubious elections). There are signs of growing internal divisions over how to tackle the protests.

Bashir has made himself useful to others. Sudan’s support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen reportedly brought it \$2.2bn in much-needed investment. The U.S. wants counter-terrorism cooperation; the EU’s priority is controlling migration. Normalization processes have bolstered him.

Those doing business with him must make it clear that they cannot continue under these circumstances, and urge him towards a peaceful transition. Many fear he will instead turn to greater violence to suppress the protests; or that, if he is forced out, the military on which he has relied could literally battle it out for power. Either is a dismal prospect. The protesters do not want a different version of this regime, or more conflict. They demand and deserve a better Sudan.

(Source: The Guardian)

The collapse of American empire is a warning to Europe

1 → Without having the power of veto, the U.S. doesn't recognize the verdict of and authorities in the international court of Justice. If sentences issued by The Hague Court oppose the U.S. policy, they will be considered inadmissible to the U.S. For example, the verdicts issued on U.S. war crimes in Iran and Afghanistan, human rights abuse, and illegal sanctions are not recognized by Washington.

In September of last year, Trump National Security Advisor John Bolton, a hawkish politician, strongly criticized the International Criminal Court and said, "The United States will use any means necessary to protect our citizens and those of our allies from unjust prosecution by this illegitimate court."

Senior judge Christoph Flugge from Germany resigned from one of the UN's international courts in The Hague in objection to the U.S. that had threatened judges after moves were made to examine the conduct of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Bolton vowed that the United States would retaliate by banning ICC judges and prosecutors from entering the U.S., imposing sanctions on any funds they had in the States and prosecuting them in the American court system. "If the court comes after us, Israel, or other U.S. allies we will not sit quietly," he said, also threatening to impose the same sanctions on any country that aided the investigation. Bolton held a speech last September in which he wished death on the international criminal court. "We will let the ICC die on its own. After all, for all intents and purposes, the ICC is already dead."

The central banks of states have long maintained their gold and other monetary reserves in the U.S. and UK. Perhaps the approach seemed logical in 1945; however, the U.S. and UK orchestrated 1953 coup d'état against Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran's prime minister, who nationalized Iran's oil, and the Iranian revolution of 1979 which led to overthrow of the Shah, the American courts blocked Iran's assets in the U.S. The movements showed that the IMF is an arm of the U.S. Department of State and the Pentagon. In today's global politics, international finance and foreign investment have become leverage against nations who won't bow down to U.S. policies.

Lately, foreign countries are apprehen-



sive about their gold holdings in the U.S. They know full well that their assets can be blocked unilaterally by the U.S., if Washington's interests are threatened. That is why in 2017, Germany decided to repatriate half of its gold reserves from the U.S. The U.S. authorities have considered the act an insult to their own civilized state.

Now, it's Venezuela's turn. The country called on the Bank of England to return \$1.2 billion of its reserved gold to repair economy, which has been hurting by the American sanctions.

The Bank of England, however, froze Venezuelan gold asset following Mike Pompeo United States Secretary of State and Bolton's instruction. Bloomberg wrote that the U.S. handed control of Venezuela's bank accounts in the U.S. to the opposition leader Juan Guaido to have a better chance to control the self-claimed government.

In late January, a rumor broke out that a Russian Boeing 777 that had landed in Caracas to spirit away 20 tons of gold from the vaults of the country's central bank, amounting to \$840 million in return for food and medicine. Although Moscow rejected the report, the Nicolás Maduro government has the right to purchase food for the Venezuelans who are under brutal U.S. sanctions by the country's gold reserve. U.S. Senator Marco Rubio called the act "stealing money" as if Maduro is a criminal

for trying to reduce the pressure of U.S. unfair sanctions against his people.

The European countries, too, have to abide by the U.S. policy, otherwise, they will be threatened to sanctions. For instance, if the European Union wishes to remain committed to the Iran deal, it will have to surrender to the U.S. pressure and sanctions. European states have realized that Bolton and Pompeo's threats can lead to confiscation of their assets by the U.S.

The U.S. threats are not merely military but a cyber-attack is a way of confronting an enemy and crashing its economy. The main cyber money transfer is led by Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) which is based in Belgium. Some countries are developing an alternative money transfer system to protect themselves against U.S. threats.

In late January, Germany, France and England launched INSTEX, a trade tool to counter U.S. sanctions in support of trade with Iran and other countries. Although for Iran, INSTEX is nothing but a similar U.S. humanitarian aid to Venezuela, for Europe it may be a way out of U.S. opposition to transporting Russian gas from Nord Stream to the European continent.

The U.S. energy official warned European official of the risk posed by relying too heavily on Russia's cheap gas and offered plans to sell America's liquid natural gas

(LNG) at a higher price to Europe through ports, which don't exist for high volume yet. Trump stresses The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members spend two percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on weapons, preferably from the U.S. and not German or French.

It seems the IMF is administered from the Pentagon in Washington. Undoubtedly, Europe is aware of losing its international financial ties.

At the funeral of George H. W. Bush, EU diplomats were at the bottom of the list of candidates to sit in their seats; the United States no longer considers the European Union as a credible entity.

In December, Mike Pompeo delivered a speech on Europe in Brussels, in which he admired the virtues of nationalism, criticized multilateralism and the European Union, and said that "international institutions" that dominated national sovereignty "must be corrected or deleted."

On Twitter, Pompeo says with a mockery: "Europe was an enemy of Europe. But it was Germany in World Wars 1 and 2. How did that work out for France? They were starting to learn German in Paris before the U.S. came along. Pay for NATO or not!"

The idea of creating a European army has been discussed in the European Union. The initial offer was from Germany, and then Macron in the commemoration of the centennial of the end of the First World War in France.

Sigmar Gabriel, former foreign minister of Germany, said in February 2018 at the Foreign Policy Forum in Berlin "that it's time for Germany and Europe to put their agenda on the agenda because the United States no longer sees the world as a global community or shared interests."

French President Charles de Gaulle long ago believed that no nation could be considered an independent state and ordered the withdrawal of France from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1996.

Europe is at risk and knows it too, but it doesn't have many options ahead. It has to choose either to use the historic opportunity to gain political, and economy independence, or give in to U.S. policy while it awaits the fall of U.S. which will jeopardize its economic and political future.

Lessons from the Indian brinkmanship

By Asif Durrani

What lessons have we learnt from Mr. Modi's misadventure in the past week? Alertness to face the enemy on the diplomatic and military fronts has been the major takeaway for Pakistan of this episode which won accolades globally from friends and foes. The second important lesson which our policy makers may have learnt is that in the international arena, it is your own prowess which saves the day for you. Third and most important gain from Pakistan's point of view has been the internationalization of Kashmir dispute, much to the chagrin of India. Fourth, and pleasantly surprising for Pakistan, was Russian offer of mediation between Pakistan and India, which, of course, India did not like a bit.

For the time being the danger of war has been averted through intervention from influential friends and prudent handling by the government at the military and diplomatic fronts. The Indian opposition has also realised that Prime Minister Modi has taken them for a ride by turning the Pulwama incident to his advantage to boost his declining popularity dented due to controversial Rafale aircraft deal. His hyper nationalist agenda has not only alienated the minorities, especially Muslims, but created a fear psychosis in the country which may have wider ramifications in the region where Muslims are in majority.

Alarmingly, Hindutva forces have unleashed their jingoistic agenda in full force. Minorities are being coerced to submission. So much so that liberal Hindus are being stigmatized and hounded not only in the social media but at times harmed physically. Under pressure many objective journalists who earned a good name in their profession have succumbed to the Hindutva agenda and those still opposing have to face the wrath of Hindutva brigade.

Chauvinism breeds jingoism and its practitioners can play havoc with their own people and cause instability in the neighborhood. Had Hitler and Mussolini not been the leaders of Germany and Italy, respectively, one could say safely that the world would have been saved from the destruction of the Second World War which cost 60 million lives in the European, Asian and African continents. Unfortunately, Indian people have elected a person whose hands are already tainted with the blood of over 2000 Muslims when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. He was declared international pariah while his entry in the US and many western capitals was banned. But politics makes strange bedfellows; as soon as Mr. Modi got elected on hyper nationalist agenda doors were opened for him in the US and European capitals. His preference for expensive defence equipment made him a darling of the West.

That modern defence technology may be a blessing but "it is the man behind machine" which matters. This phenomenon was on display when Pakistan promptly responded to India in its post Pulwama adventure. The international media has been unanimous in its assessment that the Indian armed forces could not cope up with the defence equipment either being obsolete or very old, or lack of motivation in the armed forces which proved disastrous for India in a tit-for-tat spat with Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) won accolades for its professionalism which finally turned the tables. Even subsequent attacks by India along the Line



of Control (LOC) turned out to be a fatal blow to its ground forces when responded by the Pakistani counterparts.

While there may be lull in the Indian adventure, Pakistan has to remain alert all the time as India is likely to use combination of military and diplomatic channels to pressurize Pakistan. India may exercise variety of options against Pakistan; the foremost being 1267 Committee of the UN Security Council to get the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) a terrorist organization and arrest of its leaders. Secondly, being a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), India may strive to put Pakistan from the existing "Grey List" to the "Black List". If it succeeds, Pakistan, in the Blacklist, may face tremendous problems in the international banking sector, which would badly damage Pakistan's trade. Concurrently, international financial institutions may also become reluctant to come to Pakistan's rescue because of overwhelming presence of FATF member states in the international financial institutions.

Government of Pakistan's action against the proscribed organizations, including arrest of top leadership of these organizations, is timely and need to be followed up vigorously. Indian media has started claiming that GoP's action is a result of Indian pressure, but being unaware of the fact that this action was already in the offing following the recommendations of the National Security Council (NSC) in its meeting in January this year, much before the Pulwama incident. These actions are a corollary of evolving developments in the region, foremost being the ongoing dialogue between the US government and the Taliban which Pakistan would desire to conclude successfully. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan can usher in an era of prosperity in the region and positively contribute to strengthening Pakistan's regional policy.

Second, completion of first phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and keen interest expressed by the leading Gulf states to invest in Gwadar to take benefit of the state-of-the-art infrastructure facilities offered by the EPEC is going to be a game changer for Pakistan. Third, promotion of tourism in the country can project Pakistan's soft image and generate revenues for the country in the shortest possible time. However, presence of proscribed organizations may be detrimental for Pakistan becoming a desirable tourist destination.



There are also reports that some of the proscribed organizations have been expressing strong reservations over

government's intrusive monitoring of those organizations following a clear warning to their leaders not to meddle in the country's external affairs. Unfortunately, Mr. Modi reacted in haste in maligning Pakistan when Prime Minister Imran Khan assured that if India provided concrete evidence, his government would take immediate action against the perpetrators. The incumbent government has taken a decision in principle to wind up these organizations as they have lived their utility.

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) or Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) may have been involved in the past in the occupied Kashmir in motivating or training the Kashmiri youth. However, during the past three decades Kashmiri people under the Indian occupation have gained enough political capital to counter the Indian narrative—"Kashmir is an integral part of India". Now the Indian political leaders and commentators have started saying without qualms that "Kashmiri alienation against India is complete". Kashmiris celebrate India's Independence Day as "black day", while they unfurl Pakistani flags on each occasion whether it is Pakistan's Independence Day or a Kashmiri freedom fighter's funeral. At the moment India's link with Kashmir is only through the guns, but its attempts to bludgeon the Kashmiris to submission have miserably failed.

By internationalizing the issue, India has paved the way for international mediation and a chance for the Kashmiris to present their case to the international community. And Kashmiris have learnt a lesson from the Taliban book that "Indian forces may have watches, but Kashmiris have time". Having sustained Indian repression for the past three decades Kashmiri freedom fighters have become a formidable force and their strength is growing by the day. By maligning Pakistan India cannot sidestep the Kashmir issue or justify its occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. The only option is a negotiated solution in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

(Source: Daily Times)

First Announcement											
 N.I.O.C 1397.6735		 National Iranian Drilling Company									
Call for public tender (First/Second publish) One/Two-Stages (compressed-semi compressed) tender Subject of Tender: CRA TUBING 5"											
Tender descriptions:											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>The Tender holder</th> <th>Registration No. through national electronic tendering system</th> <th>Tender No. / Indent No.</th> <th>Estimated value (Rial/Euro)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>National Iranian Drilling Company</td> <td>3181430</td> <td>TenderNo.PFP/PH 17-18/97/001 Indent No:9722002</td> <td>15,834,000,000 RIAL</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. / Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)	National Iranian Drilling Company	3181430	TenderNo.PFP/PH 17-18/97/001 Indent No:9722002	15,834,000,000 RIAL			
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National Iranian Drilling Company	3181430	TenderNo.PFP/PH 17-18/97/001 Indent No:9722002	15,834,000,000 RIAL								
Qualitative evaluation of tenders											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Method</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>£ Based on minimum scoring (£ 60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Method	£ Based on minimum scoring (£ 60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.								
Method											
£ Based on minimum scoring (£ 60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.											
Purchasing & Submitting											
Tender Document Distribution by Company											
The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof											
Distribution Place		A) Hall No. 316, 3thfloor, Drilling Projects Foreign Procurement Dept. National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN 061-34146284 B) Jomhour street , yaghma alley nio: 8th building floor no : 04 room no 428 -Tehran -Iran 021-66700249									
Submitting Method		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 510.000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114004020491 in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank (Shaba No.:IR 52010004001114004020491) Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents 									
Closing date		Days after the last time of Purchasing 14									
Documents Receiving Method		Hall No. 107, 1-floor, Tender Committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN Tel : +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569									
Tender Guarantee											
Value of guarantee	792,000,000 Rial / 16,322 Euro										
Type of guarantee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran. Saba No.:IR35010004001114006376636 										
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.										
(Name of department) Foreign Mats. Procurement (Drilling Projects) More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on: www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr تهران تایمز نوبت اول ۹۷/۱۸ نوبت دوم ۹۷/۱۲/۱۹											

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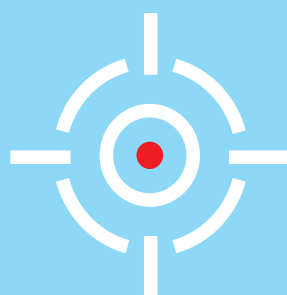
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Iranian medical scientists write to UN on U.S. sanctions against Iran

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Scientific societies for Medical Sciences in Iran have written a letter to UN Secretary General António Guterres condemning the U.S. sanctions against Iran, urging the international community to resist sanctions targeting “medical needs” and “humanitarian aid”, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif revealed on Wednesday.

“Scientific Societies for Medical Sciences in Iran call on int’l community to: condemn U.S. sanctions on Iran; strongly resist the targeting of medical needs [and] humanitarian aid; and thwart targeting of research [and] scientific advancement,” Zarif wrote on his twitter account.

Following is the text of the letter:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

February 23, 2019

H.E. Mr. António Guterres

Secretary-General of the United Nations

760 United Nations Plaza, New York, 10017

Your Excellency Mr. António Guterres:

The right to development and the right to gain knowledge and advance in science and technology is a basic and fundamental right of any society. Through tireless efforts, exchanges and sharing of knowledge and technology, humanity has advanced, enabling great strides for nations. The right of any nation to development, the right to education, health and scientific advancement and research cannot be undermined by unilateral coercive actions such as sanctions. Iran is a rapidly developing nation with a young and vibrant population.

Human development index of Iran has increased from a score of 0.66 in 1998 to 0.8 in 2017, showing an average annual growth rate of 1.02 %. This is a composite index which illustrates a society’s achievements in three basic aspects of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

One of the hallmarks of this development has been in the field of education, science and technology. According to the Spectator Index, Iran ranked 16 among the world



“Politicization of science and imposition of discriminatory regulations against Iranian scientists and academia is unprecedented and unwarranted.”

co research institutions in 2018. In recent years the growth in Iran’s scientific output has been reported to be among the fastest in the world. Iran has made great strides in medical, pharmaceutical, biomedical, as well as other areas of basic and applied sciences, thus serving humanity and contributing to global scientific advancement.

In 2017, President Trump unilaterally withdrew from the Nuclear Deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA), a multilateral international agreement that was endorsed by the UN Security Council resolution number 2231.

The US President Administration imposed a series of unjustified coercive embargoes and sanctions against our nation, curbing our economic and scientific growth and under-

mining the basic rights of the Iranian nation. These so-called ‘debilitating sanctions’ have deliberately targeted our patients, health-care sectors, academic research centers, healthcare providers, medical equipment suppliers, active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) providers, pharmaceutical equipment suppliers and health regulators leading to extensive shortages of lifesaving medical supplies and drugs.

Over 2000 Iranian academic and research centers are currently engaged in scientific exchange with the global community, joint research and publications. Iran hosts many international research centers and dozens of international scientific congresses are held in Iran annually. Recently reports coming from the academia indicate that certain publishers

are rejecting government-funded research papers or indicate a non-preference for publication of Iranian research papers on grounds other than scientific standards. This politicization of science and imposition of discriminatory regulations against Iranian scientists and academia is unprecedented and unwarranted.

We scholars, scientists, academics and students of 66 Iranian Scientific Societies for Medical Sciences call on the international community to condemn U.S. embargoes on Iran and to act strongly against sanctions targeting medical needs and humanitarian aid as well as sanctions targeting research and scientific advancement.

Iranian nation has been an active part of the international community in promoting human wisdom and knowledge during history and it supports peace and stability in the volatile Middle East and the rest of the world. In the 21st century, it is expected that the scientific community respects the rights of all individuals of all nations and refrain from actions that affect the principal rights of a nation. In this regard, the worst facet of these debilitating sanctions is deprivation a nations’ scientists, which are indeed accounted as a true wealth of humanity, from serving humanity and contributing to global scientific advancement. Conscious ignorance of the scientific community to unmanly unilateral sanctions will deprive not only Iran but also the entire world from scientific achievements of humanity.

Medical scientific associations of Iran as non-governmental organizations not only consider these improper demeanors as a disrespect and insult to scientific community but also take them into account as a dark spot in the history of the global health development and diplomacy. In this regard, we request his Excellency and all of respected world’s scientists to condemn these inhuman and medieval actions and take necessary measures to lift these coercive and unmanly sanctions.

We expect that the conscience of the scientific community will respond positively and encourage the Iranian scientists and scholars to continue their contribution to the advancement of knowledge and science.

Low-carb diets could increase risk of heart rhythm disorders, research suggests

Popular low-carb diets promoted by celebrities, as well as some doctors, could increase the risk of heart rhythm disorders that can lead to stroke, according to new research.

People who got less of their energy from starchy staples like bread, pasta and potatoes had higher chances of atrial fibrillation (AFib), researchers studying the health effects of different levels of carbohydrate intake found.

One of the most commonly diagnosed heart conditions, it affects around 1 million people in the UK. Sufferers are around five times more likely to have a stroke as well as being more likely to experience heart failure.

“Considering the potential influence on arrhythmia, our study suggests this popular weight control method should be recommended cautiously,” said Dr Xiaodong Zhuang, a cardiologist at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, China, who led the research.

This study focused on the downsides of ditching carbs and follows a major piece of research spanning half a million participants which found the diets take years off your life.

The findings, presented at a conference of the American College of Cardiology used data from 14,000 people enrolled in a long-running study on heart disease risks in the U.S., who did not have AFib at the time they started.

Participants kept a regular tally of their daily food intake alongside other lifestyle information to allow researchers to understand their health risks.

Over a 22 year follow-up period 1,900 of the participants developed AFib and the researchers broke them down into three groups based on roughly how much of their daily calorie intake was from carbohydrates.

It found that people who got fewer than 45 per cent of their daily calories from carbohydrates were 18 per cent more likely to develop AFib than those who got between 45 and 52 per cent of calories from carbs – dubbed a moderate amount.

However the types of low carbohydrate diets endorsed by celebrities and self-professed wellness gurus often mandate a much lower level of carbohydrate intake.

Above this moderate threshold they again saw an increase in risk, however low carbohydrates were still associated with a 16 per cent increase risk relative to high carb diets.

“Low carbohydrate diets were associated with increased risk of incident AFib regardless of the type of protein or fat used to replace the carbohydrate,” Dr Zhuang said.

The researchers speculate that this could be because people who eat fewer carbohydrates increase their levels of red meats and saturated fats which cause inflammation and a host of cardiovascular conditions.

They may also consume fewer inflammation-fighting anti-oxidants from fruit and vegetables.

(Source: The Independent)

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Selling raw material results in disregarding human resources: VP

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Selling raw material results in disregarding human resources, which is very destructive, the vice president for science and technology said. Sourena Sattari said that the country cannot be managed with selling raw materials and oil money, IRNA reported.



It is environment and culture, not money, which creates a knowledge-based economy, he noted.

Innovation and human resources result in wealth creation in knowledge-based economies, he said.

Money cannot create innovation but it can have a crucial role, he said.

He extolled the culture of entrepreneurship in which, education leads to big scientists and production.

“The knowledge economy pave the way for private sector to be influential in research.”

The 3rd and 4th generation of universities are based on private sector and this is possible if it is considered beneficial for private companies, he said.

“Our young generation can change oil economy, which pay attention to money rather than what is in your mind,” he lamented.

He named innovation and knowledge as the values for entrepreneurship.

“We should convince private sector that it is beneficial to invest on human resources and young generation, in this way many things may change,” he concluded.

iPhone sales could plummet in Iran

By Amir Nozemi

Apple Inc. banning Iranian iOS apps has hit headlines once again. Multiple factors are behind the recent ban which has rendered Apple smartphones almost useless in the country and can lead to a sharp fall in local demand for iPhones.

Three factors have caused the recent banishment of Iranian iOS apps: US-imposed sanctions against Iran, a change in Apple's policy in regards to enterprise developer certificates, and a recently published report listing Iranian startups that circumvented U.S. sanctions by using enterprise developer certificates which called on the U.S. firm to take action.

Following the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions against Tehran, deciding to err on the side of caution, Apple removed mobile applications developed by Iranian firms from its App Store service.

Despite broad prohibitions, according to General License D-1 issued by Office of Foreign Assets Control, the U.S. Treasury Department's financial intelligence department, there are services that American firms are not barred to offer to Iranian companies and individuals.

As per official literature, Apple is seemingly not prohibited from distributing software products developed by Iranians.

However, to curb the risk of facing possible penalties, Apple decided to impose an outright ban against Iranian developers.

To circumvent the sanctions, Iranian developers started employing Apple's Developer Enterprise Certificates for publishing their iOS apps through their own websites.

The certificates are designed to let companies distribute iOS apps to their employees without going through the App Store.

Furthermore, using the same technology several local app markets were developed by Iranian tech firms to cater to the needs of Iranian iDevice users.

Note that, U.S. sanctions have forced Iranian tech companies to use this workaround for publishing their products.

Policy change

In order to protect users' privacy and curb intellectual property infringement, Apple audits apps before publishing them on the App Store.

However, illicit software distributors and digital pirates employed Developer Enterprise Certificates to put hacked apps on iPhones.

A few months ago Apple announced that it was reviewing its policy in regard to applications of Developer Enterprise Certificates.

The crackdown on misuse of the certificates was essential for safeguarding users' data and developers' intellectual property. Nevertheless, the change in Apple policy has taken a toll on Iranian iOS smartphone users.

As of Tuesday, mobile apps developed by Iranian firms that were already barred from distribution on the App Store could not be published on local websites and app markets.

Complex issue

We are living in a complex world where issues are complicated and there is no easy answer to them.

For instance, in this case, the change in Apple policy that by itself could have been a step in the right direction for data protection, has had a negative impact on the free flow of information and online services in Iran.

Furthermore, while it cannot be said that U.S. sanctions have led to the recent banishment of Iranian iOS apps, the embargo plus other factors have created the current situation.

A combination of all the above factors has created the current untenable situation that has rendered Apple smartphones almost dysfunctional in Iran.

Iranian smartphone users use various online services regularly for such purposes as payment, package delivery, video/music streaming, and ride-hailing which are offered by local startups.

Banning iOS apps of these startups can push many Iranians towards ditching their iPhones.

It is estimated that there are close to 5.2 million iPhone users in the country and Apple has a 12% share of Iran's smartphone market. The local cellphone market is worth \$438 million.

Apple has two options. It can tap unused potentials of OFAC's General License D-1 and publish apps developed by Iranian firms on App Store or stay on its current track. If Apple goes with the latter strategy, many Iranians will be forced to think twice before buying an iPhone.

(Source: financialtribune.com)

IT paves way for young generation to implement ideas: minister

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Information technology (IT) paves the way for the young generation to implement their ideas, Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

The inefficiency in different fields is one of the main problems the country is facing, he lamented.

Startups active in different fields not only create jobs and money but also provide solutions for several problems in the society, he added.

In addition to insurance, tax and licenses, the entrepreneurs should deal with problems to hire professional human resources, he said.

Some changes and innovations are needed in the infrastructure of business ecosystem in order to use the potentialities of young generation in order to create job and money, he said.

The usage of technology in different fields will lead to improvement like smart cities in which the citizens benefit from hi-tech in their daily life, he said.

He named smart agriculture, smart health-



Startups active in different fields not only create jobs and money but also provide solutions for several problems in the society

Knowledge-based companies to receive non-repayable loans



TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The vice presidency for science and technology provides non-repayable loans to knowledge-based companies, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

The financial facilities are allocated to industrial designs, design and manufacture of demo and accounting.

The industrial design include the quality, agronomy, graphic design and packaging, which have a great influence in marketing.

Accounting, financial statements and tax return are important factors in

a company.

The loans are allocated to the companies with less than 50 billion rials (about \$1 million) revenue per year.

The vice presidency affords 50 percent of expenses for design and manufacture of demo to 100 million rials (about \$2,000), 50 percent of expenses for industrial design to 150 million rials (about \$3,000) and cover 50 percent of accounting up to 50 million rials (about \$1,000) in first fiscal years and 40 percent of accounting expenses up to 40 million rials (about \$100) in second fiscal year.



Startups should put priority on air pollution, environmental problems: official

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The startup ecosystem should put priority on water crisis, air pollution, and environmental problems, Mehdi Eliasi, an official with vice presidency for science and technology has said.

Health and seniority are other fields, which the startups should cover them, Mehr quoted Eliasi as saying on Wednesday.

Through innovation and change, we can provide an environment for entrepreneurs and young generation, he noted.

In this way, an ecosystem can be provided for new generation of entrepreneurs to solve today challenges of the society, he added.

Society is the main audience of science, technology and innovation in the country, which should not be undermined, he added.

Knowledge-based society paves the way for applying science and technology in the country and the public has a crucial role in this field, he said.

Iranian, Turkish teams to compete at Can-Sat competition



TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — A total of 18 Iranian and 2 Turkish teams will compete at the 7th National and the First International Iranian Can-Sat Competition on March 10, ISNA reported on Friday.

Supported by the vice presidency for science and technology, the event will be held at the airport of the city of Eyvanaki, Semnan province.

Can-Sat is Soda can size satellite and it provides an affordable way to acquire the students with the basic knowledge to many challenges in building a satellite.

The concept of Can-Sat was proposed by professor Robert Twiggs of Stanford University in 1999. In Can-Sat projects, students will be able to design, build and test a small electronic payload that can fit inside a Soda can.

The Can-Sat is launched and ejected from a rocket or a balloon. By the use of a parachute, the Can-Sat slowly descends back to earth performing its mission while transmitting telemetry. Post launch and recovery data acquisition will allow the students to analyze the cause of success and/or failure.

Skills every tech professional needs to deliver value in the workplace

There's a greater demand than ever for tech professionals in the workforce, as technology continues to change how we do business. From artificial intelligence (AI), to machine learning (ML), to the Internet of Things (IoT), companies continue to integrate and produce more and more technology solutions, which requires talent with the right skills to design, de-bug and deliver them.

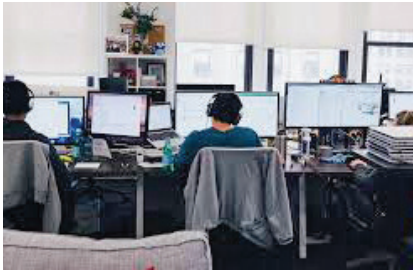
Now more than ever, it's crucial to hire tech workers who can truly bring value to your company. We asked a panel of Forbes Technology Council members what skills and experience to look for when hiring for a tech position. Here's what they had to say.

Adaptability

Tech professionals need adaptability and the ability to quickly learn on the job. Technologies are changing and evolving at a much faster rate than in previous years. The rate of change is only going to be upward. However, the fundamentals are predominantly stable. Individuals with the right foundation, and with the ability to adapt to changing technologies and learn along the way, will benefit themselves and their employers.

Creative problem-solving skills

We are about to witness a technological convergence. Emerging technologies that were previously siloed, such as AI, IoT and blockchain, will be combined together to make our daily lives better. The companies that will take advantage of this convergence need talent who can creatively devise complex products and services to solve pain points and deliver better experiences for the end user.



Cybersecurity know-how

If you are in the IT business you will not be able to avoid having cybersecurity skills. Companies are being hit hard by adversaries and are going to be requiring all IT professionals to bring cybersecurity skills with them. The best thing you can do is have a good cybersecurity baseline when entering the technical workforce. - Michael Hoyt, Life Cycle Engineering, Inc.

Emotional intelligence

Increasing rates of innovation in tech will require more self-awareness, empathy and self-regulation. These emotional intelligence skills promote compassion, respect and understanding amongst team members and are vital for maintaining optimism during complex projects. Those who do not embody these traits will have a hard time fitting in at tech companies with progressive business cultures.

A data science mindset

One of the biggest gaps we see today when it comes to technology adoption and implementation is lack of familiarity and critical

thinking when it comes to data and the technologies that help process it. I believe we are in an era when everyone should know how to enable, deploy and implement AI technology so we can solve the fundamental issues we are facing in our enterprises and the world.

Critical thinking

Valuable tech professionals need to bring critical thinking to whatever they are doing within year one. The ability to adjust and adapt to market needs means being creative and being able to think on your feet. This kind of mentality matters far more than coding or data science. Technology today involves everything from marketing to accounting. It's less about boxes and software.

Security log analysis abilities

Over the next few years, all IT pros will need to develop security log analysis skills. These skills are critical for managing security in most organizations, and future employers will require these skills.

Time management savvy

Time management has been a skill for as long as humans have walked the earth. It's becoming increasingly crucial—specifically in tech. Many aspects rely on automated processes, with no leeway for lateness. Globalization, remote working and the cost/experience benefits of distributed teams lead to multiple time zones. Overall, this skill needs to be adaptive and malleable.

A strong work ethic

No matter the economic environment or the generational tendencies, companies value young employees who will put their

heads down and their noses to the grindstone. There is some tendency today for young professionals to assume they belong in the C-Suite immediately. Ambition is okay, but they need to be willing to put in the hard work to get there, and that's something employers will truly value.

Communication skills

Lots of tech people think they can be successful just by being strong technically, but being a good coder requires listening, collaborating and advocating. If you can't communicate the value of the work you're doing, you'll fall behind those who can.

Machine learning understanding

The advancements in machine learning technologies lead to a natural requirement for employees to be able to express requirements and solutions in a language that would work best with such algorithms. Being able to think in terms of statistical analysis and learning approaches will be a key to harnessing machine learning.

Empathy

As the workforce continues to transition from "work-life balance" to "work-life harmony," it will become increasingly important to see, recognize and optimize for the generation that believes in bringing one's whole self to work. This means going beyond the professional masks of a "business is business" mentality and instead leaning into what motivates, excites and feeds the people you work with.

(Source: forbes.com)

New research finds sea ice plays pacemaker role in abrupt climate change

A new study looking at variations in past sea ice cover in the Norwegian Sea found the shrinkage and growth of ice was instrumental in several abrupt climate changes between 32,000 and 40,000 years ago.

The growth or shrinkage of sea ice is often viewed as a symptom of climate change, but new research shows it may have played a more causative role in abrupt climate changes thousands of years ago.

The study, published in Science Advances, examined sediment core extracted from the Southern Norwegian Sea to find that there were dramatic changes in the sea ice cover 32,000 to 40,000 years ago.

UNSW Scientia Fellow Dr. Laurie Menviel who works with the Climate Change Research Centre performed numerical model simulations of climate conditions that highlighted the tight coupling between the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation and sea-ice cover in the Norwegian Sea.

Climate model simulations
The study, which was led by Dr. Henrik Sadatzki from the Department of Earth Science and Bjerknes Center for Climate Research, University of Bergen (Norway), analyzed marine sediment cores from the Norwegian Sea to reconstruct changes in sea ice during the last glacial period, focusing on the abrupt climate change events.

The abrupt climate changes – known as Dansgaard-Oeschger climate events – had global implications and comprised temperature shifts of up to 15°C over the Greenland ice sheet and happened within decades.

While the underlying mechanisms of these dramatic changes are not yet fully understood, the study confirms that changes in sea ice



cover in the Norwegian Sea played a key role in driving the enigmatic events.

It is now believed that initial sea ice reduction started before the abrupt warming over Greenland, and that sea ice expansion started before the end of the warm periods in the same area.

“To reach this conclusion, we looked at specific organic molecules in a sediment core from the southern Norwegian Sea, one of

which was produced by algae that live in sea ice and others that were produced by organisms living in open, ice-free waters thousands of years ago.” Dr. Menviel says.

The data suggest that there were substantial changes in the sea ice cover in the southern Norwegian Sea between 32,000 and 40,000 years ago, according to Dr. Sadatzki.

“Most extensive sea ice conditions occurred at the onsets and early parts of cold periods

over Greenland and the most pronounced open-ocean conditions occurred at the onsets of the abrupt changes to warm periods over Greenland,” he says.

Dr. Menviel says that the transient numerical simulations she performed highlighted the link between past changes in sea-ice in the Norwegian Sea, and the large-scale Atlantic meridional oceanic circulation.

The ocean circulation
“This provided us with an indication of the sensitivity of the system and showed the interplay between sea ice in this area, the oceanic circulation and climate,” she says.

The research suggests an enhanced sea ice cover contributed to insulation of the cold, high-latitude atmosphere from relatively warmer waters that were present in the Norwegian Sea beneath the sea ice lid. In turn, sea ice reduction allowed for heat release from the exposed Norwegian Sea waters to the atmosphere, which was a prime ingredient in shaping the abrupt warming of the Dansgaard-Oeschger climate events in Greenland.

These events have stirred lots of interest in documenting that the climate system contains mechanisms that may lead to large, abrupt and surprising climate changes.

“Our results form a major step forward in our understanding of abrupt climate changes,” Dr. Sadatzki says.

The new observations suggest that the sea ice changes in the southern Norwegian Sea were an integral part of oceanic and atmospheric processes, which led to the abrupt glacial climate changes in Greenland and over large parts of the world.

(Source: phys.org)

The data suggest that there were substantial changes in the sea ice cover in the southern Norwegian Sea between 32,000 and 40,000 years ago, according to Dr. Sadatzki.

Ecological vineyards help protecting bird population in the environment

Ecological farmlands help protecting bird populations and reducing the effects of global change on the environment, according to a study published in the journal Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment by the experts Joan Real, Alex Rollan and Antonio Hernández-Matías, from the Conservation Biology Group of the Faculty of Biology and the Biodiversity Research Institute of the University of Barcelona (IRBio).

According to the study, which counted on the support from Torres Family, from Vilafranca del Penedès (Spain), the ecological viticulture increases the abundance and amount of species of farmland birds, and favors the insectivore bird populations that help the natural control of plagues in ecological crops. This agricultural practice helps improving the resilience of farmland birds -which are especially sensitive to environmental changes- towards the effects of global warming.

At the moment, intensive agricultural exploitation in Europe caused the loss of millions of farmland birds, which are also affected by global change.

In this context, the practice of ecological viticulture has spread over the last years in the sector of the vineyards, one of the most traditional cultures in the country. In Catalonia, this sector represents the first important ecological crop in the agricultural field, and one of every four vineyards has its origins in ecological agricultural production. Without insecticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers, this practice includes a series of ecological and integrated techniques (mechanical control of plagues, etc.) in a context of a growing social interest for sustainable practices with biodiversity and the environment.

The ecological crops
The beneficial effects of the ecological crops of vineyards on several organisms were known from years ago. “However -says Alex Rollan, first author of the study -, there wasn’t much information on their real impact in the community of farmland birds”.

In this context, from 2014 to 2015, UB-IRBio experts created bird censuses in a total of thirty-three vineyard parcels -designation of Origin Penedès - to see how the practice of ecological agriculture affected the com-



munity of farmland birds - insectivore ones mostly - and the most vulnerable species to climate change.

The new study describes for the first time the positive impact of the ecological viticulture on the abundance and amount of species of insectivore birds in the Mediterranean vineyards. The presence of herbaceous cover - a growing practice in European vineyards - has a beneficial effect on insectivore birds, in particular in spring and other seasons when people work on ecological crops, according to the study carried out by the Conservation Biology Group (UB-IRBio).

Sensitive to changes and impacts
Birds are sensitive to changes and impacts that occur in the ecosystems worldwide. “Therefore, they are perfect bioindicators, since they show the state of conservation of natural systems”; says Joan Real, head of the team of Conservation Biology, linked to the Department of Evolutionary Biology, Ecology and Environmental Sciences of the Faculty of Biology and IRBio. “Knowing the factors that can interact with these bioindicators helps us getting information to improve the management of natural habitats and environmental sustainability”, notes Joan Real.

The new study, published in the journal Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment provides practical information for the sector of ecological viticulture and will help shape a management for a “more sustainable agricultural production regarding biodiversity conservation in the rural environment, and in particular, those birds that are endangered due the agricultural intensification and climate change”, notes Antonio Hernández-Matías.

(Source: natureworldnews.com)

Team unlocking the untapped potential of light in optical communications

Scientists at Tokyo Institute of Technology have fabricated a multiplexer/demultiplexer module based on a property of light that was not being exploited in communications systems: the optical vortex. Such devices will be crucial for improving optical networks, which are the backbone of today’s Internet, so that they can meet the traffic demands of tomorrow.

In our communication-centered era, Internet traffic has been increasing rapidly. The massive amounts of data that travel through the Internet are enabled by huge backbone networks, usually involving millions of connections deployed using optical communication technology. Foreseeing that this increase in data flow will not stop anytime soon, researchers worldwide are searching for ways to further develop and improve optical communications.

One ubiquitous technique in modern electronic communications is multiplexing, which is a way to maximize the use of the available bandwidth. Multiplexing consists in packing multiple signals into a single signal that can be sent through a shared medium, such as an optical fiber. The received complex signal is then demultiplexed at the receiver and each simple signal is routed to its intended destination. Multiple multiplexing approaches are used nowadays to achieve speeds of over 100 gbits/s through optical networks.

Optical signals
However, we need to find a way to cram more data into optical signals without requiring more energy and at a low cost; that is, new multiplexing technologies are needed. Recent promising methods involve taking advantage of properties of light not conventionally used for communication to encode independent signals. For example, the polarization of light has already been employed and practical applications have been proposed.

On the other hand, there is another characteristic of light, called the “optical vortex” that can be exploited. This was the focus of a research carried out at Tokyo Institute of Technology, led by Assistant

Professor Tomohiro Amemiya.

The “optical vortex carries the orbital angular momentum of light and can be used to multiplex signals by assigning each signal to a light wave of different momentum,” explains Amemiya. The application of the optical vortex for signal multiplexing represents untapped territory with great potential.

Of course, to even think of encoding signals into light waves with different optical vortexes and transmit them, it is first necessary to design and implement the necessary circuitry for both the multiplexing and demultiplexing operations. The research team therefore designed and fabricated an orbital angular momentum multiplexing/demultiplexing module.

Combination of circuit structures
Using a combination of two tiny circuit structures, called a star coupler and an optical-vortex generator, each of the five signals is “encoded” with a unique optical angular momentum. The output signal consists of a combination of the five signals, and the receiver circuit only has to carry out the multiplexing operation in reverse (demultiplexing) to end up again with the five independent signals.

The fabricated module is shown in Figure 1. The curved tips of the waveguides of the optical-vortex generator were made of silicon and measured a few micrometers. The fabrication process for the optical-vortex generator had been reported in previous research, and the work now done by the team demonstrates one concrete application of this technology.

Devices and multiplexing techniques such as the ones demonstrated by the team will be crucial in the very near future. “It is certain that the demand for high capacity systems with low cost and less energy losses will further increase in the future,” states Amemiya. Fortunately, more ways to improve current communications systems by exploiting the untapped properties of light will surely become available to bring us one step forward in our communication era.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

Some worms recently evolved the ability to regrow a complete head: study

An international group of researchers including biologists from the University of Maryland found that at least four species of marine ribbon worms independently evolved the ability to regrow a head after amputation.

Regeneration of amputated body parts is uncommon but does exist throughout the animal world -- from salamanders, spiders and sea stars that can regrow appendages to a species of ribbon worm that can regenerate an entire individual from just a small sliver of tissue. But regenerative abilities were broadly assumed to be an ancient trait that some species managed to hold on to while most others lost through evolution.

This new study turns that assumption on its head. In a survey of 35 species of marine ribbon worms, the researchers found that the ability to regenerate an entire head, including a brain, evolved relatively recently in four different species.

“This means that when we compare animal groups we cannot assume that similarities in their ability to regenerate are old and reflect shared ancestry,” said Alexandra Bely, associate professor of biology at UMD and one of the study’s authors. “We need to be more careful when comparing regeneration findings across different groups of animals.”

All animals have some degree of regenerative ability. Even humans re-grow damaged skin over a wound. However, animal lineages that diverged very early in evolutionary history -- such as sponges, hydroids and ctenophores -- are often able to regrow entire individuals from even small amputated parts. As animals evolved greater complexity, regenerative abilities have become less dramatic and common.

Estimating where and when changes in regenerative abilities occurred on the tree of life is fundamental to understanding how regeneration evolves and what factors influence the trait. Until now, scientific understanding of how regeneration evolved was based solely on studies of animals that lost regenerative abilities. That’s because all known gains in regenerative ability occurred too far in the distant past for comparative studies.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

NASA snaps stunning photos of hypersonic aircraft

Until Elon Musk can fly us around the world in a rocket, conventional air travel is the fastest way from point A to point B. It hasn’t gotten any faster over the years, though.

Commercial flights are limited by the speed of sound because no one wants sonic booms breaking their windows. That’s why NASA and Lockheed Martin are working toward “low-boom” technology. To that end, NASA took some photos of supersonic shockwaves, and the images happen to be quite cool.

Any aircraft traveling faster than the speed of sound generates a pressure front that surrounds the frame and forces surrounding air out of the way. People on the ground perceive that shockwave as a sonic boom. To better understand the physics at work and help in designing low-boom aircraft, NASA wanted to get images of supersonic planes in flight. Unsurprisingly, that’s not very easy.



NASA captured the photos using a Beechcraft B200 Super King Air, a twin-turboprop aircraft with a top speed of about 350 miles per hour (570 kilometers per hour). The speed of sound is, of course, considerably faster at roughly 767 miles per hour (1,234 kilometers per hour). The subject of the photos is a pair of T-38 jets with a higher top speed. The B200 didn’t need to keep up, though. It just had to be in the right place at the right time as the jets flew in formation, passing about 600 meters from the observer aircraft.

NASA upgraded the camera aboard the B200 to capture wide frames and improved the connection to data storage so it could snap 1,400 frames per second. The final images are a result of a technique called schlieren imagery, which is used to visualize pressure fields. They also happen to look neat.

In the coming years, NASA and Lockheed Martin hope to have the experimental X-59 aircraft up and running to prove that low boom hypersonic flight is a possibility. The agency could use this same imaging technique to study how pressure waves form around the fuselage of this plane. The first flight could happen in 2021 or 2022. After that, NASA may be able to convince regulators to allow hypersonic flight over populated areas.

(Source: extremetech.com)

The latest calculation of Milky Way’s mass just changed what we know about galaxy

What’s in a galaxy? A lot, apparently. We now have the most accurate measurements of the size and mass of the Milky Way ever calculated, and it’s turned out to be more massive than we thought.

How massive? Well, about 1.5 trillion Suns’ worth of mass (solar masses), within a radius of around 129,000 light-years.

That’s over twice as much as previous estimates - according to a 2016 study, the Milky Way was estimated at around 700 billion solar masses.

So what has changed? We now have ESA’s Gaia mission, a dedicated project to accurately map the Milky Way in three dimensions. It’s given us the most detailed map of our home galaxy ever made, and has been refining our knowledge all over the shop.

By combining Gaia data with those from Hubble Space Telescope observations, a research team has been able to infer the galaxy’s size and mass based on the orbital motion of groups of stars called globular clusters, out in the galactic halo.

The mass of the Milky Way can’t just be guessed based on what we can see - because dark matter is playing a role. And we can’t detect dark matter directly. But we know something is out there, because of the orbital velocity of the outer region of the galaxy.

It orbits much faster than it should based on the matter we can detect - as though something, some undetectable mass, is creating extra gravity in the Universe.

Because dark matter can’t be observed directly, we have to infer its mass based on other methods. By starting with that outer-galaxy orbital velocity, astrophysicists can work backwards to calculate the mass responsible, based on Kepler’s laws of orbital motion.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

CERN develops new instrument to hunt for dark matter

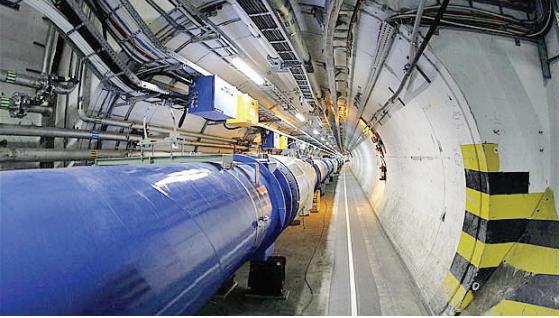
The European Organization for Nuclear Research announced the development of an instrument that will look for particles that are related to dark matter.

CERN houses the Large Hadron Collider or LHC, which is the world’s most powerful particle machine. It is located in a 17-mile tunnel passing through the French-Swiss border.

Scientists estimate that 68 percent of the universe composed of dark energy and 27 percent is dark matter. The rest makes up everything that is visible in the universe.

CERN’s search is focused on “light and weakly interacting particles” that are potentially related to dark matter. Forward Search Experiment or FASER will perform these high-sensitive searches to detect such particles.

“This novel experiment helps diversify the physics program of colliders such as the LHC, and allows us to address unanswered questions in particle physics from a different perspective,” said Mike Lamont, co-coordinator of the Physics Beyond Collider study.



The goal is to find the so-called neutralinos and dark photons. The experiment is expected to start between 2021 and 2023.

Physicists studying particles
Currently, the four LHC detectors cannot detect light and weakly interacting particles. With FASER, physicists will be

able to study these particles before they transform into more known states like electrons and positrons.

CERN said that FASER will use spare detector parts donated by ATLAS and LHCb experiments to speed up the construction process and lower the costs.

The actual detector is 5 meters long, while the core cylinder has a radius of 10 centimeters. FASER will be built alongside its injector, the Super Proton Synchrotron.

Dark matter is studied as early as the 1930s, but scientists are yet to determine its composition.

“We only know that if dark matter is a particle, then it must have mass, since it interacts with other matter through the force of gravity,” CERN reported.

Researchers are able to produce new information by observing their interactions with other matter particles in space. Simulations were conducted in a controlled laboratory environment to better understand dark matter.

(Source: techtimes.com)

Basij to build, retrofit 15,000 housing units for the deprived

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Development Basij (Basij-e-Sazandegi in Persian) affiliated to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps will be constructing and retrofitting 15,000 housing units for the financially struggling families provided with coverage of Iran’s welfare Organization, head of Development Basij has said



Within the framework of a memorandum of understanding which is planned to be signed between Development Basij and Iran’s welfare Organization on Saturday, some 15,000 housing units will be constructed by the end of the next [Iranian calendar] year (March 2020), Mohammad Zahraei explained.

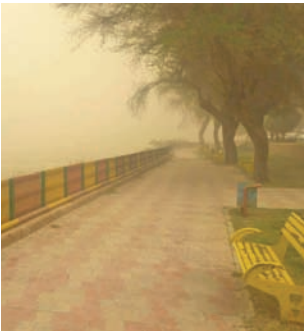
Of the 15,000 housing units 10,000 will be retrofitted and 5,000 will be constructed, Zahraei added, IRNA news agency reported on Friday.

Additionally, as per the above-mentioned memorandum of understanding Development Basij will also implement projects to make three cities, suggested by Iran’s welfare Organization, more accessible for people with disabilities, he highlighted.

Founded in the Iranian calendar year of 1379 (March 2000-March 2001), Development Basij has implemented various retrofitting and construction projects such as schools, healthcare centers and houses nationwide.

SDSs haunting 35,000 sq. km of country’s land area: GSI

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Approximately 35,000 square kilometers of the country’s land area in various regions are being haunted by sand and dust storms (SDSs), director of Geological Survey and Mineral Explorations of Iran (GSI) has said.



In order to tackle the issue some projects have been implemented in the southwestern province of Khuzestan and next [Iranian calendar] year (starting on March 21) measures to explore reasons behind the crippling phenomenon in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan will be taken as well, IRNA news agency quoted Alireza Shahidi as saying on Wednesday.

Dust storms are formally defined by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) as the result of surface winds raising large quantities of dust into the air and reducing visibility at eye level (1.8 m) to less than 1000m.

Moreover, Shahidi regretted, 300 plains in 17 provinces are suffering land subsidence resulted from depletion of ground-water resources.

LEARN ENGLISH

Human Anatomy

A: OK class, so today we are going to continue with our **anatomy** class, today we will review everything we have learned. Can anyone tell me what the first major **organ** is?

B: The **brain**!

A: That’s right the brain! It serves as a **control** center for the body, handling the **processes** of the central nervous system as well as cognition. Then what major organ is in our chest?

B: The **heart**!

A: Very good! It **pumps blood** throughout the body, using the circulatory system such as blood vessels and veins. Now let’s not forget that our **lungs** provide **oxygen** to our heart and body to keep us alive! Now what about the organs that help us **digest** food?

B: The **stomach** and intestines!

A: Very good! Let’s not forget that the stomach is the one that breaks down our food and our intestines process that food and then **expel** the waste. Are we forgetting anything?

B: Yeah! Our kidneys, liver and bladder!

A: Oh yes, you are right. Very important organs indeed.

B: So what do these organs do teacher?

A: Well, umm, they... Time for a break! We can talk about it when you get back.

■ **Key vocabulary**

anatomy: the trunk of the body from the neck to the abdomen

organ: a grouping of tissues into a distinct structure e.g. heart

brain: an organ enclosed in the skull that controls and coordinates the body.

control: the ability to direct the actions of something

process: a planned series of steps or actions that leads to something

chest: the front of the body, from neck to the waist

heart: an organ in the chest that pumps blood

pump: to supply, to circulate

blood: the fluid that circulates in the body

lung: body part that inflates with air and allows breathing

oxygen: a gas that we breath in order to live

digest: to swallow and dissolve something

stomach: the organ people use to digest food

expel: to release something

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**

skull: the bony framework of the head, enclosing the brain and supporting the face

embalm: to treat a dead body so as to preserve it, as with chemicals, drugs

spine: backbone of the body

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Traffic related deaths in Iran up by 0.8% in 10 months

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — According to the data released by Iran’s forensics organization, traffic related deaths have increased by 0.8 percent nationwide over the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21, 2018) compared to the same period last year.

Over the aforesaid period, some 14,685 individuals, including 11,512 men and 3,173 women, lost their lives in road crashes while last year in the corresponding period 14,570 individuals passed away in accidents.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) from a young age, males are more likely to be involved in road traffic crashes than females. About three quarters (73%) of all road traffic deaths occur among young males under the age of 25 years who are almost 3 times as likely to be killed in a road traffic crash as young females.

Provinces of Fars, Tehran and Khorasan Razavi with 1,179, 1100, and 972 deaths registered the highest number of fatalities respectively, the data revealed.

On the contrary provinces of Ilam, Kohgi-

luyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, and Ardebil each with 125, 164, and 191 deaths registered the lowest number of traffic related deaths respectively.

In addition to the road crashes fatalities in the same period in the current year 315,092 were injured in accidents which indicate a 9.8 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

Every year the lives of approximately 1.35 million people are cut short as a result of a road traffic crash, WHO reports. Between 20 and 50 million more people suffer non-fatal injuries, with many incurring a disability as a result of their injury.

Road traffic injuries cause considerable economic losses to individuals, their families, and to nations as a whole. These losses arise from the cost of treatment as well as lost productivity for those killed or disabled by their injuries, and for family members who need to take time off work or school to care for the injured. Road traffic crashes cost most countries 3% of their gross domestic product.

Driving under the influence of alco-



In addition to the road crashes fatalities in the same period in the current year 315,092 were injured in accidents which indicate a 9.8 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

hol and other psychoactive substances, speeding, distracted driving, unsafe road infrastructure, unsafe vehicles, inadequate post-crash care, and inadequate law enforcement of traffic laws are the main cause of accidents.

WHO highlights that road traffic injuries can be prevented. Governments need to take action to address road safety in a holistic manner. This requires involvement from multiple sectors such as transport, police, health, education, and actions that address the safety of roads, vehicles, and road users.

Effective interventions include designing safer infrastructure and incorporating road safety features into land-use and transport planning, improving the safety features of vehicles, improving post-crash care for victims of road crashes, setting and enforcing laws relating to key risks, and raising public awareness.

Mountain search and rescue groups on call during New Year holidays

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Some 60 mountain search and rescue groups will be on duty during the New Year holidays nationwide, head of Rescue and Relief Organization, Morteza Salimi, has said.

The mountain rescue scheme will kick off on March 16 and will last until April 5, IRNA news agency quoted Salimi as saying on Friday.

Those who get stranded in the wilderness can call the hotline 112 to receive rescue services, he highlighted.

Bad visibility resulted from bad weather (mist, rain, snow) or by darkness, causing walkers to get lost, heavy snow falls, rock falls, lightening, flash floods, rain and winds, mild or severe hypothermia [a condition when the body’s core temperature drops below 32°C], and heat ex-



haustion and dehydration, are some of the major hazard in the mountains.

Mountain rescue refers to search and rescue activities that happen in a mountainous environment, although the term is sometimes also used to apply to search and rescue in other wilderness environments.

This tends to include mountains with technical rope access issues, snow, avalanches, ice, crevasses, glaciers, alpine environments and high altitudes. The difficult and remote nature of the terrain in which mountain rescue often occurs has led to the development of a number of specific pieces of equipment and techniques. Helicopters are often used to quickly extract casualties, and search dogs may be deployed to find a casualty.

Britain’s iconic lakes and rivers polluted with plastic, study reveals

From the Thames to the Lake District, Britain’s iconic waterways are full of plastic pollution, according to a new analysis.

In recent years, scientists have found plastic scattered throughout the ocean, as far down as the Mariana Trench and even embedded in Arctic ice.

But the new research shows the problem also exists closer to home, with up to 1,000 tiny pieces of plastic found per liter in the worst-polluted rivers.

The team behind the study say their results show microplastics should be considered an “emergency contaminant” like pharmaceutical waste and pesticides.

“As with all emerging contaminants we don’t yet fully know the dangers they present to wildlife and ecosystems, or even human health, and to what levels they occur in all our water systems,” said Dr Christian Dunn, a wetlands researcher at Bangor University.

“But it’s now clear that microplastics should be considered a serious emerging contaminant and there needs to be a concerted effort to regularly monitor all our inland waters for them.

Preliminary results were gathered by Dr Dunn from 10 sites including Ullswater in the Lake District and Loch Lomond in Scotland.

It is thought to be the first study of its kind to use a fluorescence lighting system on water samples to identify and count tiny shards of plastic less than 5mm in size.

These pollutants include tiny fibers from clothing, scraps of tire rubber and plastic pellets used in manufacturing.

The worst-polluted stretches were urban rivers like the Tame in Greater Manchester, but even remote lochs and reedbeds contained traces of plastic.

The results gathered were preliminary, and will now form part of a scientific paper.



“It was more than a little startling to discover microplastics were present in even the most remote sites we tested, and quite depressing they were there in some of our country’s most iconic locations.

“I’m sure Wordsworth would not be happy to discover his beloved Ullswater in

the Lake District was polluted with plastic.”

The research was carried out in collaboration with Friends of the Earth, which has been pushing for stronger legislation to curb the tide of plastic pollution and stop microplastics ending up in water.

Specifically, they are calling for an end to all non-essential single-use plastic by 2025.

“The widespread contamination of our rivers and lakes with microplastic pollution is a major concern, and people will understandably want to know what impact this could have on their health and environment,” said Julian Kirby, plastics campaigner at Friends of the Earth.

“MPs must get behind new legislation, currently before parliament, that would commit the government to drastically reduce the flow of plastic pollution that’s blighting our environment.”

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iranian knowledge-based company produces oral iron chelator

An Iranian knowledge-based company succeeded in manufacturing oral iron chelator and deferasirox, domestically, Mehr news agency reported.

The CEO of the Iranian knowledge-based company, has explained that this is the first time the medication is being produced in the country saying that so far the drug was imported to Iran which resulted in massive outflow of currency.

The costs of the home-grown medicine will be covered by insurance companies, Behzad Taqipour highlighted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ery, -ry”

■ **Meaning**: a word ending that indicates a place for

■ **For example**: The driver of a steam-driven wagon was unloading warm loaves of bread fresh from the **bakery**.

PHRASAL VERB

Turn (somebody) against somebody/something

■ **Meaning**: to stop liking or supporting someone or something, or to make someone do this

■ **For example**: Many people had turned against the war.

IDIOM

Have sticky fingers

■ **Explanation**: to have a tendency or inclination to steal things

■ **For example**: I think the new cashier we hired has sticky fingers, because money has begun disappearing from the till on the days that he’s working.

تولید داروی خوراکی آهن زدای ایرانی توسط یک شرکت دانش بنیان

به گزارش خبرگزاری مهر، یک شرکت دانش بنیان ایرانی موفق به تولید داروهای خوراکی آهن زدا شده است.

به گفته مدیرعامل این شرکت دانش بنیان تاکنون داروهای خوراکی ضد آهن از خارج کشور با ارزبری بسیار بالا تامین می شده است و این شرکت ایرانی برای نخستین بار در کشور موفق به تولید داخلی این دارو شده است.

بهزاد تقی پور خاطرنشان کرد: این دارو تحت پوشش بیمه تامین اجتماعی و بیمه خدمات درمانی به صورت رایگان در اختیار بیماران قرار خواهد گرفت.

Hezbollah leader: Recent move by Britain, a war on resistance

Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah held a ceremony on the 30th anniversary of establishing the Islamic Resistance Support Association in the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

In a televised speech marking the anniversary of the establishment of the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Resistance Support Association on Friday the resistance movement's Secretary General Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah praised the efforts of the primary generation of the Resistance supporters and funders who donated their life to the movement. He also hailed the efforts of all movement members, especially the female ones, of the Islamic Resistance Support Association throughout its 30-year journey.

Praising all the Resistance funders, Nasrallah stressed that the minor financial contributions can be game-changing when they accumulate and called on all who seek the divine praise for their financial support to the Resistance to fund the Islamic Resistance Support Association.

He went on to say some people think the only support that Hezbollah enjoys is its donors, benefactor/benefactress, rich and wealthy friends, however, the real strength and might of the resistance movement stems from the support of people, which is the main source of its power. He added, we take pride in such support.



The Hezbollah top official pointed out that, we expect escalating sanctions and financial measures against the movement and all the Resistance allies in the Middle East region. Nasrallah went on to say the financial difficulties which face all the axis of resistance is part of the United States-Israeli war on it.

The Hezbollah leader said: "the resistance needs your support ... because we are in the heart of the struggle," adding

that the group will face sanctions with "patience and steadfastness."

"We can survive this war," he said.

However, he stressed that the Hezbollah resistance will emerge from this financial war victorious. Nasrallah also mentioned that Hezbollah has launched anti-corruption campaign in Lebanon in order to preserve its national victories, highlighting that Hezbollah will never stop the anti-corruption campaign re-

gardless of all the sectarian and political considerations.

Nasrallah said the anti-corruption fight is "as sacred as" his group's military resistance against Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon.

"Today more than ever, there is national consensus on fighting corruption," Nasrallah said.

Clarifying the timing of his party's endeavor against corruption, Nasrallah said: "Lebanon is precious to us and we are among the Lebanese who have offered hefty sacrifices and blood for the sake of the country, so we cannot stand idly by in order not to irritate some parties."

As for the issue of the U.S. sanctions on Hezbollah and the latest British measure against the party Nasrallah said: "The resistance axis has triumphed in all countries and they are imposing sanctions on us because we have defeated their scheme."

"More countries will put Hezbollah on their terror lists and we are aggrieved but strong," he underlined.

"The resistance axis is triumphing across the region," Nasrallah boasted.

Nasrallah's speech come a few days after Britain joined the United States in banning the resistance group as a terrorist organization. The U.S. has increased its pressure on the movement recently, placing several sets of sanctions on Hezbollah.

(Source: agencies)

Assassination reports compound amid rift among Saudi royals

1→ According to the paper, the king was warned by advisers of a potential move against him to the extent that a new security team of more than 30 hand-picked loyalists from the interior ministry was flown to Egypt to replace the existing team.

"Some of the original security staff might have been loyal to the prince," Guardian quoted the source as saying.

The prince's handling of the Saudi regime war on Yemen along with the murder of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi are said to have led to heightened rift between the king and the crown prince, it said. Bin Salman is known as the architect of the bloody war on Yemen.

The heir to the Saudi regime throne is also reported to have ordered the assassination of Khashoggi – an outspoken critic of bin Salman's policies – last October at Riyadh's Istanbul consulate.

(Source: Press TV)

MH370: Bewilderment and disbelief five years after plane vanished

For a legion of armchair enthusiasts, the disappearance of MH370 is an opportunity to spin increasingly far-fetched conspiracy theories about what happened to the plane once it vanished from radar on March 8, 2014.



For the families of the 239 passengers and crew who were on board, the world's biggest aviation mystery has meant five years of grief, bewilderment and disbelief.

Soon after the Boeing 777-200 vanished - less than an hour into an overnight flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing that should have taken around six hours - it emerged its communications systems had been turned off.

Military radar then revealed the aircraft had turned back across Malaysia, skirted the island of Penang, and headed towards the northern tip of Sumatra.

Some 26 countries joined the search-and-rescue mission, but could not find anything. Weeks later, the Malaysian government announced MH370 had flown until it ran out of fuel, ending its journey thousands of kilometers from Beijing in the depths of the southern Indian Ocean.

Officials were able to reach that conclusion after discovering the aircraft had been responding to satellite pings sent out by the Inmarsat system, which enabled them to plot an arc of where the plane might be.

The official investigation report, amounting to nearly 500 pages and numerous appendices, was finally published last July, but it offered little that was new.

It acknowledged shortcomings in Malaysia's response to the plane's disappearance and said foul play could not be ruled out even though there was no evidence of stress or strange behavior among the crew or passengers.

After five years, and the discovery of only a few pieces of wreckage, experts say the time has come to take another look at the initial investigation.

"The government has to release everything and go back to the beginning," said Gail Durham, executive director of the National Air Disaster Alliance Foundation, who was in Beijing when the plane disappeared. "That's what scientists do. We have to look at what we have in light of what we know now. We have nothing to lose." In the immediate aftermath of the plane's disappearance, the government, the national carrier and Malaysia's civil aviation authorities were widely criticized for their handling of the crisis.

But that administration was removed in elections last May, raising hopes the new leadership - Malaysia's first change in government in 60 years - would show a renewed interest in discovering what happened to MH370.

Malaysia's Transport Minister Anthony Loke joined the families' memorial on Sunday, planting a tree and inspecting two pieces of wreckage put on public display for the first time.

He insisted all the information gathered during the investigation had been published, but said the government was willing to consider new search proposals based on "credible leads".

"We are awaiting a specific proposal, especially from Ocean Infinity," he told reporters.

The United States technology group Ocean Infinity scoured the seabed over five months last year in an ultimately fruitless search for the fuselage. The official search, covering some 200,000 square kilometers of remote ocean and conducted by Australia, China and Malaysia, ended a year before that.

Ocean Infinity focused its operations to the north of the arc established by the Inmarsat data after the final report of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) suggested that might be the plane's final resting place. Drift modelling as a result of the wreckage found in Africa also pointed to the northern end of the arc. The company's CEO (Chief Executive Officer) Oliver Plunkett in a video broadcast from Argentina said the team had been "refining and improving" their search equipment after successfully recovering a submarine that had been lost for more than a year.

It is now offering to resume the search on the basis, once again, that the company will be paid only if the plane is found.

Family members are urging the government to consider all search offers, setting aside a budget of \$70m, the amount it would have had to pay Ocean Infinity if it had found the aircraft last year.

ATSB concluded the plane had probably hit the water in a "high and increasing rate of descent". The confirmed wreckage also suggests the effect took place at medium to high speed.

Since MH370 vanished, airlines have made improvements to their operations and many aircraft are now tracked in real time, especially across oceans.

The aviation industry often describes flying as the world's safest form of transport. But with MH370 still lying somewhere in the remote Indian Ocean, family members say only when the wreckage is found, the black boxes recovered, and answers found to the questions of what caused the 777's disappearance can that claim really be justified.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Finland gov't collapses after biggest reform fails

Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipila's center-right government resigned on Friday after it failed to push through a flagship social and healthcare reform package, just five weeks ahead of a legislative election.

The wide-reaching reform has been a hard fought struggle over a decade and has divided successive governments. Sipila called the failure of the reform "a major disappointment".

Sipila has since 2015 headed a coalition made up of his Center Party, the conservative National Coalition, and the Eurosceptic Blue Reform party, a moderate faction spun off from the far-right.

The three parties were unable to agree among themselves on the package, an area Sipila had made one of his top priorities in office.

A former businessman who earned millions as an IT entrepreneur before becoming Prime Minister in 2015, Sipila considered the shake-up as key to cutting the ballooning costs of treating a rapidly ageing population.

The proportion of over-65s in the Nordic country, which has a population of 5.4 million, is expected to reach 26

percent by 2030.

Finland is a constitutional republic where the parliament, the president of the republic, and the government are the highest elected bodies.

But the coalition partners were unable to agree on issues such as how much the system should be opened up to give patients freedom of choice, among others.

Sipila threw in the towel when it became clear the government would not be able to submit a proposal to parliament before the election scheduled for April 14.

President Sauli Niinisto said he had accepted the government's resignation and asked it to continue on a caretaker basis until a new government has been appointed.

Politicians in Finland were split on Sipila's decision to resign so close to the election.

The head of the opposition Social Democrats, Antti Rinne, told public broadcaster YLE he thought it was an odd move.

But a member of the parliamentary committee on health and social affairs, Veronica Rehn-Kivi of the Swedish People's Party, called it a "victory" for the welfare state and individual citizens.



The Social Democrats have been leading opinion polls in the run-up to the election, with Sipila's Centre party trailing in third place at around 15 percent.

A program of austerity cuts and tighter benefits rules during his administration has been unpopular in a country where the welfare state is a cherished national asset.

(Source: AFP)

Algerians protest against President Bouteflika

Thousands of Algerians have staged a protest in the capital, Algiers, against ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's decision to seek a fifth term in office, a day after he warned of the risk of "chaos."

The protesters gathered at Algiers' landmark Grand Post Office Square on Friday, waving the country's green, white, and red national flag and waving banners that read "Bouteflika, go!" and "No elections" until the regime is brought down.

The demonstration took place amid tightened security measures, with anti-riot police vehicles and a water cannon deployed. A

police helicopter was also seen flying over the city.

Train and metro services in the capital were also suspended on Friday.

Bouteflika called for vigilance on Thursday, saying foreign or domestic groups may seek to stoke chaos in the North African country.

"Breaking this peaceful expression by any treacherous internal or foreign group may lead to sedition and chaos and resulting crises and woes," he wrote in a letter on Thursday, without mentioning opposition demands that he abandon his bid for another term.

Bouteflika's letter came as some 1,000 lawyers took to the streets of the capital on Thursday saying his poor health had to disqualify him from the upcoming elections.

The country's leaders "will not give in easily, but we won't either," said a taxi driver, summing up the popular mood. He said the first Friday of protests saw less than half the residents of his district of Algiers take part in the demonstrations. "On March 1, about two out of three said they would march, and (now) 100 percent of people are saying they will be out on the streets," he claimed.

Several lawmakers of the ruling FLN Party also resigned to join the mass anti-govern-

ment protests, the private Ashourouq TV station reported Friday. No more details were immediately available.

Anti-government protests first erupted in Algeria on February 22 over the 81-year-old Bouteflika's bid to extend his 20-year rule.

Bouteflika is running in the April 18 presidential election in spite of doubts over his health condition. He has been seen in public only a few times since he suffered a stroke in 2013. Bouteflika flew to Switzerland on February 24 for what the presidential office called "routine medical checks" ahead of the vote.

(Source: agencies)

36 nations, including Europeans, rap Saudi Arabia for 1st time at UN rights body

1→

Saudi counter-terror law in focus

The signatories to the statement expressed concern about the kingdom's so-called counter-terrorism law, which it has been sweeping up against protesters and dissidents.

"We are particularly concerned about the use of the counter-terrorism law and other national security provisions against individuals peacefully exercising their rights and freedoms," the statement read.

The Council's members also called on Riyadh to release 10 prominent rights activists.

The joint statement named the activists as Loujain Al-Hathloul, Eman Al-Nafjan, Aziza Al-Yousef, Nassima Al-Sadah, Samar Badawi, Nouf Abdelaziz, Hatoun Al-Fassi, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, Amal Al-Harbi, and Shadan al-Anezi.

Jailed women activists subjected to torture

Meantime, advocacy and rights groups accuse the kingdom of widely using torture against jailed women activists, including those who campaigned for the right to drive, saying they have been subjected to electric shocks, flogging, sexual assault and other forms of torture.

Zaynab al-Khawaja of the Beirut-based Persian Gulf

Center for Human Rights independent charity read out a litany of the instances of torture during a panel event attended by UN experts on the sidelines of a Human Rights Council gathering in Geneva on Monday.

"We highlight some of the torture methods that are being used in Saudi Arabia - electrocution, flogging, sometimes whipping, on the thighs for example, sexual assault where some women human rights defenders have been stripped, have been groped, have been photographed naked, some while handcuffed, and others while blindfolded," she said.

Khashoggi drama

The Council's statement further condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The prominent journalist was killed and had his body dismembered after entering the Saudi regime consulate in Istanbul, Turkey last October.

"The circumstances of Mr. Khashoggi's death reaffirm the need to protect journalists and to uphold the right to freedom of expression around the world," the text said.

"Investigations into the killing must be independent, impartial, and transparent," it added, specifically calling



for cooperation with an inquiry led by Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.

Evidence has shown that the killing was carried out by a hit squad with close links to the House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), and Turkish officials have blamed Mohammed bin Salman of ordering the killing.

(Source: agencies)

U.S., British bombs caused 1,000 civilian casualties in Yemen: report

A U.S.-based human rights group has revealed that British and American have killed and maimed nearly 1,000 civilians, including over 120 children, in the Saudi regime war in Yemen, a new report has revealed.

According to the report released on Wednesday by the U.S.-based University Network for Human Rights (UNHR), the airstrikes killed 203 people and injured at least 749. At least 122 children and 56 women

were also among the casualties.

The investigators from the UNHR and Yemeni monitoring group Mwatana said they obtained the figures from only 27 unlawful strikes launched in Yemen between April 2015 and April 2018.

The findings from the 128-page investigation have reignited the debate on the need for the U.S. and Britain to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia and its allies.

"Our findings reinforce prior evidence demonstrating that the Saudi/UAE-led Coalition is failing to fulfill its obligations under the laws of war and repeatedly using US weapons in apparently disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks that have resulted in widespread civilian casualties and other civilian harm in Yemen," the report said.

The report stated that the air strikes could be unlawful under international law and

constitute potential war crimes.

"Many of the attacks appeared to take place far from any potential military target," the report said. "Others caused harm to civilians that vastly outweighed any likely military benefit. In no case did it appear that coalition forces took adequate precautions to minimize harm to civilians, as required by international humanitarian law."

(Source: Press TV)

Man Utd send support to stabbed fan in Paris

Manchester United sent the club’s support to a fan stabbed by a taxi driver in Paris in the wake of the English giants remarkable Champions League victory over Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday.

“We were shocked to hear about the incident with one of our fans who was stabbed while in Paris for the Champions League game,” said United in a statement.

“Everyone at the club wishes him well during his recovery.” A French police source confirmed to AFP that a man had been wounded on Wednesday after an argument with a cab driver but that his condition was not believed to be life-threatening.

According to Sky Sports the fan, who is 44, was travelling to the center of the French capital with three friends when the driver objected to their boisterous celebration of United’s 3-1 win to progress to the Champions League quarter-finals.

A spokesman for Britain’s foreign ministry said: “We are in touch with the French authorities following an incident involving a British man in Paris on March 6 and stand ready to offer assistance if required.”

(Source: Guardian)

Thailand bars weightlifters from Olympics after doping tests

Thailand is barring its weightlifters from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and all other international competitions, the association overseeing the sport said Friday, after several athletes tested positive for doping.

The International Weightlifting Federation has vowed to clean up a sport that has grappled with rampant steroid use.

The eight Thai cases date to last year’s championships in Turkmenistan and were detected in follow-up analysis after initial rounds of tests.

In response the Thai Amateur Weightlifting Association said it was launching an investigation and “will not send athletes to compete at the international level” until the situation is resolved.

That includes the Tokyo Games and qualifying rounds, the association added, citing the importance of protecting its “honour and dignity”.

It did not name those targeted in the probe. Thailand will however hold on to its role as host of the 2019 IWF world championships in September. No Thai athletes will take part.

The IWF president vowed last year to beat the doping scourge tainting the sport, but the task is daunting.

A raft of Olympic champions were stripped of medals and records following re-analysis of samples from the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Games.

Nine countries, including Asian powerhouse China, were suspended as a result.

As a result tough new measures have been introduced to punish serial doping offenders and limit their ability to take part in the Olympics.

(Source: AFP)

Real Madrid exit a warning for Barcelona - Valverde

Ernesto Valverde has refused to rule Real Madrid out of the title race but says their Champions League exit should serve as a warning to Barcelona when they play Lyon next week.

Barca are at home to Rayo Vallecano on Saturday in La Liga, four days before hosting Lyon in Europe, with the tie hanging in the balance following a goalless draw in the first leg.

Their position is more comfortable in the league, where they sit seven points ahead of Atletico Madrid and 12 in front of Real, but Valverde insists there is no room for complacency.

“I do not rule out any team, none of us do,” Valverde said at a press conference on Friday.

“Atletico is now the closest rival and our objective is to keep this distance at least. I do not rule out Real Madrid either out of respect and because of the maths.

“We see the Real Madrid situation from a distance and with respect, because we know that football is what it is, a lot can change in a week.

“When we see there are teams that go out of the Champions League after having good leads, and teams that are strong and powerful, it tells us how difficult it is to go through. Nobody is safe.”

Barca face Rayo, who are 19th in La Liga, on the back of consecutive victories over Real at the Santiago Bernabeu.

“There are certain matches that get a lot of focus in the season,” Valverde said.

(Source: AFP)

Belgium’s Fellaini announces international retirement

Belgium midfielder Marouane Fellaini announced his retirement from international soccer on Friday, ending a 12-year career with the national team.

The 31-year-old scored 18 goals in 87 appearances for Belgium and represented them at two World Cups, helping them finish third in Russia last year.

“After 12 years of representing Belgium at the highest level, I have decided to retire from senior international football,” Fellaini said in a statement on Twitter.

“I feel the time is right for me to step down and allow the next generation of players to continue this very successful period in Belgian football history.

“I have many amazing memories... and I am very proud Belgium is currently number one in the FIFA rankings.”

Fellaini joined Chinese Super League side Shandong Luneng in February, ending a five-and-a-half year spell at Premier League side Manchester United. He scored the winning goal on his CSL debut against Beijing Renhe this month.

(Source: Reuters)

Why LeBron James passing Michael Jordan on the all-time scoring list was so anticlimactic

The 2018-19 NBA season has been a very personal one for LeBron James. Signing with the Lakers was his first career decision that didn’t yield the pressure to win a championship right away. It’s a whole different mentality from the “Not 1, Not 2, Not 3” summer signing with the Heat, or the championship promise in his return to Cleveland.

He’s embraced the change so much to the point that he’ll miss the playoffs for the first time in 13 years. You could argue he hasn’t really cared all that much, as he’s continued to post Instagrams of his individual achievements and A&R sessions with 2Chainz. Sure he still wants to win, but he knows his legend is cemented.

“There’s nothing I need to get in this league that I don’t already have,” he said in February. “Everything else for me is just like icing on the cake.”

He’s chosen to end his prime playing years on his own terms, free of immediate expectations, and it’s been disastrous. His celebrity, his past accomplishments, and his highlight reel came with him, even if his mentality hasn’t. And that has its consequences.

That’s what James learned on Wednesday night when he passed Michael Jordan as the No. 4 all-time scorer in league history. The STAPLES Center crowd reacted with underwhelming applause given the gravity of the accomplishment.

James’ moment came down 18 points



in the first half at home — a microcosm of the Lakers season, really — and the crowd clapped while he embraced Rajon Rondo and Alex Caruso. It was a fine moment, though it lacked enthusiasm, as many of those in attendance pointed out.

“In the smaller moments we saw Wednesday, I couldn’t help imagining how much more enjoyable that night would have been in Cleveland,” Sports Illustrated’s Andrew Sharp wrote.

Solskjaer says Molde contract ended as plays down his United prospects



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer made clear on Friday he was no longer contracted to the team he had coached in Norway, but played down chances of being offered a permanent deal to manage Manchester United.

United are unbeaten in the league since Solskjaer arrived in December, and pressure on the Premier League club’s hierarchy to ask him to stay on after his interim tenure expires in June was ratcheted up several notches with Wednesday’s memorable comeback win against Paris St Germain.

Asked if speculation about a permanent contract bothered him, the former United striker told reporters: “I love managing these boys and I love working here. I’m just doing the best I can every single day. If and when a decision is to be made, then we will see.”

He said his deal with Molde had been terminated the instant he joined United, contradicting comments by his former employer.

Molde CEO Oystein Neerland said on Wednesday he expected Solskjaer to return after his stint with United ended, having signed last year to remain at the Norwegian club until 2021.

“That contract (with Molde) was terminated and I am contracted to United until the end of June,” Solskjaer said ahead of Sunday’s league trip to Arsenal.

“With the contract issue, you cannot have two contracts when you are a manager.”

Solskjaer said defender Eric Bailly and forward Anthony Martial would be available for the clash at Emirates Stadium.

He hoped midfielders Nemanja Matic and Ander Herrera would also recover in time. “They just need to have another couple of days training with the team, they’ve done well in their recovery work.”

Solskjaer also said he expected Marcus Rashford to kick on following the stoppage-time penalty that sealed a dramatic victory in Paris, comparing the young striker to the way Cristiano Ronaldo cut his teeth at Old Trafford before moving to Real Madrid in 2009.

“Rashy’s goals sometimes are worldies and he does have a sensational strike of the ball,” Solskjaer said.

“But you see the change in Cristiano’s goals from when he was young to now, he scores more from inside the box and that’s what Rashy has to improve as well.”

(Source: Reuters)

UEFA justifies PSG penalty decision in VAR explanation



Presnel Kimpembe’s handball which led to Manchester United’s extraordinary 3-1 victory over Paris St Germain in the Champions League was referred to video technology as it was “a serious missed incident”, UEFA said on Friday.

The competition organisers released a statement on their website detailing the use of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) after the system played a decisive role during the week’s last-16 second-leg games.

The most debated decision saw PSG defender Kimpembe penalised for deflecting a shot from United’s Diogo Dalot with his arm. That prompted a review which led to Marcus Rashford scoring a penalty in stoppage time to complete one of the most remarkable comebacks in the competition’s history.

“The VAR, after checking various different angles available to him, recommended to the referee an on-field review following the penalty area incident,” UEFA said in a statement. “Following the on-field review, the referee confirmed that the distance that the ball travelled was not short and the impact could therefore not be unexpected.

“The defender’s arm was not close to the body, which made the defender’s

with James donning purple and gold. The second he signed with the Lakers, James had to know he ran the risk of dethroning his idol/nemesis in front of a sold-out crowd that felt so isolated from him.

Still, he couldn’t have expected the season the Lakers had that led to the anticlimactic moment of him passing Jordan. James is coming off the worst injury of his career, one that took him out for 18 games. He watched the organization make a horrifyingly public failure of a move to trade half of his teammates for Anthony Davis. His team is flat-out bad, and will likely finish below .500. The city of Los Angeles has little reason to connect with him like his hometown of Cleveland, and he hasn’t given much reason for them to really like him the way his play and enthusiasm did in Miami.

Thirty-one thousand and thirty-eight of James’ 32,311 career points came in a Heat or Cavaliers jersey, as did all of his MVPs, championships and All-NBA selections. His accomplishments aren’t shared with the inhabitants of Staples Center.

LeBron has lived through his mistakes, and mostly corrected them. He came back to Cleveland and brought the championship he promised. He made up with Kyrie Irving over the phone after the point guard bailed on being his No. 2. Everything big and small in his professional life seems in order.

(Source: CNN)

Will hacking lead to Champions League ban for Man City?

English Premier League champion Manchester City could face a ban from the Champions League, should a UEFA probe find the club guilty of unfair financial practices.

European football’s governing body is investigating City for possible breaches of its Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations, UEFA said Thursday.

“The investigation will focus on several alleged violations of FFP that were recently made public in various media outlets,” UEFA said. City is owned by an investment vehicle of Abu Dhabi royal Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan; Der Spiegel alleges that investment violated FFP regulations as it was disguised as sponsorship from Etihad Airways, the flag carrier of the Emirate.

Etihad is the club’s shirt sponsor, and also has naming rights for its stadium. The club also allegedly concealed a player investment fund, which would allow the club to hold equity in promising players -- so-called “third-party ownership (TPO), something banned by UEFA and the Premier League -- by using a company in the Cayman Islands, the newspaper report

FFP rules are supposed to stop clubs getting into unmanageable debt, or allow wealthy benefactors to give top teams an unfair advantage.

In a statement on its website City said it saw the inquiry as “an opportunity to bring to an end the speculation resulting from the illegal hacking and out of context publication of City emails. The accusation of financial irregularities are entirely false.

“The club’s published accounts are full and complete and a matter of legal and regulatory record.”

■ **Major punishment**

Should the allegation be proven, the “heaviest pun-



ishment” that UEFA could hand down is “exclusion from UEFA competitions,” Yves Leterme, the chairman and chief investigator of Uefa’s club financial control body (CFCB), said earlier this year.

The Champions League, Europe’s flagship competition, is hugely prestigious -- and lucrative. Lifting the trophy -- something that has eluded City thus far -- is estimated to earn the winning club over \$90 million.

City currently leads the Premier League table, with 71 points from 29 games, and is battling Liverpool, one point behind on 70, for top spot with nine games to play.

Pep Guardiola’s team is also expected to reach the Champions League quarterfinals after beating Schalke 3-2 in the first leg in Germany. It recently won the League Cup and is still in the FA Cup as City chases a quadruple of titles.

Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling celebrates after scoring against Schalke in the Champions League in

February.

The top four teams from the Premier League qualify for the following season’s Champions League; with a 13-point buffer between it and crosstown rival Manchester United in fourth, City is all but guaranteed a top-four finish this season.

■ **Whistleblower to be tried**

Der Spiegel’s investigation relied on documents provided to it by Football Leaks, a whistleblower organization, which obtained 70 million confidential and, in some cases, highly sensitive documents.

Rui Pinto, the leaker at the heart of Der Spiegel’s investigation, is to be extradited from Hungary to his native Portugal, according to reports, where he faces cybercrime charges relating to the hacking of emails from Benfica, Sporting Lisbon and Porto, three leading Portuguese clubs.

In an interview with the German newspaper, Pinto said that he is “a citizen who acted in the public interest. My sole intention was to reveal illicit practices that affect the world of football,” and that his initiative was aided by others who contributed documents.

■ **Recurring allegations**

City was punished in 2014 for FFP violations. At the time the club said it would accept punishments including a fine of €60 million (\$67 million), a restriction on transfer spending and a reduction in the club’s squad size for the European Champions League.

Manchester City leaped to prominence on the back of massive investments, signing top players and announcing lucrative sponsorship deals with companies closely linked to its owner, Abu Dhabi royal Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who owns the Abu Dhabi United Group.

(Source: CNN)

Mes Sungun reclaim Iran futsal league title

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Mes Sungun won Iranian Futsal Super League for second year in a row on Thursday.

Mes Sungun came from 3-1 behind to defeat Giti Pasand Isfahan 5-3 at the packed Piroozii Hall in Isfahan in the second leg of the competition.

Mohammad Shajari gave the hosts the lead but Alireza Asgari equalized the match.

Mehdi Javid and Saeid Abbasi put Giti Pasand ahead in the first half.

In the second half, Mes Sungun were dominant and Asgari, Farhad Fakhim and Saeid Taghizadeh were on the target.

The sides played out a scoreless draw in the first leg in Tabriz.

“I am proud of my players since they made a great job in Isfahan. I believed in



my players and we knew that Mes Sungun would win the title from the very first days. I would like to thank my players and coaching staff,” Mes Sungun coach Esmaeil Taghipour said.

Mes Sungun will represent Iran at the 2019 AFC Futsal Club Championship. Isfahan will host the competition.

Mes Sungun won the 2018 AFC Futsal Club Championship after beating Vietnamese Thái Son Nam 4-2 in the final match.

The Iranian Futsal Super League is a professional futsal league competition for clubs located at the highest level of the Iranian futsal league system founded in 2004.

The Super League is the top tier of an extensive pyramid-like structure, above the 1st Division, the 2nd Division and the lower local leagues.

Chinese Para archer Wu regards Zahra Nemati as role model

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Chinese Para archer Wu Chunyan regarded Iranian legendary athlete Zahra Nemati as her role model.

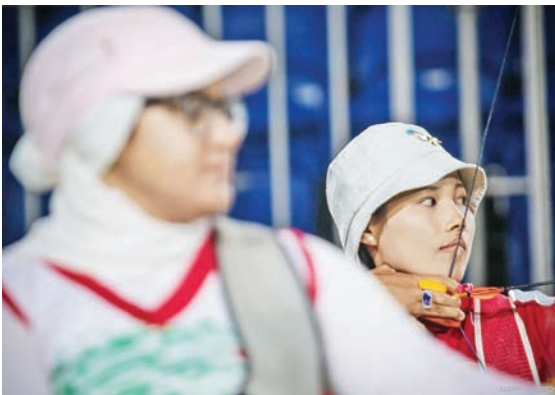
It was in 2014 that Wu made her international debut in Para archery. It was also the first time that she met Iran’s Zahra Nemati, the gold medalist in the women’s individual recurve at the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

“After that competition, I regarded her as my role model in the archery field,” Wu said in an interview with Paralympic.org. “After returning to China, I trained harder to improve my competitive level and strengthen my self-confidence.”

Nemati was an easy figure to admire. A blackbelt in taekwondo before a car accident left her paralysed, the 33-year-old champion decided to take up Para archery and within months was already winning medals in national able-bodied competitions.

At London 2012, Nemati became the first Iranian woman to win a gold medal at an Olympic or Paralympic Games. She also qualified for both Olympic and Paralympic competitions at Rio 2016.

“When I first heard the name Zahra Nemati, I



was only a new archer,” Wu said. “At that time she was already a champion of the Paralympic Games. She is an Olympic athlete too. I think it is a kind of unyielding belief and her own efforts that make her a strong athlete.”

Wu finished second to Nemati at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. Since then, the Chinese archer has

undertaken a massive effort to push her own athletic career forward.

Wu’s hard work paid off when she crossed paths with Nemati again, this time at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia, and emerged the winner against the woman who had been her long-term inspiration in the sport.

“Several major international events improved my performance, until 2018, when she and I met in the final again. The score was very close,” Wu said. “I should thank her for being a strong opponent.”

Wu continues to train hard, for as long as eight hours a day, with the goal of repeating the same performance at the 2019 World Para Archery Championships. Nemati was golden at the previous edition of the World Championships in Beijing, while Wu was third.

“The will to win is important to me,” Wu said. “I love archery from the bottom of my heart. It has brought me great happiness and something beyond honor.

“At the 2019 World Championships, what I need to do is to make the best of what I have in training and not leave with any regrets,” Wu concluded.

Record Albion signing not happy without goals and assists

Alireza Jahanbakhsh’s display against Huddersfield was widely perceived to be his best yet for Albion – but there was still an element missing for the record signing.

He did not score or set up a goal.

The Iran winger came close on his first Premier League start since early November with a first half shot which dipped against the bar and in the second half with a finish too close to keeper Jonas Loss.

“I felt really good,” he said. “I was fit, with good confidence, but still I don’t think that’s my best to be honest.

“The fans haven’t seen my best yet. I was close to scoring a goal, but as long as I don’t score, don’t give assists, that is obviously not my best game. That’s what I am looking for.”

Jahanbakhsh is still in the infancy of his journey adjustment from the Dutch Eredivisie to the Premier League.

A late arrival after representing his country in last summer’s World Cup in Russia, a hamstring injury which ruled him out for two-and-a-half months and another inter-

national departure to play in the Asian Cup have combined to restrict Jahanbakhsh to 15 appearances in all competitions, seven of them from the bench, since his £17 million switch from AZ Alkmaar in July.

The well-groomed 25-year-old has looked neat and tidy without setting the pulse racing.

There is another reason, other than the multiple interruptions, for the contrast in figures between the 21 goals in 33 games for Alkmaar last season, concluding with a pair of hat-tricks.

Manager Chris Hughton said: “It emphasizes that he played right side in a 4-3-3 and didn’t have the defensive responsibilities you need to have in this division for a club at this level.

“I think they gave him a little bit more of a license in the final third and he is a very good finisher.

“That’s where the adjustment is. In a 4-3-3 it is very difficult for him to play the same way here as he did in Holland.”

Although Jahanbakhsh had the freedom

of the park in Holland, he is accustomed to a more disciplined role for his country.

There are similarities between Albion’s Premier League stature and the challenge Iran faced in their World Cup group.

They beat Morocco 1-0, lost 1-0 to Spain and held Cristiano Ronaldo’s Portugal to a 1-1 draw.

Jahanbakhsh told The Argus: “The position we are in as a team and the Premier League is a different competition to the Dutch League.

“He (Hughton) wants more from me in the defensive part, which I am trying to do.

“Actually as an attacking player you would like to be with a free role in front, just to do your things.

“I know what he wants from me, to also defend sometimes as a winger. That’s what I’m trying to improve every single game.

“With the national team we’ve had that a lot of time. In the World Cup we had that. As a team we knew we were facing a bigger team with more quality players. One more



player in the defense can help the balance of the team, not to concede any goals.

“That is the same here with the Premier League games. I was doing that quite well in the time I was playing. After that I was injured and away, now I am back I have to get to improve that again, get back to the good shape and what the manager wants from me.”

(Source: The Argus)

‘Gucci’ aims to enhance Sydney FC’s Asian brand

WITH his World Cup and European pedigree and ‘Gucci’ nickname, Iranian forward Reza Ghoochannejhad is hoping to bring a touch of class to Australian giants Sydney FC in their 2019 AFC Champions League (ACL) campaign.

The 31-year-old joined the three-time Aussie champions at the end of January, on-loan from Cyprus club APOEL FC.

He scored his first goal in his fourth A-League appearance in the 2-0 win against Adelaide United on March 1.

And on Wednesday, he was a member of the Sydney FC side who began their ACL campaign with a 0-0 home draw with Ulsan Hyundai, of South Korea.

“Sydney FC is the biggest team in Australia, and one of the better teams in Asia. When I heard of the interest from Sydney, I was drawn because of the club, the adventure and the country,” Ghoochannejhad said.

“I’ve been here before in 2015 (for the Asian Cup) so I’ve had some great experiences with Australia and I knew what to expect.

“It’s an opportunity for me to show my skills here, and great for me and my family to be in Australia.”

A speedy striker with a polished finish who takes the AFC player spot at Sydney FC, Ghoochannejhad seems like a perfect fit, with his near-perfect English and growing partnership with fellow import Adam le Fondre.

The pair faced each other in the English Championship when Ghoochannejhad was at Charlton and Le Fondre played for Reading and Cardiff City.

The Iranian scored only five times in 42 appearances in two years with Charlton, but would have a more successful spell at Dutch club, Heerenveen.

In the 2016-17 season, he was the Eredivisie’s third-highest scorer with 19 goals in 34 matches, and grabbed a memorable hat-trick away to PSV Eindhoven as he made the league’s team of the year.

He’s the first Iranian to play in the A-League, and the nation’s sizeable Persian community has already made



him feel welcome: “They contacted me through social media, and keep in touch with me. I hope that I can make them proud again.”

The Gucci moniker was introduced early in his career when fans decided it was catchier than his four-syllable family name.

At different times over the past decade or so, Iran and Australia have been Asia’s top-ranked nations (Team Melli are currently No. 22, with the Socceroos at 42nd).

But their rivalry predates Australia’s entry to the AFC in 2006 when they were still part of Oceania.

In an inter-confederation playoff for the last spot at France ’98, Iran famously came from 2-0 down in Melbourne to draw 2-2 (after a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Tehran), advancing to their second World Cup finals on the away goals’ rule.

Just 10 years old at the time of Iran’s last meeting with Australia, Ghoochannejhad has mostly positive memories of the World Cup.

He scored the winner in a qualifier against South Korea to book his nation a spot at Brazil 2014.

And he netted Iran’s only goal of that tournament in

the 3-1 loss to Bosnia.

“That’s a goal that no-one can ever take away from you. I’ll cherish it for the rest of my life,” he said.

But the 2018 World Cup holds less pleasant memories.

Despite being selected in the squad by Carlos Queiroz, Ghoochannejhad didn’t see a single minute of playing time in Russia, falling behind Zenit St Petersburg’s Sardar Azmoun

and Brighton’s Alireza Jahanbakhsh in the pecking order.

Immediately after the tournament, he announced his international retirement via his Instagram account.

Even so, Ghoochannejhad has no regrets about his international career – he scored 16 goals in 44 appearances – and his decision to play for his birth nation, having lived in the Netherlands after the age of four.

He earned caps for the Dutch age-group teams, including three appearances and one goal for their Under-19s.

He came through Heerenveen’s youth academy, and also had stints in Belgium, Kuwait and Qatar, in addition to England and Holland.

He’s never played club football in his native Iran.

“I played against many good players from Ibrahimovic to Messi – those are the big names that everybody knows. “Those are players who will always be remembered. Those moments are unforgettable for me,” he said.

While the A-League no longer has household names like Dwight Yorke, Emile Heskey and Alessandro Del Piero, Ghoochannejhad is likely to cross paths with Oscar and Hulk when Sydney FC face Shanghai SIPG in the ACL next month.

It’s his second stint in the regional showcase after a stint with Kuwait SC in 2014.

“It’s a great feeling to be part of the team to play in the ACL, and an opportunity for me to show my skills here. It’s a great adventure,” he said.

(Source: Borneo Post)

Persepolis held by Nassaji, Sepahan edge Pars Jonoubi

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team were held to a 1-1 draw by Nassaji Mazandaran but stayed on top of the Iran Professional League (IPL) on Friday.

In the match held in Ghaemshahr’s Shahid Vahidi Stadium, Mehdi Nazari gave the lead the hosts in the 21st minute but Soroush Rafiei equalized the match after the hour mark.

In Isfahan’s Fooladshahr Stadium, Sepahan edged past Pars Jonoubi thanks to Kiros Stanley’s strike before the break.

Also, Sanat Naft Abadan shared the spoils with Sepidrood Rasht in Abadan in a 1-1 draw.

Persepolis remain top of the table with 42 points, followed by Sepahan with 41 points and one game in hands.

AFC Beach Soccer Championship: Iran beat Iraq

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran defeated Iraq 5-2 to defend their AFC Beach Soccer Championship title.

The 2017 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup semi-finalists took the first step to returning to the global Finals, prevailing in a spirited encounter against their neighbors to take three points.

Marco Octavio’s men can now enjoy the luxury of a four-day break, while Iraq have little choice but to take points from their second and final group stage match against Oman on Sunday, the-afc.com reported.



Ranked second in the world, the Iranians were strong favorites, but Iraq - who took just one point from three matches in 2017 - have steadily improved in recent times, and they gave an example of their progress when Sajjad Salah blasted a free kick past Hamid Behzadpour to give them second-minute lead.

For a time, Iraq’s advantage remained intact, but a series of fouls gave Iran numerous opportunities to hit back, one of which was eventually taken by Ali Mirshekari, whose eighth-minute effort flicked up off the sand to beat Mohammed Saad.

The action was fast, furious and physical, with Iran steadily growing in stature. Saad made key saves at regular intervals, but there was nothing the shot-stopper could do to stop Amir Hossein Akbari’s late strike, which made it 2-1 at the end of the opening period.

Behzadpour extended the Iran advantage in spectacular style in the 17th minute, when the goalkeeper picked out the top corner from the opposite end of the pitch, and their momentum was further underlined when Saeid Piramoun thrashed another long range effort into the upright moments later.

Moslem Mesigar blew a great chance to extend the lead when he fired a penalty into the upright in the first minute of the final period, and Salah immediately punished the miss, scoring in the very next minute to bring Iraq to within one.

But another foul conceded by Iraq gave Iran a chance they wouldn’t miss, with captain Mohammad Ahmadian opening his tournament account in the 28th minute, before 2017 top scorer Mohammad Ali Mokhtari made a telling impact when he deftly headed Peyman Hosseini’s powerful long throw into the back of the net five minutes later to round out the scoring.

Iran’s Zohreh Haratian wins AFC Young Medical Officer award

Zohreh Haratian from Iran won the AFC Young Medical Officer Award for making commendable contributions to the game through research and development.

The Award is given to medical officers aged 45 years and below who have been actively involved in football.

Dr. Haratian has been contributing her expertise as a medical practitioner to the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) in various capacities since 2005.

She started as the team doctor of the Iran women’s national football team in 2005, before becoming a member of the FFIRI’s panel of Doping Control Officers in 2008.

In 2015 she joined as a member of both the FFIRI’s Medical and Women’s Committees. She was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Iran FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence in 2014 and Iran AFC Medical Centre of Excellence in 2018.

Internationally, Dr. Haratian has been involved as a Medical and Doping Control Officer in various AFC and FIFA competitions since 2012. She has also been a member of the AFC Medical Committee since 2013.

Furthermore, Iranian doctors Parhan Khanlari and Amin Norouzi won AFC Distinguished Service Awards silver medals. Alireza Shahab also won a bronze medal.

(Source: the-afc)

Hassan Rahimi says goodbye to wrestling

TASNIM — Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Rahimi announced his retirement from the sport.

The 29-year-old wrestler became the Junior Asian Champion and Junior World silver medalist in 2008.

Rahimi won a gold medal at the Junior World Champion in 2009. He won a bronze at the World championships in 2011 and one year later claimed a gold at the Asian championship.

Rahimi also claimed a title at the 2013 World Wrestling Championships in Budapest, Hungary and took a silver two years later at the World Wrestling Championships in Las Vegas.

Rahimi made a great job in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games and seized a bronze medal in the event.

“I did my best to make my people happy in my career. It was (...) one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever made. I think it’s time to say goodbye,” he posted on his Instagram account.

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Turning away from knowledge is the excuse
of the negligent.

Imam Ali (AS)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

■ Paintings by Hadi Shabani are currently on display in an exhibition at CAMA – Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery.

The exhibit titled “White Season” runs until March 13 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Maral Soltani is underway at Shokuh Gallery.

The exhibition runs until March 13 at the gallery that can be found at 19 Amir Nuri Alley, North Salimi St. near Andarzgu Blvd.

■ Morad Fattahi, Marjan Salm-ani, Farzaneh Azarnia and Maryam Sadat Heidari are displaying their latest paintings in an exhibition at Idea Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until March 14 at the gallery located at 26, 18th St. off Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.

■ A group of artists, including Roya Ahmadi, Kazem Rezaian, Soheila Keysan, Bahman Niku and Mahbubeh Najafi, is showcasing their paintings in an exhibition at Rezaian Gallery.

The exhibit will run until March 17 at the gallery located at 14 Taban St., Africa Ave.

Multimedia

■ Shalman Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings, calligraphic paintings and sculptures by a large number of artists, including Bahareh Ahmadi, Sudeh Safarzadeh, Fatemeh Baqerpur, Parisa Pegah, Reza Barati and Roxana Rezaei.

The exhibition titled “Pause” will run until March 13 at the gallery located at 27 Kavusi Alley, West Rudbar St., off Mirdamad Blvd.

■ Puya Jamali is showcasing his sculptures and paintings in an exhibition at White Line Gallery.

The exhibition will run until March 18 at the gallery, which can be found at 22 Parvin Alley, off Jame Jam St. off Vali-e Asr Ave.

■ Sets of installation art and paintings by Hani Najm are on display in an exhibition at Iranshahr Café Gallery.

The exhibit named “Café Graphy” runs until April 4 at the gallery located at 2nd floor of Iranshahr Hall, Iranshahr St.

■ Artworks by a large group of artists in various media are on display in an exhibition at Artibition Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until March 17 at the gallery that can be found at Qandi Alley, Sasanipur St., Golsnabi St., off Shariati Ave.

Photo

■ Ag Gallery is showcasing photos by a number of artists including Abnus Alborzi, Maryam Zandi, Ali Zanjani, Kamran Shirdel, Hengameh Golestani, Peyman Hushmandzadeh and Abbas Kowsari.

The exhibit entitled “Small Picture, Big Mirror” will run until March 15 at the gallery located at 3 Pesyan St., off Moqaddas Ardebili St., in the Zafarani neighborhood.

Sculpture

■ An exhibition of sculptures by Mojtaba Ramzi, Mitra Arbab-Saljuqi, Nilufar Musavi, Mohsen Gholami and Sadaf Naderi is underway at Seyhun Gallery.

The exhibit titled “Zoo” will continue until March 13 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.

“This Magnificent Cake!” tastes good at Tehran animation festival

➡ The closing ceremony of the event was organized at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), where “Am I a Wolf?” by Iranian animator Amir-Hushang Moein selected as a runner-up.

The award for third best movie went to “Peripheria” by David Coquard-Dassault from France.

“Patchwork Pals” by German director Angela Steffen won the award for best children’s film, while “My Little Goat” by Tomoki Misato from Japan received the award for the best student animation.

The award for the best TV production went to “One Thousand Myths” co-directed by Asghar Saffar and Abbas Jalali Yekta from Iran, and “9 Ways to Draw a Person” by Sasha Svirsky from Russia won the award for the best experimental animation.

The acclaimed Iranian animation “The Last Fiction” by Ashkan Rahgozar won the award for best feature-length movie, while “Wicked Girl”, a co-production between France and Turkey by Turkish director Ayce Kartal, received the special jury prize.

“The Blissful Accidental Death” by Sergiu Negulici from Romania received the award for best artistic and technical achievement, and the CIFEJ Prize was presented to “Trunky” by Ekaterina Filippova from Russia.

In the national section, “Fox” by Sadeq Javadi was picked as best animation.

The film is about a young fox on the verge of experiencing the first love. Meanwhile, it gets trapped by a hunter. Thus begins the fox’s effort to survive and love, and seek revenge.



Iranian film scholar Akbar Alami (R) poses with IIDCYA director Fazel Nazari after being honored for his lifetime achievements during the 11th Tehran International Animation Festival on March 7, 2019. (Fars/Hamid Tavakkoli)

“Am I a Wolf?” was selected as second best film and “Maned and Macho” by Shiva Sadeq-Asadi won the award for best third

movie.

The special jury award was presented to “Eaten” by Mohsen Rezapur.

Veteran Iranian film scholar Akbar Alami also was honored for his lifetime achievements during the ceremony.

Sculptor Lilite Therian dies at 88



Lilite Therian attends an exhibition of her sculptures and artworks by her fellow artists at Maryam Gallery in Tehran on January 6, 2017. (Honaronline/Gata Ziatabari)

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian-d e s k Armenian sculptor Lilite Therian, who is considered as the mother of modern Iranian sculpture, died on Thursday at the age of 88.

“I don’t know the exact cause of her death, but I know she fell down the stairs at her home about two weeks ago and hurt her pelvis,” director of the Association of Iranian Sculptors, Abbas Majidi, told the Persian service of ISNA.

The association plans to organize a memorial service for Therian this week, he added.

She studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Tehran and then left the country to continue her education in France.

In 1961, Therian returned home and began a career in teaching at the Faculty of Decorative Arts. She introduced modern sculpture to the academic centers in Iran and then established the Sculpture Department at the faculty.

She spent about 30 years teaching

sculpture in various academic centers in Iran and many renowned Iranian sculptors learned the art at the centers.

A statue of the early medieval Armenian linguist, composer and theologian, Mesrop Mashtots, located at the Tarkmanchatz Church in Tehran, is one of her outstanding works.

She also created a bust of Yeprem Khan, an Iranian-Armenian revolutionary leader and a leading figure in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, which is located at the Saint Mary Church in Tehran.

In February 2007, the Imam Ali Religious Arts Museum in Tehran honored Therian for her lifetime achievements.

“I draw inspiration from events and scenes that outwardly seem unimportant,” Therian once said in an interview.

“For example, I made my ‘Mother and Child’ based an idea that arose when I saw one of my relatives with her newborn baby. The mother held her baby in her arms and the scene inspired me to make the sculpture.”

Iranian-Azerbaijani film “Castle of Love” premieres

A R T TEHRAN — “Castle of Love” (“Qiz Qalasi”), a co-production between Iran and Azerbaijan, had its premiere at the Nizami Cinema Center, a multiscreen cinema in Baku, Azerbaijan on Thursday.

Azerbaijani director Ilham Qasimov and Iranian producer Amir-Shahab Razavian also attended the special screening of the film, Iran’s Farabi Cinema Foundation announced on Friday.

In his short speech before the screening, Qasimov said that the co-production is

a big step forward in the expansion of relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, and expressed his hope that the film can open a new chapter on cultural collaboration between the two countries and prepare the ground for more joint film projects.

Qasimov has written the screenplay based on an Azerbaijani mythical romance about Princess Aytakin who is in love with an ordinary boy from Tabriz, while she has lots of noble suitors.

The “Castle of Love” project was launched in Baku during June 2018

under the tentative title “High Voltage”.

Scenes of the movie were also filmed on locations in the Iranian town of Meshkinshahr in Ardebil Province.

Iranian actor Reza Naji, who won the Berlinale Silver Bear for Best Actor for his role in Majid Majidi’s “The Song of Sparrows”, and Ziya Agha, Chinara Malikzada and Kamala Piriyea from Azerbaijan are the main members of the cast.

Theaters in Azerbaijani cities of Ganja and Lankaran are also screening the movie.



A poster for “Castle of Love”.

Fajr unveils Iranian lineup for Classics Preserved



A combination photo shows posters for the Iranian films selected for Restored Classics at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival. (FIFF)

A R T TEHRAN — Restored d e s k versions of five Iranian films from the 1980s will go on screen in the Preserved Classics section during the 37th Fajr International Film Festival, the organizers announced on Thursday.

“The Runner” by Amir Naderi (1984), “Talisman” by Dariush Farhang (1986) and “Cold Roads” by Masud Jafari-Jozani (1986) are among the films.

The lineup also includes “The Scout” by Ebrahim Hatamikia (1988) and “The

Last Act” (1989) by Varuj Karim-Masihi.

The films have been restored in collaboration with the National Film Archive of Iran and the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

A lineup of classic hits from world cinema will also be screened in Restored Classics. The lineup will be announced in the near future.

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran from April 18 to 26.

“One Hundred Years of Solitude” coming to Netflix

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The groundbreaking novel “One Hundred Years of Solitude” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is coming to the screen for the first time in a Spanish language series for Netflix, the streaming service said on Wednesday.

The multi-generational family tale, published in 1967, is widely considered one of the most influential novels of the 20th century and an early example of the magical realism style embraced by other Latin American authors.

Garcia Marquez’s two sons will serve as executive producers on the television series, which will be filmed mainly in the author’s native Colombia.

They said in a statement that the Nobel Prize winning novelist, who died in 2014, had been reluctant to sell the rights to the books for years “because he believed that it could not be made under the time constraints of a feature film, or that producing it in a language other than Spanish would not do it justice.”

However, given what has been called a new golden age of television “and the acceptance by worldwide audiences of programs in foreign languages, the time could not be better to bring an adaptation



Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez stands outside his house on his 87th birthday in Mexico City March 6, 2014. (Reuters/Edgard Garrido)

to the extraordinary global viewership that Netflix provides.”

The announcement follows Netflix’s acclaimed black and white Mexican movie “Roma,” filmed in Spanish and indigenous Mixtec, which won three Oscars last month.

Netflix in February announced it was expanding its presence in Mexico, opening an office in Mexico City and furthering its development of movie and television projects in Spanish.