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EGFI to issue bank guarantees for IRENEX oil buyers

TEHRAN — Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) is going to issue bank guarantees for the customers who purchase the oil offered at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), Mehr news agency reported on Sunday, quoting EGFI managing director. "We are in talks with the oil ministry in this regard," Afrouz Bahrami said. Bahrami noted that EGFI has received some requests for issuing banking guar-

antees from oil customers interested in purchasing the oil offered at IRENEX.

According to the official, EGFI covers the commercial and political risks of exports, including both non-oil and oil exports and since the oil which is offered at the IRENEX is also considered as part of the country's oil exports, therefore it is possible for EGFI to issue banking guarantees for such cargoes. [→4](#)

Seven Iranian crafts get Geographical Indication tags

TEHRAN — A select of seven Iranian handicraft fields have gained tags of Geographical Indication (GI), an international recognition granted by the World Intellectual Property Organization. A presentation ceremony was held in Tehran on Sunday with a WIPO representative in attendance, CHTN reported. Amongst the honorees are: Isfahan for inlay, Tehran for glasswork,

Hersin for kilim carpets, Abadeh for woodcarving and Meybod for Zilou floor covering.

In November 2018, Abadeh in southern Fars province and Meybod in central Yazd province were respectively named world crafts cities for "Woodcarving" and "Zilou" (traditional hand-woven floor-covering) by the World Crafts Council - Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR). [→10](#)

Iraq summons U.S., Bahrain envoys over 'meddlesome' remarks

TEHRAN — Iraq has summoned the envoys of Bahrain and the United States to protest their insulting and meddlesome comments about the Arab state's domestic affairs and relations with neighboring Iran. Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmad al-Sahaf told Iraq's al-Sumaria News TV channel on that Foreign Minister Mo-hamed Ali al-Hakim had issued the order

to summon the American chargé d'affaires as well as the Bahraini ambassador to Baghdad, Press TV reported.

Baghdad is angry over a tweet recently posted by Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah, in which he insulted Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose Sairoon (Alliance Towards Reform) bloc holds the highest number of seats in the parliament. [→13](#)



ARTICLE

Ebrahim Fallahi
Tehran Times journalist

Iran's winning cards in facing U.S. sanctions

Surrounded by fifteen neighboring countries through land and sea, Iran enjoys a very strategic geopolitical and economic position in the Middle East and considering the U.S. recent actions for increasing pressure on the country's oil industry, many economy experts and scholars believe that Iran should retaliate by focusing more on improving domestic production and increasing non-oil trade especially with its neighboring countries.

Earlier this month, the U.S. president Donald Trump announced that Washington is not going to extend the sanction waivers which allowed the Iran's trade partners to buy oil from the country.

The U.S. expects the limitations on Iran's oil trade to have a huge impact on the country's economy and in fact they could be right if Iran doesn't come up with ways to counter the situation or mitigated the impact.

One important way through which Iran can significantly reduce the negative impact of sanctions on its economy is to decrease the reliance on oil and improving other sources of income including non-oil trade.

In this regard, developing non-oil trade with the neighboring countries, not only saves the country lots of costs and shipping difficulty but also will result in stronger political and strategic ties with them and consequently benefit all the involving nations.

According to the Iranian industry, mining and trade ministry, currently only two percent of the total imports of Iran's neighbors comes from the Islamic Republic and considering the 15 nations' near 600 million market, one can see how unsatisfactory the level of trade is and how great of a potential is still untapped.

■ The neighbors

As mentioned before, Iran shares border with fifteen countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Based on the latest data published by Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the value of trade with the neighboring countries stood at over \$36.5 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019), that is about 41 percent of the country's total non-oil trade in the mentioned time span. [→4](#)

'Iran pioneer in stem cell knowledge, technology'

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Iran is one of the most pioneering countries in the world and the second country in the region based on stem cell knowledge and technology, Hossein Baharvand, director of Royan Institute for stem cell biology and technology, has said.

Baharvand is a distinguished professor of stem cells and developmental biology at Royan Institute.

He received his B.Sc. in biology from Shiraz University in 1994, and M.Sc. in developmental biology from Shahid Beheshti University in 1996.

He also received his Ph.D. in cell and developmental biology from Khwarizmi University in 2004. In 2012, he became professor at Royan Institute.

For the first time, he generated the mouse and human embryonic stem cells (2003) and induced pluripotent stem cells (2008) in Iran. This has enabled his team to pursue many avenues of research into translational research and regenerative medicine.

He is the founder and director of Royan Institute for stem cell biology and technology, where the institute is committed to cross-dis-

ciplinary partnerships and collaborations by biology, engineering, and medical academics to improve human health and life quality. Now, the institute includes 4 main departments named as Stem Cells and Developmental Biology, Regenerative Medicine, Cell Engineering and the newly established Brain and Cognitive Sciences.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times, Baharvand explained about his research works and the potential of cell therapy and regenerative medicine technologies in "curing the diseases." [→11](#)

World financial bodies are tools for imposing U.S. policies

TEHRAN (MNA) — America's monetary ammunition refers to the coordinated collection of U.S. secondary banking sanction laws, the FATF recommendations and Swift Services for imposing sanctions, which Iran has been one of its most important targets in recent years.

The U.S. monetary ammunition refers to the coordinated collection of U.S. secondary banking sanction laws, the FATF recommendations and

Swift Services for imposing sanctions relying on power of the dollar and its domination over global transactions seeking materialization of American domination over the world. Iran has been one of the main targets of this ammunition in recent years.

A look at the mentality and practical framework behind the designing of the sanctions against Iran shows that there has been a turning point

in how U.S. imposed sanctions around 2010.

■ Triangle of the U.S. monetary ammunition

U.S. secondary sanctions, the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Swift Services, are three sides of the monetary triangle that contain the global financial system or the global banking system that can be called "monetary ammunition triangle." [→6](#)

Trump: 'Saudi Arabia buys a lot, I don't want to lose them'

TEHRAN — U.S. President Donald Trump has reiterated his support for Saudi Arabia at a "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) rally where he also described a negotiation tactic he used to get more money from the kingdom for the United States' military support.

During a rally with his supporters in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Trump indicated that he would remain a steadfast supporter of the Saudi government, largely due to Riyadh's purchases from

U.S. companies < AL Jazeera reported.

"They have nothing but cash, right?" he told the crowd. "They buy a lot from us, \$450 billion they bought."

"You had people wanting to cut off Saudi Arabia ... I don't want to lose them," he said.

It's unclear where Trump drew the \$450bn figure from. PolitiFact, a fact-checking website, has previously rated the claim as "Pants on Fire".



© Tehran Times/ Mohammadreza Abbasi

Largest ever meteorite exhibit opens in Tehran

On Sunday, Iran's largest ever exhibition of meteorites opened its doors to the public at the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran.

The exhibition displays over 700 pieces of outer space rocks which have hit the sprawling Lut Desert and other parts of the country over time.

The scorching Lut Desert is currently considered as one of the top areas in the world for finding meteorites, thanks to its unique parameters.



REPORT

Fatemeh Salehi
Mehr News Agency
journalist

How Al Saud and Al Khalifa manipulate Formula One and Hajj pilgrimage?

The Al Saud and Al Khalifa regimes are trying to abuse the Hajj Pilgrimage and the Formula One motor race to their own benefit.

Amnesty International has recently announced that the Bahrain regime is using Formula One motor race to present a good picture of itself; However, Bahrain has an extremely oppressive regime and any citizen could be arrested after posting a tweet in criticism of the government. It's better for Bahrain to improve the freedom of speech in the country instead of putting on a show and using sports to conceal the violation of human rights in the country.

Earlier, activists in UK had condemned Bahraini regime of exploiting the new round of Formula One competitions to cover up the violation of human rights in the country. They gathered outside the Formula One headquarters in London to express their protest against the organization for being accomplice to Bahrain regime.

The activists announced that during these competitions, the world will not see the real image of Bahrain where people are suppressed, arrested and stripped off their rights for running peaceful protests.

Bahrain people can be arrested for only posting a comment on social media; for example, the activist, Najah Ahmed Yusuf, who protested against the Bahrain Formula One competitions, Grand Prix 2017, on Facebook was jailed for three years by the country's authorities.

Before that, UN Watch, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (Bird) and other similar humanitarian organizations had sent letters for Formula One chiefs, saying the competitions are running despite the gross human rights violation in Bahrain.

Protests against running Formula One competitions in Bahrain has reached a point that a new nickname has been invented for the competitions: the Formula of Blood. The Censorship in Bahrain, however, is very strict and the country's local news are not reflected in the international media, so with watching these competitions many people around the world would assume that there is no sign of protest, turmoil and oppression in this country and people are in perfect peace and security. [→6](#)

Leader urges police to fight smuggling, control cyberspace

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of Islamic Revolution d e s k Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Sunday that police forces should fight smuggling of goods and counter those who undermine security in the cyberspace.

It is essential to fight smuggling which is an impediment to boost production in the country, the Leader said during a meeting with a group of police commanders.



He noted the reason behind smuggling is not just gaining profits, saying sometimes “evil intentions” are at work. Ayatollah Khamenei also said that the police are duty bound to protect the people’s security in cyberspace.

“Cyberspace has expanded a lot ... and represents both opportunities and dangers,” the Leader noted.

Police should also counter sale of weapons as the act is banned in Iran, the Leader remarked.

He said easy access to guns in the United States served only a “mafia of gun manufacturers”.

“In some countries, such as the United States, weapons are freely sold in the interest of the mafia of gun manufacturers and this causes problems for the people,” the Leader pointed out.

Elsewhere, Ayatollah Khamenei said that police forces have made great advances, but more efforts should be done.

He also praised efforts made by police during the recent floods that hit various cities and villages across the country.

Heavy rainfall, beginning on March 19, led to flooding in 28 out of 31 provinces. It has affected 42,269,129 inhabitants in 253 cities. It has caused widespread damage to residential buildings, farms, roads, municipal facilities, including health centers and hospitals.

Zarif to visit North Korea

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad d e s k Javad Zarif has said that he plans to visit North Korea without giving a date.

In an interview with IRNA published on early Sunday, Zarif said that he will announce the date of his visit soon.

He also said that he will visit Russia in 10 days.

Commenting on his interview with Fox News aired on Sunday, Zarif said the interview was in line with establishing connection with a layer of the U.S. society which supports Donald Trump’s administration.

“It should have been noted that the U.S. interests are being ignored for interests of Israel and a war mongering group. This reality is not something new, but the atmosphere have been poisoned by propaganda to the extent that many people who believe this reality do not dare to say it. So, it was necessary to say such reality [in Fox News] to make an influence on atmosphere created by suppressing news,” the chief diplomat noted.

In an interview with Fox News, Zarif accused U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton as well as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE of “dragging the U.S. into a conflict” with Iran.

■ **‘U.S. should speak with Iranians in another way’**
On his suggestion on prisoner swap between Iran and the U.S., Zarif said the U.S. just makes claims, suggesting that Washington should speak with Iranians in another way.

Asked about British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt’s comments on prisoner swap, Zarif said the proposal does not include Britain.

Zarif said during an interview in New York on Wednesday that Iran is ready to exchange prisoners with the U.S.

“I put this offer on the table publicly now. [Let’s] Exchange them”, Zarif said. “If they tell you anything else, they are lying,” he added.

Hunt had assumed Zarif’s suggestion of a prisoner swap also includes Iranian-British dual citizen, Nazanin Zaghari, who is jailed in Tehran for espionage.

In his interview on Wednesday, Zarif just said she feels sorry for Nazanin Zaghari and her child and that he has done his “best to help” her.

■ **‘Iran experienced in countering sanctions’**
Zarif also said that Iran is experienced in countering sanctions. However, he said, that this path has difficulties.

He urged the Europeans to take practical actions in line with saving the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, now that Donald Trump has withdrawn the U.S. from the agreement and ordered sanctions on Iran.

Sputnik: Iranian news agency shows IRGC drone footage of U.S. carrier in Persian Gulf

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Tasnim news agency has published a video shot by a drone belonging to the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) flying over a U.S. aircraft carrier and an accompanying ship in the Persian Gulf, Sputnik reported on Saturday.

The video shows the carrier’s deck in detail, including the types and number of aircraft on it.

The media outlet didn’t specify when the footage was shot, but said that it was released by the IRGC.

The carrier in the video appears to be the Nimitz-class nuclear-powered USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69). Its last reported deployment in the Persian Gulf was in December 2016.

The drone that took the footage is an Ababil-3 with an eight-hour flight capability at 3,658 meters and a 250-kilometre range.

The development comes after the U.S. ended sanctions waivers on Iran’s oil exports and designated the IRGC as a “foreign terrorist organization”.

Tehran immediately retaliated by declaring the United States a “state sponsor of terrorism” and U.S. forces in the region “terrorist groups”.

Also, Iran’s military chief threatened on Sunday that if his country would not be able to export oil from the Strait of Hormuz then no other country can.

Larijani: Some regional states ‘cannot be reasoned with’

Iranians will make Trump ‘regretful’, parliament speaker says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani delivered a warning on Sunday to certain regional countries backing the United States’ antagonism towards Iran.

Upon Washington’s announcement on April 22 that it would be trying to reduce Iran’s oil exports to “zero,” Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have said they would make up for potential shortages of Iranian crude.

“Some of the region’s countries should pay close heed. Apparently, some of them cannot be reasoned with. We are going to settle our account with them,” the top lawmaker asserted.

The official, however, emphasized that the Islamic Republic has not closed the door on negotiations with these states.

■ **‘U.S., vassal states after fanning terrorism across region’**

Larijani also said the United States is after fueling terrorism in the region through further intervention and cooperation with some “vassal states.”

The instances of American meddling have become “numerous and unbridled.” Ali Larijani warned during a speech at an international conference called “The Future of the Islamic World in the Horizon of 2035,” in Tehran on Sunday, Press TV reported.

Larijani further said the actions the U.S. takes together with some regional countries in order to breed terrorism have led to “internal complexities” in some countries and heavily damaged their economies.



Iran, however, “has never had a policy of aggression against any country on its agenda,” Larijani said.

Tehran, he added, had not even pursued a policy of reprisal against those committing such aggression against it and sought increased cooperation among those “who have realized their mistakes.”

He cited the example of Saudi Arabia, which helped out former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hus-

sein in his 1980-88 deadly war on Iran. Such support, Larijani added, was to the detriment of the kingdom itself, as a Saudi official once admitted, and saw Iraq under Saddam later launch attacks against Kuwait and parts of Saudi Arabia.

“Iran has never been after taking revenge and has constantly sought cooperation with those who have realized their mistake,” he added.

Larijani to Trump: “You are cutting your own throat with your own hands.”

Hormuz Strait for all or no one

General Baqeri says if Iran can’t export oil through Hormuz Strait then no other country can

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s mili- d e s k tary chief said on Sunday that Iran is not seeking to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz but if any country seeks to make the strait insecure Iran will confront it strongly.

“As oil and commodities of other countries are passing through the Strait of Hormuz, ours are also moving through it,” said Major General Mohammad Baqeri, Iran’s armed forces chief of staff.

He added, “We will definitely confront

anyone who attempts to destabilize the Strait of Hormuz, and if our crude is not to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, others’ [crude] will not pass either.”

A few days ago, the White House once again took aim at Iran’s oil sector, ending six months of waivers which allowed Tehran’s eight largest customers to continue importing limited volumes.

It threatened the buyers of Iranian oil with sanctions if they fail to stop their purchases by May 1, in a move that quickly sent global

crude prices to their highest levels since last November.

Iran has said it may close the Strait of Hormuz if prevented from using the waterway, which links crude producers in the Middle East to markets in Europe, Asia Pacific, North America and beyond.

In a recent interview with Reuters, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Iran was “not going to take any action” should the U.S. continue observing the rules of engagement.



Tehran’s envoy to France: EU has so far failed to uphold JCPOA commitments

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Bahram Qassemi, Iran’s new d e s k ambassador to France, has said that the European Union has so far failed to uphold its side of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“The JCPOA was the result of a successful, functional, and effective diplomacy in a highly complicated matter, whose importance to the UN, the EU, and the Security Council is clear as a historic achievement,” Qassemi told a number of political science students in Paris on Saturday.

He expressed regret that with the rise of Donald Trump to power in the U.S., the JCPOA was violated and the U.S. president even threatened other countries to comply.

The ambassador underlined that Tehran expected the European Union to act more swiftly in implementing a special payment system to help keep trade with Iran alive.

“The European parties have so far failed to do what they were expected to under the JCPOA. Their measures will be a very serious and decisive criterion for Iran’s policies,” Qassemi cautioned.

Recently, France reported progress in efforts towards the implementation of a direct payment mechanism, which the European country has launched alongside Britain and Germany to safeguard trade with Iran in the face of U.S. sanctions.

“The work that has been put in place is making posi-



tive progress, with a view to an eventual conclusion” of the non-dollar payment system, officially named the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), the French Foreign Ministry announced on April 23.

INSTEX, which was launched in January, has been designed by Paris, Germany and the UK – the three European signatories to the 2015 Iran deal -- to help European companies circumvent the U.S. bans and continue trading with Iran.

In its initial stage, the transactions channel was intended to be used for selling food, medicine and medical devices to Iran, but efforts are underway by the trio to expand INSTEX to cover other areas of trade, including oil sales.

The United States reinstated its sanctions against Iran after leaving the historic multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran last May. The move, however, drew criticism from the other signatories, which pledged efforts to protect the agreement and keep Tehran in it.

Paris further reiterated its support for the Iran deal. The French statement was issued in response to Washington’s latest moves to put more economic pressure on Iran.

The U.S. reintroduced the anti-Iran sanctions in two bouts. The second one came last November, taking aim at Iran’s banking and energy sector.

Washington, however, granted waivers from the bans to eight major importers of the Iranian oil -- China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy, and Greece -- fearing market instability.

Washington, however, said Monday that it would no longer be extending the waivers and called on the recipients of the crude to stop importing any as of May 2 or face U.S. sanctions.

The ministry, meanwhile, vaguely added that in order for INSTEX to come into force, “Iran must also, for its part, make progress on its equivalent counterparty.”

Tehran has warned the Europeans not to tie any irrelevant issue to their legal financial cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

Iran made no offer, responded to U.S. call for prisoner swap: Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Minister d e s k Mohammad Javad Zarif ruled out that he made an offer to engage in talks with the Trump administration in September, stressing that Tehran, in fact, responded to the U.S. offer.

“We responded- we responded to the offer that they had actually made to engage and we are waiting for a reply,” Zarif on Sunday said after CBS host Margaret Brennan asked him if he had made an offer to the Trump administration in September for negotiations on a prisoner swap.

Zarif reiterated that Iran was still ready to engage in negotiations with the U.S. on the exchange of prisoners as long as the other side respected Iran’s conditions.

“Well there are a number of Iranians who are in U.S. jails for sanctions violations. There are a number of Iranians who are in jail all over the world,” he said.

The CBS host asked Zarif whether he would, “as a show of...seriousness” release some of at least five Americans who are incarcerated in Iran.

He responded, “We’re not supposed to

show seriousness because we have shown our seriousness by implementing the nuclear deal. It’s the United States that needs to prove that it’s serious.”

The Iranian top diplomat further said that he as foreign minister could not interfere in the Iranian courts handling the cases related to Americans held in the country unless there was an exchange of prisoners between the two countries.

“I am responsible for foreign policy. I’m not responsible for interfering in court’s decisions. I can intervene when there is an exchange, an offer of exchange. I cannot intervene as foreign minister. I can intervene as a private individual on humanitarian basis, and I do, I do. But as foreign minister, I do not have a standing in any Iranian court unless I can

engage in an exchange with Iranians who are wrongfully, in our view, detained either inside the United States or elsewhere. We have people, we have- we have ladies who were pregnant when they were detained who gave birth in prison, who were not even given a- released on bail to deliver outside prison. We have people with heart conditions. We have people with terminal cancer in there,” he said.

Elsewhere in the interview, Zarif condemned Washington’s decision to blacklist IRGC and end sanctions waivers for nations importing Iranian oil, saying, “Well it will show to the Iranian people that the United States is not worthy of being a negotiating partner. That’s what it will prove. It depends on whether Europe, as well as other members

“We will survive (sanctions). We have survived tougher days. It’s not something that we would invite. It’s not something that we would welcome. We will take our measures in response, but we will survive”.



of the JCPOA, want to leave their destiny in the hands of an administration that does not respect its words. We will survive. We have survived tougher days. It’s not something that we would invite. It’s not something that we would welcome. We will take our measures in response, but we will survive.”

The Iranian minister also referred to Iran’s stabilizing role in the region and said, “We are operating in our own region. That’s why it’s called the Persian Gulf. Not- not the Gulf of Mexico. We are operating in our own region. We are a force for stability in our region. History shows that. The United States is operating far from its shores, in our region. It has to make the correct recognition. Who’s doing the work for stability?”

Labor Party waiting for reformists to enter parliamentary race: spokesman

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Labor Party will decide on how to enter the 2020 parliamentary elections after the Coordination Council of the Reformist Front makes a decision, the party's spokesman Mohammad Neyshabouri has said. "Right now, the Coordination Council of the Reformist Front has not reached a decision ... We should wait and see what decision they make with regard to the current [Iranian] year's elections," Neyshabouri said, ISNA reported.

"The eleventh parliamentary elections are to be held simultaneously with the [midterm] elections of the Assembly of Experts, and naturally, all political associations will direct all of their facilities toward the elections," he stated. Neyshabouri also pointed to the parliament's passing of a bill that would change parliamentary elections from local to provincial levels, saying if the Guardian Council approves the bill, it will

change the way the reformists enter into the elections.

Determining the fate of this bill will have a huge impact on the way the political parties and factions enter the election race, he stressed.

The Guardian Council said on Saturday that it is neither against nor in favor of parliamentary election at provincial level. However, the council's spokesman said it should not impact voter turnout.

Parliamentary elections will be held on Feb. 21, 2020 with the approval of the Guardian Council, Interior Ministry spokesman Salman Samani announced two months ago.

On U.S. President Donald Trump's intensified pressure against Iran and the recent widespread floods hitting large parts of the country, Neyshabouri said such issues have created different problems for the people, predicting that the issues can impact the elections.



Islamic Coalition Party holds extraordinary meeting

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Coalition Party held an extraordinary meeting on Thursday to elect a replacement for the late Mohammad Nabi Habibi and reform the party's manifesto.

During the meeting, members of the party elected Habibollah Tavasoli to replace Habibi in the jury panel of the party, IRNA reported.

Mohammad Shahangian and Mohammad Mehmandoust were elected as the party's first and second inspectors respectively.

Addressing the meeting, Secretary General Asadollah Badamchian highlighted the importance of unity and empathy among the members of the party.

He said through unity and empathy, the party can offer great services to the Islamic Republic and the nation.



Asadollah Badamchian

Badamchian was elected secretary general of the party after Nabi Habibi passed away in late January.

Badamchian hailed Habibi as a decent human being who was not after power but sought to serve Islam and the Vilayat-e Faqih.

He said the party should be at the service of the Islamic establishment, Vilayat-e Faqih and people.

Badamchian also quoted Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as saying that the second 40 years of the Islamic Revolution would bring about the end of the enemy's hostility and that the Zionists will definitely be destroyed.

The Islamic Coalition Party is a conservative group which is the pivotal organization within Front of Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader.

U.S. oil sanctions on Iran 'extremely unfair': Pakistani analyst

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A senior Pakistani analyst has described the U.S. decision to end sanctions waivers for Iran oil exports as "extremely unfair", saying Washington cannot impose its will on the entire world.

In an interview with IRNA published on Sunday, retired Lieutenant General Talat Masood said the United States' unilateral actions would create serious problems for the rest of the world.

"I think this is extremely unfair because the U.S. is not a country which can impose its will on the entire world," he said.

"If there was any action that had to be taken, it has to have the approval of the United Nations and of all world powers," he emphasized.

The analyst added that the U.S. is trying to create divisions and impose its will and hegemony over the world by reimposing the



sanctions. "This is unfair and I would expect that the

Chinese, Russians and other major countries, even European countries, will try not to go

by what Americans have to say," he stated.

The expert further said the U.S. administration is pursuing a very aggressive policy towards Iran in order to please the Zionist regime.

"They think that Iran is standing up to the Zionist regime and promote the interests of the Muslim world, so I think they want to pressure Iran because of that," Masood commented.

Following its withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and reimposition of unilateral sanctions against Iran, the U.S. had agreed to allow several countries to continue buying Iranian oil.

However, in a recent statement, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States would not be extending any waivers exempting importers of Iranian oil from U.S. sanctions and there would be no grace period for those economies to comply.

Ex-minister warns Saudi, UAE against teaming up with U.S.



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A former intelligence minister has warned Saudi Arabia and the UAE against becoming the United States' accomplice in its economic war against the Islamic Republic.

"The Emirates and Saudi Arabia have not still compensated for the damage they inflicted upon Muslims in the Iran-Iraq war and their interference in Syria and Yemen," said Ali Fallahian, Fars reported on Thursday.

"If they become accomplice in America's crime, the amount of their debts [to Muslims] will continue to grow," he added.

Fallahian said Saudi Arabia is responsible for part of the damage caused by the Iran-Iraq war because Iraqi dictator Sadd-

am Hussein bought arms and ammunition with their money and caused great damage to Iran. "If you are seeking security, try to compensate this damage instead of cooperating with the criminal America and endangering future of the region's security," he argued.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been welcoming the exit of Donald Trump's administration from the 2015 nuclear agreement and reimposition of sanctions on Iran.

Trump has also demanded Saudi Arabia and the UAE to compensate for the loss of Iran's oil exports as his administration announced on April 22 that all the remaining countries that are buying Iran's oil should stop their imports by May 2.

Official: 58 religious minority associations have permits



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hamid Molanouri, director general of the political department at the Interior Ministry, has said 58 religious minority associations have official permission for activity in Iran. Molanouri said the associations include 29 Zoroastrian groups, 16 Armenians, 10 Assyrians and 3 Jews, ISNA reported. He said the associations conduct religious and social activities. "These communities have been founded with the aim of resolving religious, sociocultural and welfare problems of the religious minorities," he explained. "Each of them is somehow responsible for the social affairs of the religious minorities as well as holding their religious and cultural events," he added.

Molanouri further said the followers

of Iran's religious minorities have one association per 2,600 people.

He added that due to the Interior Ministry's special attention to the rights of religious minorities and its policy of promoting dialogue with them, last year representatives from the political department at the Interior Ministry held 11 meetings with followers of religious minorities at different levels.

The Islamic Republic of Iran recognizes the rights of religious minorities based on its constitution. All Iranian citizens are equal in benefiting from their basic rights within legal frameworks. Iranian authorities also argue that the Iranian constitution does not tolerate discrimination against divine religions and guarantees equality for the followers of all divine faiths.

Foreign Policy: Trump's 'hollow triumph' on Iran will come at exceedingly high cost

In a commentary on its website on April 26, the Foreign Policy said Donald Trump's new Iran sanctions will hurt the United States in the long term.

The commentary, written by Elizabeth Rosenberg, said the maximum pressure on Tehran will not work.

Following is part of the article:

On April 22, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo moved to end sanctions waivers on Iranian oil—a major step to increase financial pressure on Tehran. The new policy, once it goes into force on May 2, aims to force China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey to stop buying crude from Iran, depriving the country of its primary source of cash.

In the near term, the pressure tactic will mostly work, successfully siphoning off a significant share of Iran's oil exports. The big buyers in the handful of countries still doing oil business with Iran will plead for leniency, or kick and scream, and then grudgingly wind down. They are unlikely to get to zero, for lack of affordable and available alternatives, possible permission from the United States to slow-walk their retreat, and good old-fashioned recalcitrance. But they will likely steer away from committing reputational and financial suicide by flagrantly breaching U.S. sanctions.

President Donald Trump will surely shout victory. He is right that the United States can, for now, weaponize the global financial system. Washington can use sanctions to bring businesses around the world to their knees, making them the unwilling executors of U.S. national security policy.

Tehran is seething and threatening retaliation. It is probably closer to leaving the 2015 nuclear deal than it has ever been. European countries and other supporters of the agreement are irate. Their limited willingness to cooperate with the United States on security issues is shrinking.

These are all desired outcomes for the Trump administration, regardless of the collateral damage to the working poor around the globe, who will bear the brunt of spiking energy prices.

Ultimately, by tightening the economic vice, the Trump administration aims to isolate Iran and create enough pressure to instigate regime change. The White House wants to change Iran's policy. However, there is little to indicate that the Trump administration's brand of maximum economic pressure will deliver this result.

What the White House strategy is set to deliver is a meaningful, if temporary, dip in Iran's oil exports. This hollow triumph will come at an exceedingly high cost.

To begin with, Iranian oil exports should only take a serious slide when most of the big players exit Iranian oil deals next month. But exports will inevitably creep back up and continue to flow. Smaller-scale traders will ferry cargoes to smaller-scale refineries. Smaller-scale banks or trading companies, with extremely limited exposure to the United States and U.S. sanctions enforcement, will process the oil transactions. Regulators in countries angered by the U.S. policy may look the other way as this barter and smuggling activity occurs. Chinese, Indian, and Turkish entities are the most likely candidates for this new kind of commerce.

The United States cannot possibly hit every Iran sanctions violator, no matter how much it wants the pressure policy to work. Washington cannot rely on the same international intelligence sharing and enforcement assistance as it made use of during the 2012-2015 period of intensive Iran sanctions. As some Iranian oil continues to make its way to market, observers may conclude that U.S. sanctions are not so tough after all, which could supercharge the incentive to push the envelope or breach them. This will make Trump's Iran policy less effective.

Many expect that Iran will suffer through the intensive sanctions regime instead of capitulating.

400 professors call on Salami to reshape IRGC

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — 400 university professors have called on Major General Hossein Salami, the newly appointed chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), to reshape the IRGC to fit the agenda of the Islamic Republic in its second 40 years of existence.

In an open letter, the professors said the IRGC is very popular among regional nations as well as inside Iran because of its fight against terrorism and its services to the Iranians, Fars reported on Sunday.

This is in spite of the U.S. psychological war against the IRGC, they stated. The IRGC has turned into a unifying force among different political factions and tribes within Iran, they added.

The statement also condemned Washington's bullying of other nations, saying Salami's appointment as the commander of the IRGC coincided with the fall of the hegemony of "the criminal America" over the world.

"You are one of the professors of the Supreme National Defense University and one of the theorists of the need to enhance the strategic depth of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran," they said.

"The enemies of Iran and Islam know you with such characteristics as chasing and punishing the aggressor into the enemy's soil," they added.

Palestinian politician slams U.S. Iran policy as 'utmost brutality'

Secretary General of the Palestinian People's Party on Saturday decried the U.S. anti-Iran policy as "utmost brutality" and "imperialist bullying" with reliance upon military power.

"Imposing sanctions to drive the Iranian people to famine and create obstacles for export of its oil are against international law," Bassam al-Salehi said.

He condemned the U.S. for refusing to renew sanctions waivers to customers of Iran's oil.

The unilateral withdrawal from a deal with international powers, i.e. the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is an unprecedented impudent attempt to change international regulations, he added.

(Source: IRNA)

Student Basij Organization forms jihadi groups to resolve issues

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Student Basij Organization has formed jihadi groups in order to resolve problems and challenges faced by Iran, says Mohammad-Javad Nik-Ravesh, head of the organization.

Addressing university students in Ilam city, Nik-Ravesh said the organization regards people's contentment as one of the pillars of protecting the Islamic Revolution, Fars reported on Sunday.

He cited the ideals of the founder of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, one of which was the foundation of the Student Basij Organization, saying basiji forces should strive for the existence of the great Islamic establishment. "In order to achieve the goals of the Islamic Revolution, we would face troubles and confusion; if we do not have a comprehensive map, then we do not know the path and do not understand the issues," Nik-Ravesh remarked.

He also said the principle of fighting the enemy is a guarantee for stability in the path of progress, emphasizing that "stability" and "resistance" are needed to counter the enemy.

The organization can and should play a role in specialized fields, he stressed.

Nik-Ravesh added that being a revolutionary requires expertise, commitment, experience and familiarity with the issues of the country, people and the Islamic revolution.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	209243.9
IFX	2568.39

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,880 rials
GBP	54,250 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$71.63/b
WTI	\$63.30/b
OPEC Basket	\$69.10/b
Gold	\$1,287.30/oz
Silver	\$15.13/oz
Platinum	\$902.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

EGFI to issue bank guarantees for IRENEX oil buyers

➔ Mentioning the U.S.'s recent decision on ending waivers on oil sanctions, Bahrani noted "the main problem for us will be staying connected with the world and using our relations with guarantee funds across the globe we will hopefully be able to tackle this issue."

New areas for trade co-op discussed between Iran, Iraq

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In a meeting between Iran's commercial attaché in Iraq and the new head of Iraq's Union of Chambers of Commerce in Baghdad on Saturday the two sides explored the ways for new fields of bilateral trade cooperation.

In an interview with IRNA, Nasser Behzad, the Iranian commercial attaché, said that plans for increasing trade delegations exchange between the two countries' private sectors and interaction between Iraq's businessmen and Iranian companies were dealt with during the meeting.

Regular communications between private sectors to increase trade, promoting cooperation to hit the target of \$20 billion annual trade between the two countries, devising necessary mechanism for collaboration among the Iranian and Iraqi provinces' chambers of commerce were among other topics discussed during the meeting, he said.

Head of Iraq's Union of Chambers of Commerce Abdul Razzaq al-Zahiri, for his part, voiced readiness for collaboration with the Iranian tradesmen and industrialists.

Referring to the Iraq government's efforts to empower the private sector, he added that the two countries' private sectors should take steps in line with promoting transparent trade between Tehran and Baghdad.

Trade between Iran, Slovakia up 135% in 2018

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of trade between Iran and Slovakia rose 135 percent in 2018, according to the data released by Slovakian Economy Ministry.

The ministry's data show that Iran-Slovakia trade stood at €58.77 million in 2018, while it was €24.97m in 2017, Mehr news agency reported.

Iran's exports to Slovakia observed a 274% hike reaching to €28.09 million in the past year.

The imports from the European country amounted close to €30.68 million, which also shows a considerable growth of 165% year-on-year.

Iranian and Slovakian economic and business ties have been thriving in the past months, thanks to the generally positive development of their trading collaborations.

Many Iranian traders view cooperation with Slovakia as a good opportunity in terms of joint investments and bilateral relations.

The Iranian Embassy in Austria, as the accredited representative of Tehran to Slovakia, has played a significant role in bringing the two countries' business sectors together.

Good news from China could boost materials shares

Even as the lift from optimism over prospects for U.S.-China trade detente shows signs of wearing off for the wider U.S. stock market, upbeat sentiment around China's economy could bolster shares of materials companies.

According to Reuters, Shares of S&P 500 industrial and technology companies, which were buffeted by last year's tit-for-tat tariffs as well as slowing global demand, have been very responsive to progress in U.S.-China trade relations and a strengthening Chinese economy. This year, those sectors have outpaced the ascent in the S&P 500, which reached a record closing high on Tuesday.

Materials stocks have not been as sensitive, however, even though they also stand to benefit as a stronger Chinese economy lifts global consumption and industrial output. As China has taken measures to stimulate its economy, its economic data have turned more upbeat. That in turn could aid global growth, which has flagged as a result of China's cool-down.

"What we're seeing is China spending more on stimulus: fiscal stimulus and monetary stimulus," said Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco in New York. "That's likely to be a positive for materials."

The People's Bank of China has cut banks' reserve requirement ratio five times over the past year and is widely expected to ease policy further to spur lending and reduce borrowing costs. The stimulus appears to have boosted Chinese economic data, with factory activity growing in March for the first time in four months.

‘CBI planning for sustainable inflation management’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati said that by controlling the short-term interest rates and infusing changes in the country's monetary policy, the bank is planning to manage inflation in the long-run, IRNA reported on Sunday.

"Despite fluctuations in economic activity last year, liquidity growth in 1397 [last Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20] was 23 percent, [only] one percent higher than [that of] 1396." Hemmati wrote in an Instagram post.

Explaining CBI plans for managing

inflation, the official noted that previous monetary policies regarding the controls over cash flow will be modified using the new structure of monetary policy and consequently uncertainty over controlling the cash demand is going to decrease.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran, the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on April 20, which marks the end of the first Iranian calendar month of Farvardin, stood at 30.6 percent.

The inflation rate in the mentioned period shows a 3.7-percent rise from the figure of the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the previous month.



As reported, the average goods and services Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 169.3 in urban areas and at 180.1 in the rural

regions in Farvardin, indicating 3.7 percent and 5.8 percent increase, respectively, compared to the previous month.

Iran's winning cards in facing U.S. sanctions

➔ The country, however, doesn't have equal trade with all the mentioned nations and Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Azerbaijan, Kuwait and Turkmenistan account for most of Iran's trade with its neighbors.

■ Top trade partner

As Iran's top trade partner in the region, Iraq is one of the most important nations that the Islamic Republic is closely interacting with on many levels and considering the two country's great potentials for mutual trade, both sides are eager for increasing their trade turnover to a level much higher than its current amount.

The Arab neighbor supplies most of it electricity and gas needs from Iran and imports a wide range of non-oil commodities from Iran including foodstuff, home appliances, agricultural products, air conditioners and spare car parts.

Iran and Iraq's current trade turnover stands at \$12 billion which is the highest among all the neighboring countries. Earlier in March, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced in an Iran-Iraq business forum in Bagdad that the two countries plan to boost this number to \$20 billion in the near future.

Iran's non-oil trade data for last year, indicates that exports to Iraq accounted for more than 37 percent of Iran's total exports to the neighboring countries and the



number increased by over 36 percent compared to the preceding year. In terms of imports, however, Iraq stands at the seventh place among exporters to Iran in the region which consequently pushes the trade balance between the two countries significantly positive toward Iran.

■ The impact of U.S. sanctions

Aside from the oil industry, the U.S. sanctions are aimed to limit Iran's non-oil trade through restricting the access to the global markets which are mainly dollar-driven.

Countering this situation, Iran and Iraq reached an

agreement in February 2019 to trade in national currencies and well as euro in order to facilitate trade transactions.

Despite all the U.S. pressures, Iran and Iraq are clearly determined for expansion of all-out ties and both sides are taking all the necessary measures in this regard.

President Rouhani's high profile visit to Iraq in March, is a clear indication of how much the sides are willing to have even closer political, economic and cultural ties. The visit was described as "historic" by some analysts.

■ Final thoughts

Iran's neighbors could be considered the country's winning card in the face of increasing economic pressures by the United States.

Beside the efforts for maintaining oil exports, the country should also focus on improving domestic production and increasing non-oil trade with its neighbors, since the problems with the shipping and transportation are also significantly less in trade in close ranges.

Among Iran's trade partners in the region, Iraq holds a very special place in terms of both political and economic importance. Of course the relationship between the two countries is mutual and in order to reach the desired levels of cooperation, both sides need to push further and take practical action in developing ties in all areas especially in economic sectors.

Iran's crude steel production capacity to rise 25m tons in 4 years

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's crude steel production capacity will increase by 25 million tons within the next four years, according to a deputy director in Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

Ardeshir Sa'd Mohammadi said that through such increase in crude steel output, the required feedstock for the plants will be properly supplied, IRNA reported.

The official further lamented that of the 35 million tons of crude steel produced in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), 25 million tons were used in the production process.

A report released by the World Steel Organization (WSO) indicated that Iran became the world's tenth largest steel producer in 2018.

Iran which stood at the 13th place in 2017 could lag behind three major steel producers in the world, namely Italy,



Taiwan, and Ukraine to stand at the 10th place in 2018, despite the re-imposition of sanctions by the U.S.

According to the WSO's report, Iran produced 25 million tons of crude steel in 2018 which indicates 17.7 percent growth from 21.2 million tons in 2017.

Iran is one of the top 10 mineral-rich countries where 68 types of minerals have been identified so far, including the world's largest deposits of copper, zinc and iron ore, which are tempting international investors.

IME accounts for 39% of Iran's capital market trades in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Trades conducted at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) accounted for 39 percent of the value of the total trades in the Iranian capital market during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), according to the managing director of IME.

Hamed Soltani-Nezad put the value of IME trades at 1.78 quadrillion rials (about \$42.3 billion) in the past year, IRNA reported.

As previously announced, the value of trades at IME rose 52 percent in the past calendar year from its previous year.

Over 24.84 million tons of commodities valued at 884.3 trillion rials (about \$21.05 billion) were traded at the physical market of IME, showing seven percent fall in the amount and 77 percent rise in the worth of trades year on year.

Applying new financial instruments in Iranian capital market was one of the



achievements of the country's exchange markets during the past year.

In this due, IME launched "option" in early March 2019 in an approach to diversify financing methods for agricultural products.

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

‘China’s investment in Iran brings win-win results’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — China's investment in Iranian projects within the framework of the One Belt, One Road Initiative will bring win-win outcomes, Chairman of Majlis Economic Committee Mohammad-Reza Pour-Ebrahimi stated.

The official who traveled to China last week to attend the Second International One Belt, One Road Conference told IRNA in Beijing that good agreements on investment within the framework of Belt-Road Initiative were reached on the sidelines of the meeting.

China's Second International One Belt, One Road Conference started on Thursday. The three-day forum was meant to promote Chinese leader Xi Jinping's project of the century, a foreign policy initiative launched in 2013 to revive ancient trading routes between Asia and Europe, as well as to build new links in the Middle East,



Africa, and South America.

Delegations from 110 countries took part in the conference.

Investors brace for a big week of insights into world economy

The world economy's ability to rebound from its recent soft patch will be tested anew this week as data is released from Washington to Beijing.

According to Federal Reserve officials conclude a meeting on Wednesday amid expectations they won't change their monetary policy settings as counterparts elsewhere follow its dovish turn. A press conference by Chairman Jerome Powell will be eyed for insights into his view of the policy outlook as well as what he's thinking about his inflation target and bond portfolio.

"While the Fed is not expected to take any policy action at its May 1 meeting, there will be plenty of action behind the scenes,"

said Carl Riccadonna, chief U.S. economist at Bloomberg Economics.

Perhaps as interesting will be a flood of data in the aftermath of last week's news that U.S economic growth accelerated markedly in the first quarter, albeit driven by advances in trade and inventories, which may reverse.

The high point will be Friday's release of the U.S. jobs report for April, with a gain of 180,000 expected by the consensus of economists surveyed by Bloomberg News. A survey of manufacturers on Wednesday is also expected to show some signs of stabilizing.

Elsewhere, China releases its purchasing managers index on Tuesday, the same

day that the euro-area is predicted to show its economy steadied in the first quarter.

■ On personal income

Other major data due include the U.S. report on personal income and spending on Monday, which is forecast to show spending outpacing income.

On Wednesday, the Treasury will reveal its latest plan to keep selling debt to plug a record budget deficit. The U.S. and China will resume trade talks in Beijing amid hopes a deal is imminent. Canada will reveal on Tuesday how its economy performed during the first quarter.

France and Italy release output data on Tuesday which, along with the euro-area number, will help provide a more defini-

tive picture of the first quarter, when the European Central Bank became alarmed enough about the slowdown to reactivate its stimulus stance.

The modest acceleration seen by economists might provide a basis for policy makers to conclude the current soft patch has stabilized.

The Bank of England is set to leave monetary policy unchanged on Thursday, although there is some suggestion it may become more hawkish. The same day, the Czech Republic may hike its benchmark to 2 percent. Turkey's central bank is due to shed light on billions of dollars of foreign-currency holdings that analysts have been struggling to keep track of this year.

'U.S. sanctions won't affect Iran's petchem exports'

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — General **d e s k** Secretary of Iran's Association of Petrochemical Industry Corporation (APIC) said on Saturday that U.S. sanctions are not going to have any significant impact on Iran's petrochemical exports.

"The mechanisms of petrochemical exports differ significantly from oil exports and therefore U.S. sanctions will have no impact on the production and export of petrochemicals," Mehr quoted Ahmad Mahdavi Abhari as saying.

The official noted that considering the reduction in exports of gas condensate, more feedstock may be injected into the petrochemical industry.

Consequently, both production and exports of petrochemicals will experience significant growth in the current year (started March 21, 2019), he said, adding, "New petrochemical units will come on stream in the current year in line with increasing production volume."



The official emphasized that currently the country's petrochemical industry is not facing any problems regarding feedstock. Turning to the exports destination of

petrochemicals, Mahdavi said, "Many countries in the world seek Iran's high-quality petrochemicals, the most important of which include neighboring countries, China, India, Southeast Asian countries and even European nations."

Petrochemical industry is one of the most important pillars of Iran's economy and one of the main suppliers of foreign currency especially euro for the country.

According to Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, the country is currently producing 62 million tons of petrochemical products annually and with the new projects going on stream the number is expected to jump to 65.5 million tons further cementing the Islamic country's stance as a major petrochemical supplier to the world markets.

In September 2018, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated three major petrochemical projects in Assaluyeh petrochemical zone in southwestern Iran.

Libya's oil ports tuned into military sites



E N E R G Y The National Oil **d e s k** Corporation (NOC) has strongly condemned the use of the country's oil terminals in the oil crescent region as military sites by the forces of warlord Khalifa Haftar, Libya Observer reported.

In a statement on Saturday, the NOC said Haftar's armed groups had stormed Es Sider oil port and captured its airstrip for military uses. They also attempted to seize NOC tugboats.

The armed groups also stormed Ras Lanuf oil terminal to berth warships and other military vessels, the NOC adds.

"NOC has informed the Public Prosecutor of its intention to take all legal steps

necessary to protect staff and facilities," read the statement.

Chairman of NOC Mustafa Sanalla said: "This illegal and irresponsible activity is a gross violation of our civilian mandate and must stop. These acts endanger workers, diminish partner confidence, and threaten our ability to maintain operations. NOC rejects all attempts to use corporation equipment and facilities for military objectives. NOC is the lifeline of the Libyan economy and must be protected from all forms of conflict."

A French frigate arrived at Ras Lanuf oil terminal last Thursday carrying ammunition and military equipment to warlord Khalifa Haftar, according to Al Jazeera.

Saudi's SABIC Q1 net profit drops 38%, cites lower selling prices



E N E R G Y Saudi Basic Industries **d e s k** Corp (SABIC), the world's fourth-biggest petrochemicals company, reported a 38 percent drop in first-quarter net profit due to lower average selling prices, missing analysts' expectations.

According to a Reuters report, SABIC made a net profit of 3.41 billion Saudi riyal (\$909 million) in the three months to March 31, down from 5.51 billion riyals in the year-earlier period, the company said in a bourse statement on Sunday.

Analysts expected SABIC to make a net profit of 3.98 billion riyals in the first quarter, according to the average of estimates of five analysts polled by Refinitiv.

SABIC said average prices decreased by

8 percent quarter-on-quarter, driven by slowing global demand, a slow start to the year and relatively high level of inventories.

It expected SABIC's performance to be in line with trends in the global petrochemical industry, even though it cautioned that global economic growth will be lower this year.

The company's results are closely tied to oil prices and global economic growth because its products - plastics, fertilisers and metals - are used extensively in construction, agriculture, industry and the manufacturing of consumer goods.

Saudi national oil giant Aramco last month reached an agreement with the Public Investment Fund to buy its controlling stake in SABIC for \$69.1 billion.

Oil major Total targets expansion in retail power market

Oil major Total is picking up about 150,000 retail energy customers a month in France and is on course to hit its 2022 target for the business ahead of schedule, company executives said on Friday.

As Reuters reported, the French energy group is looking to broaden its revenue streams with expansion in a retail power and gas market in which demand is shifting to low-carbon energy from more polluting fossil fuels.

Total has said it plans to invest between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion a year on low-carbon electricity.

Rival Royal Dutch Shell, which is expanding its own retail power business, has said it plans to invest the same amount on renewables and low-carbon business.

Total bought Belgium's Lampiris in 2016 and Direct Energie last year for \$1.7 billion, merging the businesses in its push to become a so-called integrated player operating gas-fired,

wind, solar and hydropower generation while also selling power directly to retail clients.

The group had set a target of seven million clients across France and Belgium — about 15 percent of the market — by 2022, up from four million currently.

Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne and Xavier Caitucoli, the head of Total's power and gas business in Europe, told journalists that current trends make the target achievable before 2022.

It is now France's third-largest retail power supplier, behind former monopolies EDF and Engie, and the biggest alternative supplier in a market that also includes Leclerc, Casino and Italy's Eni.

EDF is the market leader with 28.4 million customers, according to data from French energy market regulator CRE.

Pouyanne said that Total will leverage its brand recognition and petrol station network to win customers, with plans to offer 1 euro

cent for every liter of petrol bought from its French forecourts to the first million clients that sign up for its residential electricity offer from June 1.

■ Power generation

The company also plans to expand its power generation capacity, particularly in gas and renewables.

It has four gas-fired plants, plans to buy two others operated by Germany's Uniper and has made a final investment decision to build another by the end of 2021.

"We will likely not stop there," Pouyanne said, pointing to European efforts to halt coal-fired generation while France plans to reduce its nuclear power capacity.

Belgium this month passed bills aimed at spurring investment in gas-fired power and 4,000 megawatts of new offshore wind farm capacity by 2030 to replace its ageing nuclear reactors.

Caitucoli said Total would participate in



the energy transformation in Belgium, where it has a million customers and owns a 400 MW gas power plant.

"Concretely, we are currently looking at a project to build another gas power plant in Belgium, but I will not say where," Pouyanne added.

"There is a future for gas-fired generation and we are taking that position. We would likely buy or build if prices are competitive."

Big Oil is spending "too much" on new oil production: Report

By Irina Slav

Big Oil plans to spend nearly \$5 trillion in capital expenditure over the next decade, much of which would go into adding new production. Yet this money will also bring the world farther from the Paris Agreement climate targets, a report from energy industry-focused nonprofit Global Witness warns.

The organization analyzed a report compiled by the International Panel on Climate Change last year and then compared the data with the spending plans of the oil and gas industry. What it found was that investment in any new oil and gas field development was "incompatible with limiting warming to 1.5°C."

This is the lower target set in the Paris Agreement for the rate at which the Earth warms. The higher and preferable target is 2°C, but it is the less realistically achievable one. The 1.5°C target, however, may be achieved if a lot of things change fast, the IPCC report concluded last year.

Yet Global Witness did not stop there. The organization also calculated that current oil production should be cut by nine percent and gas production should be reduced by six percent if the 1.5°C goal is to be achieved. It also noted in its report that all of the energy industry's \$4.9-trillion capex planned for the next ten years was "incompatible with limiting warming to 1.5°C."



The argument runs as follows: if the world is to limit the rise in the average global temperature to 1.5°C, work must be done to reduce its reliance on oil and gas. If this work is successful, all these trillions Big Oil plans to spend on production expansion will be the worst spent money ever. If the work on limiting the rise of temperatures fails, the planet will continue heating up at unacceptably high rates with a slew of adverse consequences hitting mankind.

The report's finding will undoubtedly serve as yet another argument for activist investors in the energy industry to use as a tool to pressure the companies in their sights into doing more to reduce their carbon footprint.

Speaking of carbon, Global Witness also takes aim at carbon capture and storage technologies that the energy

industry has been using to varying degrees as a means of reducing the abovementioned footprint. According to Global Witness, it's pretty pointless: a lot of the carbon captured currently in the industry is used in the extraction of more oil and gas, which clearly goes against the environmental grain.

However, the organization notes there may be something good in carbon capture and removal... if it is done on a much larger scale. Whether such a scale of utilization for the technology is possible remains to be seen, which is why Global Witness is not counting on it as a reliable way to advance the Paris Agreement goals.

The energy industry could hardly be counted on to take things into its own hands and voluntarily reduce its investment plans for new production. Whatever the climate goals of governments, the world's population is growing and with it demand for energy. For now, energy comes mainly from oil and gas, and coal as well, in many poorer parts of the world. Renewables have yet to become competitive everywhere.

But there is a silver lining. If governments manage to find a way to press energy companies into reducing their spending programs especially on new production, they will have to. Oil and gas prices will rise sharply as a result—demand for energy is blind to the source of that energy—and renewables will become more appealing in places where oil and gas are still cheaper.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Putin says countries in OPEC+ deal are abiding by agreement

OPEC+ states including Saudi Arabia are complying with the terms of the agreement to limit oil output, Bloomberg quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin as saying.

"We have agreements within the OPEC+. We fulfill our agreements and we don't have any news, any information, from our Saudi partners and any other OPEC member, that they are ready to exit these agreements," Putin told reporters in Beijing on Saturday, where he participated in the Belt and Road forum.

On Friday, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that he "spoke to Saudi Arabia and others about increasing oil flow" and said that "all are in agreement" after the administration announced on Monday that it wouldn't extend waivers for buyers of Iranian crude that had allowed them to continue purchases despite American sanctions.

Asked about Saudi Arabia possibly compensating for shortfalls of Iranian oil on the global market, Putin said he hoped that wouldn't happen and reiterated that countries should abide by the OPEC+ agreement.

The waivers expire on May 2 and China, India, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Taiwan now face the prospect of having to find alternative supplies.

It's hard to forecast what will happen with the oil market in May when the waivers expire, Putin said. He said he didn't discuss the issue with Chinese President Xi Jinping, though added that Russia is willing to meet China's demands for oil.

■ 'Colossal potential'

"We can produce even more," Putin said. "We have colossal potential, but it's not about potential, it's about the fact that we have agreements with OPEC that we keep to a certain level of output."

It's unlikely that Saudi Arabia will abandon the OPEC+ pact that was reached in December and runs to the end of June, since it initiated the deal, Putin said. Russia joined the OPEC+ cooperation because a "coordinated price policy" was needed on the market, he said.

The Russian leader said he discussed the issue of contaminated oil in the Druzhba pipeline to Europe with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Transneft is investigating how the crude came to be contaminated and law enforcement may become involved if necessary, Putin said.

He told reporters that Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project won't affect pipeline gas supplies to China, which wants Russia to increase deliveries via the Power of Siberia link. Russia wants to increase LNG supplies to the world market to 100 million tons, he said.

Dirty Russian oil has made a fragile market worse

President Donald Trump wants to strangle the Iranian economy and keep gas prices low for American drivers. The discovery that Russia has been exporting contaminated crude oil means any hopes that he could do both have all but evaporated.

Trump decided this month not to renew waivers that let countries buy Iranian oil without violating his sanctions, affecting eight nations that have exemptions expiring on May 2. This drove crude prices higher at a time when gasoline prices were already rising. Gas is up by nearly 30 percent since the start of the year and is now within 10 cents of last year's peak, before America's summer driving season has even started.

■ Pedal to the metal

This harsher regime looks like it will stick. While some countries will try to persuade Trump to grant last-minute extensions, the current rhetoric from Washington doesn't look encouraging. The exemptions that were made alongside the first wave of sanctions in November were unexpected. Offering a second round of waivers after saying there wouldn't be any would, frankly, make Trump's administration look stupid.

Three countries won't even try to persuade Trump to issue new waivers. Italy, Greece and Taiwan never used them and won't miss them when they're gone.

China and Turkey have both criticized the unilateral nature of the sanctions and accused the U.S. of exceeding its jurisdiction, but it is unclear how far either will defy American demands.

■ Iran

Turkey has already strained relations with the U.S. over its plans to buy a Russian missile-defense system. Continuing to buy Iranian crude would sour them further. And even if the Turkish government wants to rebel against the sanctions Tupras, the country's biggest refiner, may be less willing as it would bear the brunt of any American retaliation.

That leaves India, South Korea and Japan, and they are already lobbying the White House. Even if Trump were to have a change of heart, he doesn't have to capitulate fully. Were he to agree a 25 percent reduction in the volume of oil allowed for purchase from Iran over the next six months, that would still make his sanctions tougher than those of his predecessor.

But if the president refuses to budge, then all three are likely to stop buying crude and condensate from Iran. They are already starting to toe the line.

■ Achieving balance

The U.S. sees itself as able to get tougher with its sanctions because it believes oil markets are well-supplied, unlike last November. Brian Hook, Special Representative for Iran, says all forecasts show the global supply of oil exceeding demand in 2019. That's only true if OPEC boosts its overall output. The group's production already has to increase by 250,000 barrels a day in the second half of 2019 compared with last month's levels to balance the market, according to the Department of Energy's latest forecast.

■ Spare capacity

The U.S. expects others to offset the impact of tougher sanctions — the Department of State published a fact sheet last week saying it has pledges from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to increase production in order to make up for the shortfall from Iranian exports.

Counting on those promises is a gamble. After being blindsided by the waivers issued in November, nobody should expect OPEC nations to start pumping more until there is clear evidence of Iranian supplies falling. They may also need to compensate for any further falls in output from other members of the Shaky Six. Within that group, both Venezuela and Libya look particularly vulnerable.

The pledges cited by the State Department is doable in theory, but could break the group apart if Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. are seen as blatantly doing America's bidding to the detriment of fellow founding members.

World financial bodies, tools for imposing U.S. policies



1 → ■ Secondary bank sanctions at the top of monetary ammunition triangle

The U.S. secondary bank sanctions are at the top of monetary ammunition triangle. The implementation of U.S. banking secondary sanctions is divided into two generations based on the way they were enforced. The first generation, which were created and implemented before 2010 on the basis of the executive orders of the President. These sanctions enjoy a posteriori approach and targets the end of the banking service chain.

All of the financial institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran were affected by this kind of sanctions, including the Bank Melli Iran, Export Development Bank of Iran and Bank Saderat Iran.

This generation of banking sanctions defines a series of individuals, transactions and institutions and then slaps sanctions against them and stipulates that anyone who offers financial services to sanctioned institutions or individuals; it will be sanctioned or placed on the America's Specially Designated Nationals (SDN's) list.

But the second generation of banking sanctions imposed by U.S. after 2010 aimed to force the world's largest banks to be coordinated with U.S. in imposing sanction. It means that it will force these banks not to provide banking services to individuals and entities that are sanctioned.

Therefore, the focus was on the beginning of the banking services chain, i.e. the big international banks, and the access to dollar payment system is the main leverage. The approach of this generation of sanctions is a priori (deterrent) and aims to isolate sanctions targets in the global banking system.

This sanction strategy was followed by the laws of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA), Iran's Freedom of Law Act and the Coping with Iran's (IFCA) activities. The rules stipulated that banks either knowingly or unknowingly provide sanctioned targets with services, will encounter restrictions on their brokerage accounts in U.S.

■ FATF's position in imposing U.S. secondary sanctions

If the second-generation of secondary banking sanctions is going to be successful, the banks should be able to track transactions that are being made by sanctioned targets. This requires that the actual beneficiaries of each transaction be identified. According to David Cohen, the U.S. Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence in the years 2011 to 2015, there must be enough infrastructures in order to create financial transparency so that it can be found out whom the sanction targeted countries are working. So they can be prevented from continuing their activities. This transparency is essential for both generations of secondary banking sanctions.

The FATF or the Financial Action Task Force plays a role in this regard. The FATF's 40 recommendations, which have been developed with U.S. engagement, all seek to enhance global financial transparency. Providing credible information to identify customers and validating this information, and then sharing this information with banks and foreign entities, are examples of recommendations from this group that can lead to the distinguishing of sanction targets from non-sanctioned ones.

The FATF's standards have focused on two dimensions of producing accurate information about economic relations and their sharing. These two dimensions are very effective in completing the sanctions puzzle.

■ **Swift role in monetary ammunition triangle**
There is a need for a series of simplifications and fluctuations as imposing sanctions and subsequently implementing FATF standards, create barriers in the process of global business, cause difficulties for economic and global interactions, and ultimately make no attractiveness and cost to the world's banks.

In this case, SWIFT is engaged in facilitating and simplifying the enforcement of sanctions standards and trying to reduce costs for sanctions by providing services including sanction screening, know your customer (KYC REGISTRY), and know your customer's customer.

SWIFT's new service is being developed in this regard and it can no longer be considered as a simple messenger. In fact it is becoming a tool for projecting power in line with U.S. administration policies.

■ **Dollar domination on global exchanges, an effective factor for U.S. monetary ammunition**
What has made the U.S. sanctions to be implemented through FATF and SWIFT standards is size of the U.S. economy which is bigger that the size of the world economy and also U.S. dollar's domination on global exchanges.

According to statistics, U.S. owns about 25 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and about 65 percent of SWIFT exchanges are traded at U.S. dollar. This issue has led the world's largest banks to obey U.S. sanctions, due to their urgent need for the dollar.

It should be noted that the countries will not have problem with dollar domination issue over the next few years, but they will face the U.S. monetary ammunition triangle that they have to look for ways to get rid of it.

It should be noted that the countries will not have problem with dollar domination issue over the next few years, but they will face the U.S. monetary ammunition triangle that they have to look for ways to get rid of it.

How Al Saud and Al Khalifa manipulate Formula One and Hajj pilgrimage?

1 → Al Khalifa regime has a long history in repression of protests and is constantly trying to divert the attention of world away from the Bahrain internal unrest by accusing other countries, especially Iran, of violating the human rights.

Running competitions such as Formula One that are international events and receive massive media coverage is just another tool for Bahrain regime to fake a good image. In the same time, political prisoners in Bahrain, especially women are in terrible conditions; they are usually arrested without their charges being explained to them and their courts are held out of the reach of video cameras.

■ Al Saud manipulating Hajj pilgrimage

Al Khalifa regime is not the only regime that is taking advantage of international events. Hajj pilgrimage is indeed a chance for Muslims all around the world to demonstrate their solidarity, but Al Saud family is trying use it as an opportunity to derive their own political benefits.

In fact, Saudi Arabia gains billions of dollars each year from Hajj pilgrimage as it is an unparalleled international convention; however the problem is Saudi Arabia leaders are using this event as a leverage to put pressure on countries whose ideas and policies are different from Al Saud regime. Iran, Syria, Yemen and Qatar are the examples of some countries whose policies have dissatisfied the Al Saud regime so it is now trying to put obstacles on the way of these countries in sending their pilgrims to Hajj.



Recently, the Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar announced that Saudi Arabia's policies are aimed at using Hajj pilgrimage for their political ends, even though it is a religious event; in this regard, Qataris have been deprived of their right to go on this pilgrimage due to political tensions.

Mohammed Abdul Sattar, the current Ministry of Awqaf of Syria has also announced that the Saudi officials are inhibiting the Syrians from doing their religious duty by preventing them from going on Hajj pilgrimage. To this moment, Saudi Arabia has not granted any permits to Syrians for making

the Hajj journey.

Evidently, Saudi Arabia is trying to politicize the Hajj pilgrimage and has reduced the Muslims' participation in doing their religious duty, in the same time, in August, the media released that Saudis are giving out Hajj visas to Christian activists in Lebanon, a move that was greeted with public ridicule in international arena.

To make the matters worth, Al Haramain Watch, headquartered in Malaysia, has recently reported massive financial corruption in Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umra. The Al Haramain Watch announced

that the Ministry has abused many people and organizations, both in terms of extorting money from them and dictating their policies.

Experts have been discussing the mismanagement of Hajj pilgrimage by Saudi officials for a long time. The Saudi's mismanagement hit the roof in 2015 when incident in Mina killed over 2,000 pilgrims. After the incident, not only the Saudi officials refrained from giving an apology, they also tried to excuse themselves from any responsibility and kept bullying other countries with using Hajj pilgrimage as a leverage to put pressure on them.

It seems that Saudi Arabia is trying to run the U.S. and Zionists plot to undermine the Hajj pilgrimage as an international event by reducing the pilgrims coming from a variety of independent countries in the region.

Evidently, both Bahraini and Saudi officials know how to manipulate situations to their own benefit. Obviously, there is no problem in running Formula One motor race competitions but the problem arises when the competitions are used to whitewash the oppression of Bahraini people who can go to jail for merely putting a post on social media.

Instead of using the Hajj pilgrimage as a chance to promote Muslims' solidarity and unity against the Zionist enemy, Saudi Arabia is trying to diminish the number of pilgrims coming from independent countries by making up excuses that are actually rooted in its own political and financial benefits; something that unfortunately will lead to nothing but scission among Muslims and will empower the Zionists in their stand against Muslims.

Oil price plunges on Trump comments

Asia Times — The sting of the Trump administration's decision not to re-issue waivers on Iran oil sanctions faded on Friday with crude prices dropping more than 3% following comments from the US president.

"The gasoline prices are coming down," US President Donald Trump promised in remarks to reporters at the White House. "I called up OPEC and said you've gotta bring 'em down."

Prices spiked earlier in the week on an announcement that the US was ready to sanction any country that buys any amount of oil from Iran — a threat that the Trump administration backed away from last November. Waivers were granted to big buyers of Iranian oil, including China, India and Japan. But analysts say that the US getting anywhere

close its stated goal of reducing Iranian crude exports to zero are slim to none, and the impact of other events weighing on the price — such as political risk in Libya and Venezuela — have been overstated.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday that the effort to forbid all nations from buying Iranian oil was intended "to deprive the outlaw regime of the funds it has used to destabilize the Middle East for four decades and incentivize Iran to behave like a normal country."

A White House statement said that Saudi Arabia had agreed to "take timely action to assure that global demand is met as all Iranian oil is removed from the market."

Following the announcement, Saudi Arabian Energy

Minister Khalid Al-Falih issued a vague statement that the kingdom would work to keep prices stable. "In the next few weeks, the kingdom will be consulting closely with other producing countries and key oil consuming nations to ensure a well-balanced and stable oil market," Al-Falih said, per Bloomberg.

China, the largest importer of Iranian oil, called the unilateral imposition of sanctions "illegal," while Russia said the action was reckless.

"The rest of the world perfectly understands that Washington's policy is becoming more and more aggressive and reckless," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement

Why US neo-conservatives are trying to block Europe from BRI benefits

By John Ross

Global Times — This is an important year for Europe as economic slowdown is likely - the IMF projects EU growth will fall to 1.6 percent in 2019. Regarding major external influences which can improve or worsen this situation, the US will also slow, the IMF projecting a decline in growth from 2.9 to 2.3 percent, while China's growth is expected to be far higher at 6.0-6.5 percent.

Given this situation, unsurprisingly, important European countries are showing increasing interest in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Italy became the first G7 country to sign a BRI agreement. This followed previous initiatives such as Britain's early endorsement of the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, into membership of which the UK was followed by Germany, France, and other European countries, and the 16-1 meetings of Central and East European countries with China.

US "neo-conservative" forces, aiming to weaken China, look on this development with alarm. For example Foreign Affairs, the most important US foreign policy journal, recently published an article by Andrew Small, senior transatlantic fellow with the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, warning "China's political reach and influence in Europe are undoubtedly growing" - a development to which he was deeply hostile. The US has similarly applied strong pressure to get European countries to cut China's telecoms company Huawei out of development of European 5G.

The problem for such US attempts to block European cooperation with China is that the



US has little positive to attract European countries to cooperate with it. The US is not only growing less rapidly than China but the Trump administration's protectionist steps make the US even less attractive.

US foreign policy toward countries other than China also damages Europe. Notably, Iran is not a big US market but is potentially significant for Europe - the EU stood to gain from the lifting of sanctions under the Obama administration's Iran nuclear weapons deal and is damaged by the Trump administration's unilateral re-imposition of them.

The US has also been trying to get Germany to abandon its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, under the Baltic Sea, which guarantees Russian gas supplies to Germany without interference by countries such as Ukraine. Cancelling it would make Germany more dependent on expensive US liquid national gas supplies.

Other US policies have less direct but also damaging effects on Europe. In particular, US military action against Iraq, Libya and involvement in the civil war in Syria caused a massive Middle East refugee exodus creating significant problems for Europe - as well as bases for terrorism in European countries.

Even leaving aside indirect effects in the Middle East, this combination of US policies - cutting out Huawei, thereby making European 5G delivery slower and more expensive, Iran sanctions, making Germany's gas supply less secure, and attempting to weaken Europe's cooperation with China's rapidly growing economy - all directly hit Europe.

As the US has little to offer positively it therefore has to primarily rely on the stick, not the carrot, in relations with Europe. Giving in to such sticks, however, worsens European countries' economic position and thereby creates domestic political problems.

Consequently, among Europe's general public the US leadership is currently extremely unpopular - the latest European wide Gallup opinion poll showing only 24 percent approval of the US leadership and 59 percent disapproval.

The available US sticks are clear. Western Europe is disunited and weak militarily, unlike Russia, and the US is seen by European governments as crucial for their defence. The US also controls the international financial system and is able to threaten unilateral sanctions - as with Iran.

The result of such sharply opposing forces is therefore political conflict in European countries. On one side are those seeking to improve their country's economic situation, including by cooperation with China, and on the other those favouring giving in to US demands - even if this damages their own country's economy and therefore its political stability.

Given such trends the US has shifted from its traditional policy of general support for the EU to active intervention in domestic affairs of European countries. This can be seen clearly over individual issues - the reported decision by the British government to allow Huawei to participate in the rollout of 5G in the country is openly attacked by pro-Trump politicians and media for example.

Even more widely seen is the US' overt hostility to Merkel in Germany, the Trump administration's support for Brexit, and attempts to block Italy from participating in the BRI. Given the large scale of forces involved on both sides of these clashes, which largely involve Europe's relations with China, such a situation will last for a significant period of time.

BRF shows China's open-mindedness

Global Times — The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) ended Saturday in Beijing. Leaders who attended the forum signed a joint communiqué and reached several achievements. The forum further expanded the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and boosted people's confidence in this cooperation mechanism.

The openness of the BRF has impressed the world. As the one who proposed the BRI, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward high-quality Belt and Road construction, emphasized the cooperation will be open, green and clean, and will strengthen international rules synergy. These are inherent requirements of the BRI construction and also responses to some Western countries' concerns.

People's Bank of China Governor Yi Gang said the BRI's investment and financing decisions must fully consider a country's overall debt capacity, and improve the coordination between

investment and financing to ensure debt is sustainable.

The BRI is a rapidly developing new initiative. It has attracted discussions in the world. But the US and some Western countries made biased comments, some with ill intentions. China proposed the initiative, but stayed calm and focused on improving the BRI's mechanism together with cooperative countries. China's broad mind matches the great cause of the BRI.

The BRI is an expanding friendly circle with no adversaries. Two former US cabinet members released a report called "The Higher Road: Forging a US Strategy for the Global Infrastructure Challenge." It is a good thing if the US really supports global infrastructure.

But the purpose of the report seems to be to build US leadership in infrastructure and exclude China's influence. The two former cabinet members advocated "the higher

road," but it seems like a zero-sum geopolitical road.

China's foreign investment has never ignored the principle of being green and clean. It also took recipient countries' debt capacity into consideration. But since some countries expressed concerns, the BRF placed the corresponding improvements in a prominent position. In contrast with the open-mindedness of China, the US' unilateralism has increased.

The America First policy has disturbed most global multilateral cooperation platforms. Thus, the BRI may be more attractive because countries only have the goodwill of reciprocity within the framework. All countries want to develop, and the BRI can help in mutual development.

BRI cooperation will be more prosperous with higher quality in the future. It is open to regions and countries as well as good ideas and rules. Proposed by China, the BRI belongs to humankind. These are not empty words.

Why Kim really sought out Putin

Asia Times - Kim-Putin summit leveraged the two sides storied history and modern economic ties to put Moscow in the middle of denuclearization talks

When North Korean leader Kim Jong Un arrived at the Russian far eastern city of Vladivostok on April 25, he was bound to find a more sympathetic ear from president Vladimir Putin than he could ever expect from US president Donald Trump.

North Korea's relationship with Russia is as old as the Pyongyang regime itself, and Kim's visit for talks with Putin was more than just a snub to Trump after an unpropitious meeting between the two leaders in Hanoi in February. At that time, Trump demanded a complete denuclearization of North Korea before any sanctions could be lifted, while Kim wanted the US to end all such punitive measures before his country would begin to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal.

In principle, Russia is also in favor of a denuclearized Korean peninsula, as outlined in foreign policy concept document signed by Putin in November 2016. Moreover, Russia has direct, justifiable reasons to be wary of North Korea's ballistic missile tests.

Many of those are carried out from the Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground, also known as Musudan-ri, which is located dangerously close to North Korea's border with Russia. History shows the tests are not always successful, threatening Russian territory.

Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomes North Korean leader Kim Jong Un before their talks at the Far Eastern Federal University campus in the far eastern Russian port of Vladivostok on April 25, 2019. Photo: AFP / Yuri Kadoobov

In July 2006, two medium range missiles launched from that facility veered off course and landed in Russian territorial waters off the port city of Nakhodka near Vladivostok. The mistake infuriated local Russians and angry citizens tried to make their way into the North Korean consulate in Nakhodka to protest. Mikhail Kaminin, a Russian foreign ministry official, branded the test launch "an act of provocation."

Still, Russia does not view North Korea's WMD program in the same fretful way as the US. To Washington, it is a nuclear threat to regional security and stability, as well as the US mainland in sight of Pyongyang's steadily improving ballistic missile capabilities.

Alexander Gabuev at the Carnegie Moscow Center explains Russia's point of view in an April 24 article: "In Moscow's thinking, Kim Jong Un has learned from the fates of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi that for an authoritarian regime the only safeguard against USA military intervention is the possession of nuclear weapons capable of hitting the American mainland."

Therefore, Gabuev explains, "nuclear weapons are the last thing Pyongyang will give up since they are the only guarantee of the Kim regime's survival."

Putin declared during the recent meeting in Vladivostok that North Korea needs internationally recognized security guarantees before any denuclearization may take place.



That obviously would have to include more countries than the US.

North Korea must be fully aware of how the Trump administration withdrew unilaterally from its bilateral Iran nuclear deal, thus adding for North Korea one more example of America's willingness to break off negotiated deals with what it considers rogue regimes.

This has led to a softer Russian approach to the issue, which in turn has prompted Washington to view Moscow as a spoiler to US plans to apply maximum pressure to get Pyongyang to agree to a solution on America's exclusively determined terms.

Russian entities in the far east have also been accused of helping North Korea circumvent UN sanctions by importing North Korean coal and re-exporting it to countries such as South Korea and Japan marked as Russian coal. More legitimately, Russian companies are keen to implement a number of projects in North Korea, among them the construction of a gas pipeline to South Korea that would run through the North, a proper railway link between the two countries and a shared electricity supply system.

But, as Gabuev argues, "Moscow finds itself in a Catch 22 situation: the sanctions need to be dropped for the projects to become more realistic and to offer North Korea an incentive to change its behavior, but because there is no immediate stimulus for Pyongyang to change course, UN sanctions could stay in place indefinitely, thereby killing Russia's hopes of implementing these trilateral projects."

By meeting Kim, Putin may have shown that Moscow is an honest broker that wants to find a solution to the Korean WMD crisis on more realistic terms than Washington's hardline approach, which at this point appears doomed to fail despite Kim's recent suggestion of a third Trump summit. That is a view Russia shares with China, but Putin also knows that

Moscow's leverage is limited and cannot be compared with Beijing's outsized influence.

China remains North Korea's main foreign trade partner and the only country that Kim so far has shown any willingness to heed. Kim's first meeting with Trump, in Singapore in June 2016, came after close consultations with China and personal meetings with Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Russia's comparative role, as Gabuev argues, will be to "continue its increasingly active support of Beijing by playing second fiddle to China in North Korea." Still, the importance of Russian-North Korean relations should not be underestimated. The North Korean state is, after all, a creation of the erstwhile Soviet Union.

In the winter of 1940, Kim Jung Un's grandfather and leader Kim Il Sung retreated with a group of followers into Russia after having fought together with Chinese communists in then Japanese-occupied Manchuria. Despite the official North Korean version of history, there is no record of Kim Il Sung being active in Korea apart from attacking a police station at Pochonbo just across the Manchurian border.

While in Russia, the Koreans were settled in the village of Vyatskoye north of Khabarovsk, where Kim Il Sung's son and Kim Jong Un's father Kim Jong Il was born in 1942.

When this Asia Times' correspondent visited Vyatskoye in 2003, villagers still remembered the Koreans and even pointed out the old log cabin where the Kim family stayed until the end of World War II, as well as the earthen airstrip from which Kim Il Sung was flown down to Vladivostok after the Soviet Red Army had occupied the northern half of the Korean peninsula in August 1945. From Vladivostok, Kim Il Sung continued by ship to the North Korean port of Wonsan. In September 1949, the Soviet-occupied north became the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea with Kim Il-sung at its first premier.

The official North Korean version, of course, has it that Kim Il Sung liberated Korea and that Kim Jong Il was born in a guerilla camp on the slopes of Peaktu mountain in the Korean peninsula's north, where his first toys were allegedly guns and bandoliers.

Such fantasy has been ridiculed by Russian writers and Yu Song Chul, an ethnic Korean, once wrote in an open letter to Kim Jong Il: "I'm ashamed...I still can recall how you walked around Vyatskoye with your [father's] captain's cap on your head. It was there you walked your first steps...how come you don't remember that?"

North Korea's powerful — and dreaded — internal intelligence agency was established by ethnic Koreans from the Soviet Union and modeled after Stalinist prototypes. Once in power — and despite the Marxist indoctrination in the Soviet-run camp at Vyatskoye — Kim Il Sung took over the secret police force and set about creating a dynasty more akin to a clan-oriented Confucian autocracy than a socialist republic. That may be a main reason why North Korea's communist system has not collapsed, unlike that in Russia and Eastern Europe, or transformed itself into capitalist autocracies like those in China, Vietnam and Laos.

But despite all that — and anger at North Korean attempts at rewriting history by omitting the Soviet Red Army's role in driving the Japanese out of the peninsula's north — now capitalist Russia has nevertheless inherited the ex-Soviet Union's close relations with Pyongyang. Trade between Russia and North Korea totals less than US\$100 annually and is not nearly as brisk as between North Korea and China, which annually is worth billions of dollars. But it is not unimportant for local businesses in Russia's far eastern region.

There is also the question of an official figure of 8,000 North Korean workers employed by businesses across Russia. Although that marks a significant drop on the 40,000 or so who were working in Russia until UN sanctions prohibited the employment of North Koreans two years ago, it remains an issue especially in the far east.

Around 85% of the North Koreans work in construction and are paid 40% less than the average salary in Russia. Several Russian construction companies in the region cannot manage without cheap labor from North Korea, a fact that the government in Moscow cannot readily ignore.

It is clear that Russian officials would like to find ways to ease UN sanctions against North Korea, but it is unlikely that the recent Putin-Kim summit would make much progress on that score as long as America's position remains unchanged.

Trump promised to ease tension and neutralize what he perceives as a North Korean threat to the region, but the outcome has so far been the opposite: a polarization of forces where the US has to face not only China but also Russia. Putin may be playing second fiddle in the bigger strategic contest, but he has managed to strengthen Kim's resolve to withstand any pressure to give in to what he said in Vladivostok he considers unreasonable American demands.

America's Way of War: Killing Civilians

TEHRAN (FNA)— From Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the United States and its allies have been really good at one thing only: Killing civilians in wars without end.

This has been going on since 2001, starting from Afghanistan, stretching to Yemen and then all the way back to Afghanistan, where the United Nations has once again warned that the United States and its allied forces are killing more Afghan civilians than the Taliban and other armed groups do.

This has been largely the case in the first three months of this year. A new quarterly report from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan shows that from January to the end of March.

It's interesting to note that in response to the report, US forces spokesman in Afghanistan Colonel Dave Butler has said: "We reserve the right of self-defense of our forces. The best way to end the suffering of non-combatants is to end the fighting through an agreed-upon reduction in violence on all sides."

The thing is, the ongoing violence could be reduced to a great extent if all US and NATO forces actually leave the war-torn country. This would reduce the high number of civilian casualties that the latest UN report shows are mostly being killed in massive airstrikes, drone operations, and brutal night raids.

The concern is that as the 2020 US elections approach, the situation could get worse and further civilian casualties won't be off the charts. With the Taliban willing to negotiate peace with the central government in Kabul, even if the US is to carry out ever more drone strikes across the war-torn country, it will need better excuses to justify the presence of its drone bases, which are the favorite weapon of choice in this war of repetition.

During all these years, the US has tried everything in its manual of military tactics and still has gone nowhere: From dropping 'the mother of all bombs,' the largest non-nuclear munition in that military's arena, to often time and again any other weaponry. Amid all that failure repetition, civilians are still dying; Afghans and others are being uprooted and displaced and terror outfits are spreading.

The argument is that this endless failure of the US military effort in Afghanistan is where it all began and where it seems never to end. And hard as it might be to believe, even when it comes to the US policy of negotiations with the Taliban, initiated by the Trump administration, it's seemingly also going nowhere — but where it all began and it seems never to come to a decisive conclusion and result to end the tragedy.

On that note, the UN's latest report on civilian casualties represents nothing new. In the past, we have read similar reports and warnings issued by the world body, which unsurprisingly failed to end America's 'the right war' and hold anyone to account.

This understanding should do justice to this conclusion: Just like his predecessors, President Trump will also lose the longest war in American history. Which is to say, the next best possible plan is to try to follow through on a withdrawal plan, just as he promised during his elections campaign. He is likely to have a few problems on his hands. Above all, the Pentagon and the country's commanders are still hooked on America's longest war. They exhibit not the slightest urge to stop their murderous campaign.

After all, this represents the only thing the US military knows how to do in Afghanistan. And one thing is guaranteed: If they don't plan a withdrawal strategy, they have the power and ability to kill even more civilians in that unfortunate West Asian nation.

And with that in mind, almost 18 years later, don't think that victory is out of the question either. Every defenseless civilian that the US military kills in Afghanistan with its 'precision' weaponry is indeed a victory for the War Party in Washington and its terror proxy forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere. It justifies their 'humanitarian' occupation and makes sure the war that has cost the US economy billions of dollars will continue apace with no end in sight.

The crisis of leadership in the European Union

Saeed Sobhani

Perhaps until recently, many analysts and experts in European affairs believed that Angela Merkel was the leader of the European Union and the eurozone. It was not without reason that in many polls, Merkel was named as the most powerful politician in the European Union. Without a doubt, Angela Merkel never imagined that she would have to permanently withdraw from power in Europe by 2021, as an incapable chancellor.

We are in 2019! No less is the German Chancellor as the leader of the European Union or even the leader of the eurozone! Merkel has lost her strength. In other words, the date of the German Chancellor's acceptance in Europe has come to an end. It's not too difficult to check!

It's a difficult time for the Chancellor of Germany! She had to pass the power inside the Christian Democrat Party to her rival, Kramp-Karrenbauer. In a conference, Karenbauer rejected claims that she was the "mini Merkel".

"People consider me a 'mini,' a copy, a simple 'more of the same,' but I can tell you that I stand here as my own person, just as life has shaped me and of that I am proud," she said.

Angela Merkel has announced that she will step down of power in 2021, but the polls conducted in Germany has intensively worried her. The results of these polls indicate that the total popularity of the two traditional German parties, the coalition of the Christian and Social Democrats, have fallen below 50%. This suggests the unpopularity of the coalition government among the German citizens. Merkel now has to run the weak coalition government until 2021!

Many analysts of Europe's affairs believe that Merkel's power is actually over. The Chancellor of Germany is no longer the symbol of power in the United Europe. She has lost the power of managing the power equations in her country. In other words, Merkel has become a "passive player" in Berlin, the European Union and the Eurozone.

On the other hand, French President Emmanuel Macron is no longer the least capable of directing and managing the European Union and the eurozone. Public protests in France have made Macron a powerless politician and president.

anyway, Political history of the German Chancellor as the EU leader has come an end at a time when her substitute (in the event of a relative and fragile victory in the country's next general elections), should devote her power to attempts for the formation of a coalition or minimal government in Berlin.

The Budget Will Never Balance Until the Wars End

By JOHN KRISTOF

Antiwar - Traditional party politics was turned on its head earlier this month when a group of House Democrats proposed a balanced budget constitutional amendment. Congressman Ben McAdams' measure would prohibit Congress from spending more than it receives in a given year. Additionally, it requires that the president's budget proposals sent to Congress balance out revenues and expenditures.

Given the failures of previous balanced budget amendments, few people expect this to materialize. Constitutional amendments are tough to pass: both the House and Senate must approve with two-thirds majorities, and 38 out of the 50 states must ratify. But even if McAdams' legislation were to become law, the country's near-limitless dedication to military intervention would render it completely ineffective. That is because it contains two key exceptions.

First, the balanced budget rule will not apply if the economy is in a recession. Specifically, if GDP shrinks during two consecutive quarters in the current or previous fiscal year, or if the unemployment rate is higher than 7 percent for two consecutive months or longer, the budget may go into deficit.

The rule will also not apply if a declaration of war is in effect, or if the United States "is engaged in military conflict which causes an imminent and serious military threat to national security." (Majorities of the House and Senate must agree that such a threat exists for the exception to apply.)

While both exceptions seem reasonable on a surface level, America's approach to foreign intervention would make the wartime exception the rule. The United States has been involved in a significant military conflict for roughly 225 years out of its 242-year history, including every year since 2001.

And it's hard to find a military conflict the U.S. has fought in which it didn't argue that it was in the interest of national security. President Donald Trump has promised to "stop endless wars" and bring the troops home, but he has increased America's military presence in the Middle East since taking office. Most recently, he vetoed the War Powers Resolution, a bipartisan attempt to halt support for Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign in Yemen due to the grave humanitarian crisis that the Saudis have caused there. Trump wrote that pulling support would endanger "the lives of American citizens." The U.S. also remains involved in conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

So current policy would likely nullify the balanced budget



amendment as soon as it became law. And once that happened, it would probably never take effect—U.S. involvement in military conflicts has only increased since the end of the Cold War. So long as they're justified by Congress as being in the security interests of American citizens—as they so often are—the United States never will be held to this balanced budget amendment, making it largely symbolic and ineffective.

And even if it did take effect, America's interventionist military policies would make it difficult to enforce. For instance, if a major war were to break out between the United States and a foe like China, North Korea, or Russia, Congress would, of course, want some budget flexibility to respond quickly. Given how often the security of American citizens is invoked to defend intervention, legislating specific parameters for allowing military force would be a tall order. To be effective, then, any rule for fiscal restraint would require the Pentagon to be much more selective about monitoring and allocating its resources.

The tug of war between balanced budgets and military expansion is reflective of a broader ongoing conflict be-

tween fiscal responsibility and military spending. Defense appropriations have helped drive soaring deficits throughout U.S. history. The Government Accountability Office recently identified defense as the biggest discretionary spending source contributing to our mounting debt. The Department of Defense has been hawkish about protecting its budget for years. It failed its first-ever audit, released in December, unable to account for billions of dollars in assets.

The Defense Department also didn't publicize an estimate of how much money it could have saved by eliminating inefficiencies. A 2015 internal study revealed a "clear path" for the Pentagon to improve its administration, saving \$125 billion over five years without reducing personnel. Yet defense officials worried Congress would see this as an opportunity to cut their budget, so the Pentagon imposed secrecy restrictions on the study, and a public summary of the report was removed from a government website.

Defense is hardly the only spending area where streamlining is needed, and more tax revenue is also necessary to arrest the rapidly rising debt. But if America is going to become fiscally responsible, it must end its addiction to war.

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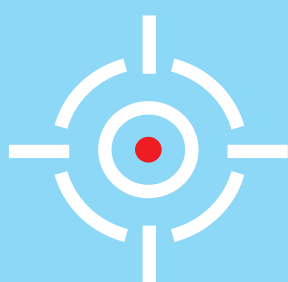
Agenda:

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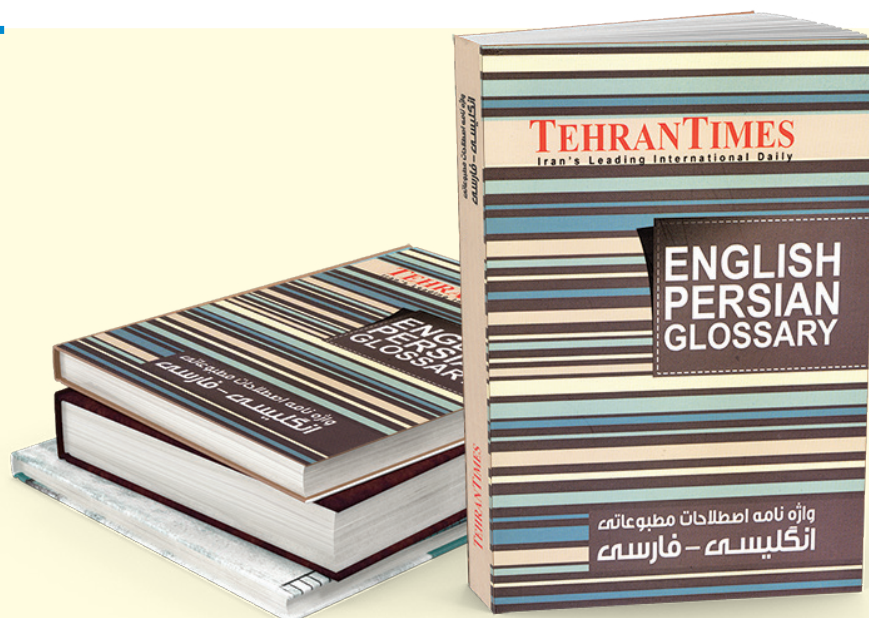
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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

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SpaceX escape engines were test fired before mishap: panel

A NASA safety panel said on Thursday that Saturday's accident on a SpaceX astronaut capsule happened after eight engines were test fired, but offered scant details on what caused the mishap or the extent of the damage.

NASA's Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP) told reporters Elon Musk's rocket company continues to investigate the cause of the 'anomaly' during a test of engines designed to propel the crew to safety at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida.

Orange smoke was seen rising above SpaceX's facilities by a photographer working for local newspaper Florida Today. No injuries were reported.

The capsule, which conducted a six-day test flight to the International Space Station in March, was one of at least six models SpaceX has in production.

The company is planning to launch Crew Dragon's first mission to space carrying humans as soon as July, though the accident could delay that.

ASAP chair Patricia Sanders said SpaceX and NASA are in the early stages of the investigation, focusing on collecting data from the accident and determining how much it will impact the schedule for the human spaceflight mission.

NASA awarded \$6.8 billion to SpaceX and Boeing Co to develop separate capsule systems to fly astronauts to space, but both companies have faced technical challenges and delays.

"There's been a lot of progress made on each side, but there's still technical issues that need to be resolved as both providers are on the path to qualification," ASAP member Sandra Magnus, a former U.S. astronaut, said.

(Source: Reuters)



Mystery of weird sky-glow named "STEVE" finally solved

Three years ago, a mysterious purplish glow arced across the Canadian skies. The light show was a completely unknown celestial phenomenon, so it was given a name befitting its beauty and grandeur: Steve.

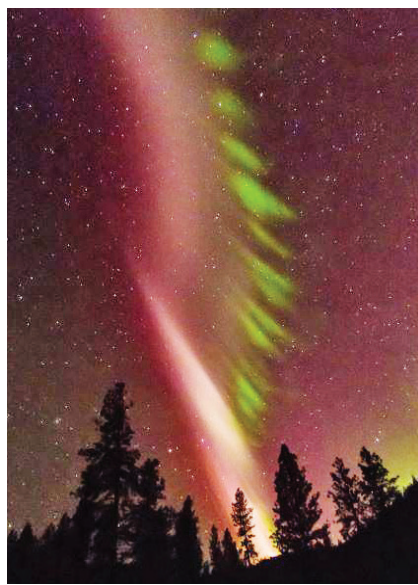
Now, scientists have finally pinpointed what causes the phenomenon's glowing ribbons of reddish purple and green: magnetic waves, winds of hot plasma and showers of electrons in regions they normally never appear.

A brief history of STEVE

On July 25, 2016, observers noticed an odd type of atmospheric light display illuminating the night sky in the Northern Hemisphere. They quickly realized that this was no ordinary aurora and gave it a new name inspired by the film "Over the Hedge" (DreamWorks Animation, 2006); a group of forest animals, confounded by a hedge for the first time, name the unfamiliar object "Steve." (Astronomers later changed that name to STEVE, an acronym for strong thermal emission velocity enhancement.)

Preliminary analysis of STEVE found that its optical effects came about differently than an aurora's, but scientists couldn't say what exactly was taking place.

Auroras can trace their origins to the sun, when sunspots spit out clouds of protons and electrons that speed toward Earth on



solar winds. Once these charged particles reach the planet, its magnetic field draws them toward the North and South poles. As the particles leave the magnetosphere and bombard the planet's upper atmos-

phere, they interact with elements such as oxygen and nitrogen to generate swirling ribbons of light.

But STEVE's light shows are different from a typical aurora's. STEVE appears farther south, and over more-populated areas, than most auroras do. And unlike an aurora and its trademark greenish swirls that undulate horizontally, STEVE produces a towering vertical purplish or green band, sometimes accompanied by a column of short bars resembling a picket fence, according to the new study.

"Completely unknown"

In a prior study published in 2018, the same researchers found that STEVE originated in the ionosphere, the zone stretching from about 50 to 375 miles (80 to 600 kilometers) above the ground, where auroras form.

But even though STEVE appeared during the same solar-powered magnetic storms that produced auroras, most of the newfound phenomenon's glowing appearance was not the result of charged particles slamming into Earth's upper atmosphere. That conclusion comes from evidence gathered by satellites that passed through a STEVE event in 2008.

The new study used that 2008 data, along with satellite data and ground observations from two other STEVE events, to identify

two different processes that shape STEVE's light ribbon and picket fence.

STEVE's vertical ribbons are illuminated not by a rain of charged particles falling into the atmosphere, but by friction caused by hot plasma flows and powerful magnetic waves about 15,000 miles (25,000 km) above Earth, according to the study. Heat from these flows energizes particles so that they generate purple light, a mechanism similar to the illumination of incandescent lightbulbs.

While aurora glows occur when electrons and protons fall into Earth's atmosphere, "the STEVE atmospheric glow comes from heating without particle precipitation," study co-author Bea Gallardo-Lacourt, a space physicist at the University of Calgary in Canada, said in a statement.

STEVE's green picket fence, on the other hand, forms as auroras do: when electrons rain down on the upper atmosphere. However, this occurs far south of the latitudes where auroras usually form, "so it's indeed unique," Gallardo-Lacourt said.

But scientists still don't know why the phenomenon appears so much farther south than auroras do, meaning that STEVE retains a little of its mystery.

(Source: livescience.com)

Neanderthals may have trapped golden eagles 130,000 years ago



The golden eagle has been hunted and revered by human cultures for thousands of years. Yet this may not have been a uniquely human devotion—Neanderthals, too, may have targeted these impressive birds of prey some 130,000 years ago, according to new research. What's more, modern humans may have learned their eagle-catching techniques from their hominin cousins.

With its luminous auburn feathers and massive 2.2-meter wingspan, the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is associated with solar deities in religions around the world, from Native American traditional belief systems to Roman and Greek mythologies.

A family team of anthropologists wanted to find out whether Neanderthals were part of that heritage. Eagle bones and talons have been found across dozens of sites in central and western Europe occupied by both Neanderthals and modern humans. So the researchers combed through the literature on 154 Neanderthal-associated sites to see whether golden eagle remains stood out in any way.

Although rock dove and raven remains were the most numerous birds, the remains of golden eagles were also present at 26 sites. Cut marks along the wing bones—where golden eagles have little meat—suggest Neanderthals carefully extracted the feathers, the researchers report in *Quaternary Science Reviews*. Additional cuts to the birds' leg and foot bones suggest their claws and talons were also delicately separated from the rest of their bodies.

No golden eagle Neanderthal jewelry has been discovered, but anthropologists in 2015 reported finding talons from another eagle—the white-tailed eagle—adorning a Neanderthal necklace. Because Neanderthals were apparently catching and fashioning jewelry from large raptors in Eurasia thousands of years before modern humans migrated up into the continent from Africa, the authors suggest our ancient ancestors may have picked up the practice from watching their Neanderthal neighbors.

(Source: sciencemag.org)



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Seven Iranian crafts get Geographical Indication tags

1 → Handicraft exports fetched the Islamic Republic some \$190 million during the first nine months of the past Persian calendar year (ended March 2019), an 11 percent growth year on year.



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

The Digital Corpus of Literary Papyri (DCLP), a new digital tool for researching ancient literature, is now available

Scholars from Heidelberg University and New York University spearheaded the development of the newly released open-access database, which offers information about and transcripts of Greek and Latin texts preserved on fragments of papyri, but also, for example, on ceramic shards or wooden tablets.

The project was financed by the National Endowment for the Humanities in the USA and the German Research Foundation.

The database is accessible to anyone and currently has information on nearly 15,000 fragments of ancient works. Approximately 1,000 of these entries include the corresponding Greek or Latin texts.

Literary works by major authors such as Homer, Sappho and Virgil, as well as subliterary documents like medical tracts and grammars, are among the texts, which date between the 4th-century BC and 8th-century CE and originate from Egypt and other Mediterranean regions. The DCLP offers a number of research options and efficient search functions.

It is designed particularly for scholars of ancient literature and culture, primarily classical philologists, theologians, and historians. "One special feature of the database is that the fragments are provided open-access and in a data format that conforms to robust standards", explains Dr Rodney Ast of the Institute for Papyrology of Heidelberg University, who jointly directs the project with Prof. Dr Roger Bagnall of New York University.

The Digital Corpus of Literary Papyri is based on the infrastructure of Papyri.info, an internet portal administered by Duke University (USA) that provides access to transcripts and metadata on approximately 55,000 documents, such as ancient administrative records, letters, and contracts.

The Digital Corpus of Literary Papyri also features an on-line editing system for submission of content for peer review and subsequent inclusion in the database, thus ensuring its continual expansion. Other participants in the development of the DCLP include Dr James Cowey of the Institute for Papyrology at Ruperto Carola as well as classical scholars from the universities of Würzburg and Leuven (Belgium), the Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi (Italy), and Duke University.

(Source: Heritage Daily)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic town of Ouro Preto

Founded in the early 18th century 513km north of Rio de Janeiro, the historic town of Ouro Preto (Black Gold) covers the steep slopes of the Vila Rica (Rich Valley) in Brazil.

It's the center of a rich gold mining area and the capital of Minas Gerais Province from 1720-1897.



A view of the historical town of Ouro Preto in Brazil

Along the original winding road and within the irregular layout following the contours of the landscape lie squares, public buildings, residences, fountains, bridges and churches which together form an outstanding homogenous group exhibiting the fine curvilinear form of Baroque architecture.

The historic city of Ouro Preto was the symbolic center of the Inconfidência Mineira in 1789, a Brazilian independence movement, and home to exceptional artists responsible for many of the most significant works of the Brazilian Baroque period, including the Church of Sao Francisco of Assisi by the distinguished architect and sculptor Antonio Francisco Lisboa (Aleijadinho).

The area's isolation for the better part of the 19th and 20th centuries generated economic stagnation, fostering preservation of the original colonial constructions and urban pattern. (Source: UNESCO)

Pakistan simplifies visa process for 48 countries including Iran

TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN — Pakistan has simplified bureaucracy for travelers from 48 countries including Iran, rolling out a visa on arrival policy for diplomats and official passport holders, IRNA reported on Saturday.

According to a statement issued by Pakistan's Interior Ministry, the new visa policy would permit nationals of at least 48 countries to come to in Pakistan on visa on arrival.

It relaxes restrictions for those holding the passports from Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Malaysia, Russia, Turkey, China, Sri Lanka, Australia and Denmark among others.

Iranians and a majority of other nationals are offered visas on arrival for three-month period, however, there are citizens including ones from Egypt and Azerbaijan who are entitled to gain 30-day visas.

The notification further revealed that

citizens of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Afghanistan and India will not be able to benefit from the policy amongst other nations, The News International reported.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan had earlier announced on March 13 that a visa on arrival policy will be rolling out for countries including UAE, Turkey, Malaysia and China," the Pakistani website said.

Earlier in January, Islamabad's Ambassador to Tehran Riffat Masood said that some 700,000 Pakistani pilgrims annually travel to Iran's Mashhad to visit the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

The envoy underlined that Tehran and Islamabad have put in a great deal of effort to facilitate air and land traveling to Mashhad, adding "Iran and Pakistan, in addition to having common borders, have many cultural heritage such as language, rituals and traditions in common."



Chinese 'dragons' invited to Tehran

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — Tehran's Golestan Palace plans to host an exhibition of works in connection with historical Chinese dragons, which are commonly known as legendary creatures in the nation's mythology and folklore and in the East Asian culture at large.

"A joint exhibition of historical objects related to historical Chinese dragons will be displayed in the future in the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace," director of the World Heritage site Masoud Nosrati said on Sunday, ISNA reported.

Lately, the authorities of the Golestan Palace and a visiting delegation from Shanghai Museum have explored avenues towards deepening ties and arranging joint exhibits, Nosrati added.

Experts of the Shanghai Museum, which is dedicated to ancient Chinese art, also visited treasure troves, showrooms,

museums and other sections of the palace, voicing hope to launch exclusive exhibitions and to enhance the level of cooperation in the near future.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Nosrati emphasized that the Golestan Palace broadly welcomes approaches to boost cultural interactions between the two countries, saying "Considering potentials and capacities of the Golestan Palace, it is planning to hold an exhibition of works related to Chinese dragons."

In conclusion, the official referred to cultural and historical background that the nations have in common, saying "Given the fact that Iran and China share cultural and historical background, we hope to witness holding such a great artistic event in our country for the first time.

Some 80,000 Chinese nationals visited Iran in 2017.

The French region with a new currency

By Justin Calderon

French Basque Country has its own micro-currency – and it's hitting the big time. Now other European communities are hoping to replicate its success. It didn't take long after my arrival in Bayonne, France, to realize that this riverside town of meandering medieval alleyways flanked by narrow wooden-framed homes is a different kind of Basque Country.

French Basque Country counts a population of just less than 300,000, compared to more than two million Spanish Basques, with whom they share a language and culture. Besides being dwarfed by their relatives just 40km to the south, here in south-west France, the ikurrina, as the Basque flag is called, is flown noticeably less frequently. Even the ubiquitous jamon, beloved on both sides of the border, takes on a look and taste all its own. Shop names, restaurant menus and road signs are overwhelmingly written in French rather than Euskara (the Basque language), which, unlike in Spain, is not officially recognized in France. I sensed in Bayonne that the 'Frenchness' of the place overpowers any Basque patriotism that may lie beneath.

"Our language is about to disappear here. Everybody speaks French," lamented Bayonne local Dante Edme-Sanjurjo. "The young people are learning Basque at private and public schools, but the problem is that they don't use it. There is a reluctance to speaking Basque when addressing someone we don't know; it is a private language that they don't share in public."

Inspired to bring Basque pride back to the region, in 2013 Edme-Sanjurjo and



Launched in 2013, the eusko micro-currency reached the equivalent of €1 million in circulation in 2018

about a dozen volunteers launched a euro-equivalent micro-currency. Their aim was to reinvigorate enthusiasm for their cultural and linguistic roots and keep money within the French-Basque region by supporting local businesses. Flash forward to October 2018, and their micro-currency, coined the eusko (pronounced 'you-s-ko'), reached the equivalent of €1 million in circulation, making it the most successful of such monetary experiments in Europe, according to The Local.

Today, 17 municipal governments and 820 local shops, businesses and associations in the French Basque Country accept the eusko as legal tender. Euskal Moneta – the organization headed by Edme-Sanjurjo that

manages and prints the currency – says two to three new eusko accounts are being opened daily with them.

Participating businesses are encouraged to make their shops bilingual. "We encourage business owners to learn a few greeting words in Basque and/or have as many Basque-language signs in the shop as possible, and we provide the translation for free thanks to public subsidies," Edme-Sanjurjo said. "This allows young people to see Basque in public life and not be ashamed anymore."

While the idea of printing your own money might seem radical, the concept of micro-currencies is far from novel. Indeed, Euskal Moneta was inspired by the Chiemgauer, a micro-currency that has been available in

Notre Dame's neighbors warned of lead contamination risk after fire

Neighbors of the fire-stricken Notre Dame cathedral have been advised to use wet wipes to clean surfaces where lead-laden dust from the blaze may have settled.

Tests have shown that the devastating 15 April fire released particles of the toxic metal that had been present in the frame of the church and its now-levelled spire, Paris police have said.

Investigators found lead in areas near the church, "very localized" and "notably on premises that may have been standing open at the time of the fire, and where dust had settled".

The threat was limited, the police noted, as lead poisoning usually builds up over years of exposure. There have been no reports of acute lead poisoning since the inferno that destroyed the roof of the 850-year-old landmark.

"With regard to homes or private premises, it is recommended that residents in the immediate vicinity

of the Notre Dame proceed to clean their home or premises and their furniture and other items, using wet wipes to eliminate any dust," the police statement said.

Public areas that may pose a lead exposure risk, such as the gardens around the cathedral, have been closed and will not be reopened until lead levels are back to normal, the police added.

Last week, the French environmental campaign group Robin des Bois said about 300 tonnes of lead from the cathedral's roof and steeple had melted in the blaze, which officials said had reached 800C at its peak.

"The cathedral has been reduced to the state of toxic waste," the association said in a statement, urging authorities to detoxify the tonnes of rubble, ash and wastewater produced in the disaster.

Airparif, which monitors air quality in Paris, said pollution did not exceed normal levels the day after the fire. Nearly two weeks later, a police cordon is still



keeping members of the public well away from the site. (Source: The Guardian)

‘Iran pioneer in stem cell knowledge, technology’

1 → Below is the text of the interview:
■ Liver and heart diseases are the leading causes of death worldwide, how does your research on regenerating liver and heart cells, winning an award in the 32nd Khwarizmi International Award, can help in treatment of such diseases?

Chronic degeneration of different organs is the major cause for mortality and morbidity worldwide. Organ transplantation is the “gold standard” protocol for the end stage patients suffering from organ failure. However, the limited number of donated organs make a potential obstacle in organ transplants. In addition, post transplantation complications are another obstacle after organ transplants. Cell therapy is an alternative strategy for patients suffering from organ failure. In Royan Institute, we developed advanced protocols to produce liver and heart cells from human stem cells. The generated cells were functional in lab and performed their physiological functions. Then we tried to scale-up these protocols and generate sufficient cells for any possible application in industry and clinic. The differentiation protocols are updated continuously and we are going to optimize them.

■ You also won the Word Academy of Sciences (TWAS) 2019 prize in biology. You received the prize for your fundamental contribution to the understanding of how pluripotency and differentiation establish and maintain in stem cells. Can you elaborate on how the research can help in treatment of diseases in human beings?

Pluripotent stem cells have unique abilities that make them an ideal source to produce any functional cell. The proliferation capacity of these cells is unlimited and they can differentiate into all cell types in the human body, thus they provide an exceptional platform to treat a wide range of diseases. The cutting-edge research in stem cell science, however faces



many challenges. We are working on these challenges now.

One of the biggest hurdles in any embryonic stem cell-based therapy is forced directed differentiation of stem cell to the desired cell. The process of specification and maturation to a functional cell type from a pluripotent state is called differentiation.

Guiding embryonic stem cells to become a particular cell type has been fraught with difficulty. Normally, stem cells growing in a developing embryo receive different signals from the surrounding tissue as well as cells.

In lab, we have to mimic those conditions and microenvironment. For example, in addition to producing liver and heart cells, we have successfully differentiated human embryonic stem cells into retinal pigment epithelium and dopaminergic cells for age related macular degeneration and Parkinson's diseases, respectively. We transplanted the cells in animal models and found improvement. For this translational science, we need to pass many regulations and many quality controls before clinical trials. So, to take a step further, we have established a special

Different autologous and allogenic cell transplantation clinical trials in patients with diseases such as myocardial infarction and diabetes and vascular, liver, skin, eye, bone, cartilage, and neurological disorders have been done in Iran.

unit to produce stem cells under Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) condition. This enables to provide clinical-grade cells with defined quality and assured safety for human use for Parkinson's disease and age-related macular degeneration.

■ As the director of Royan Institute for stem cell biology and technology, how much do you think stem cell technology can prove to be effective in treatment of diseases and how much advancement Iran has made in this regard?

Regenerative medicine technologies, aimed at changing form and function of therapeutic methods, inform the prospect of transforming standard-of-care practices in the near future.

The evolution from the traditional perspective of “caring the disease” to the increasingly actionable paradigm of “curing the disease”, has shown its efficiency in huge number of clinical trials in recent years and also increasing number of industrial units emerging in this field which are more than 900 companies all over the world.

Iran is one of the most pioneering countries in the world and the second country in the region based on stem cell knowledge and technologies. There are several registered companies in this field which have approved 5 cell-based products in Iran FDA up to now. Also regulatory guidelines have been set which will promote stem cell technologies progression in coming years. Different autologous and allogenic cell transplantation clinical trials in patients with diseases such as myocardial infarction and diabetes and vascular, liver, skin, eye, bone, cartilage, and neurological disorders have been done in Iran. Up to now, Iran has registered 119 clinical trials in <https://clinicaltrials.gov>.

[ClinicalTrials.gov is a resource provided by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. It is a database of privately and publicly funded clinical studies conducted around the world.]

First public laser therapy clinic for skin conditions opens in Tehran

HEALTH d e s k **TEHRAN**—The first public laser therapy clinic for treating burns and skin diseases opened on Wednesday at Hazrat-e Fatemeh Reconstructive and Plastic Surgery hospital in Tehran.

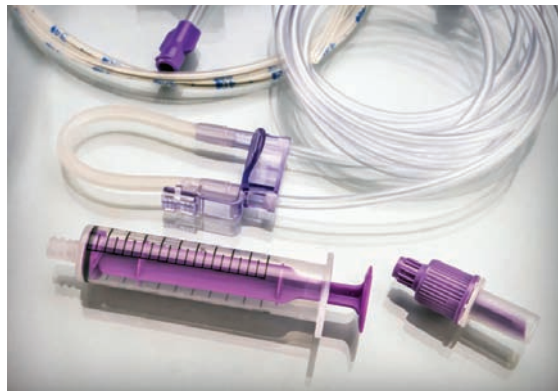
Hazrat-e Fatemeh is a teaching hospital that is part of Iran University of Medical Sciences.

According to the hospital's chief medical officer, Nurahmad Latifi, many hospitals in Iran are already providing patients with laser therapy but this is the first and only laser therapy clinic that belongs to the public sector, Fars news agency reported.

Meanwhile, Jalil kuhpayehzadeh, the president of Iran University of Medical Sciences, announced that setting up the hospital costs around 20 billion rials (around \$715,000).

He further noted that the clinic is also an educational center where medical students can receive specialized training.

According to World Health Organization, skin diseases in developing countries have a serious impact on people's quality of life, causing lost productivity at work and school, and discrimination due to disfigurement. Skin changes may also indicate the presence of more serious diseases that need treatment.



Peanut exposure therapy may lead to three times as many allergic reactions, study says

A breakthrough method to prevent life-threatening allergic reactions by exposing suffers to gradually increasing levels of peanut extract may treble attacks, new research suggests.

‘Life-changing’ findings from a trial last year were the most convincing demonstration yet that this exposure method can prevent accidental ingestion of peanut products triggering a fatal reaction.

But a new analysis of these findings and 11 other trials has questioned whether these results can be replicated outside of laboratory conditions.

Data from more than 1,000 children who had taken part in “oral immunotherapy” trials found 22.2 per cent of children who had exposure therapy experienced anaphylaxis attacks, compared to 7 per cent who practiced avoiding accidental peanut exposure.

There were also more serious reactions, which led to vomiting, abdominal pain, mouth itching, hives, wheezing and asthma, as well as attacks where life-saving adrenaline had to be administered.

Average 10 year old has consumed the recommended amount of sugar for an adult

Their findings suggest that children who did not undergo desensitization and instead remain focused on avoiding peanuts as an ingredient had fewer attacks overall.

“Numerous studies of varying quality have been published on oral immunotherapy, but its effectiveness and reliability



remains unclear,” lead researcher Dr Derek Chu, from McMaster University in Canada said.

The findings, published in the Lancet medical journal, favor an avoidance approach over all forms of oral immunotherapy.

Dr Chu added that exposure goal can achieve the aim of desensitization “this outcome does not translate into achieving the clinical and patient-desired aim of less allergic reactions and anaphylaxis over time.

“Instead, the opposite outcome occurs, with more allergic and adverse reactions with oral immunotherapy compared with avoidance or placebo.”

More than six million people are affected by food

allergies in Europe and North America, including 8 per cent of children and between 2 and 3 per cent of adults, said the scientists.

While common allergies to milk and egg are often outgrown by the age of five to 10, peanut allergy can be a lifelong problem.

Studies of oral immunotherapy measure treatment success by whether a patient can pass a supervised food challenge but not risk in the real world.

However researchers who have led trials in the UK said that their research suggests the most serious attacks might be reduced and despite higher risks during the initial exposure phase the benefits could last a lifetime.

Professor George du Toit, a children's allergy consultant at Evelina Children's Hospital in London who helped conduct the UK arm of the Palisade trial which reported its findings last November, said: “A safe, simple and symptom-free peanut allergy treatment currently remains elusive.

“We therefore need to determine what degree of risk and discomfort peanut allergic patients are willing to accept and which clinical outcomes are important to patients and their families.”

The Palisade findings were “enough to protect against most accidental exposures, and that the severity of repeat peanut reactions decreased over time,” he added.

(Source: *The Independent*)

Pollution contributing to ‘thousands of lung cancers deaths in non-smokers’, experts warn

Lung cancer is on the rise among people who have never smoked because of increasing exposure to toxic air, but doctors – and politicians – are unaware of the problem's scale, experts warn.

In the UK 6,000 people a year die of lung cancer despite having never smoked, or having smoked a negligible number of cigarettes (fewer than 100 in their lifetime), a study has found.

This makes lung cancer among non-smokers alone the eight biggest cancer-related cause of death in the country, ahead of leukaemia, lymphoma and cervical cancer.

But medical experts say the much stronger association with smoking has created stigma around the disease, disadvantaging those who don't smoke and curtailing research into other causes.

“For too long, having lung cancer has only been thought of as a smoking related disease,” said Professor Paul Cosford, director of health protection at Public Health England (PHE) and lead author of the research that appeared in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.

“This remains an important association but, as this work



shows, the scale of the challenge means there is a need to raise awareness with clinicians and policy makers of the other risk factors including indoor and outdoor air pollution.”

This is why PHE has published guidance for councils on improving air quality by stopping parents idling near school gates and promoting carpooling.

While smoking is the single biggest lifestyle factor that

affects lung cancer – accounting for 86 per cent of cases – pollution, fumes from coal fire places, and second-hand smoke are also linked to its development.

Women were also much more likely to be affected by lung cancer despite never smoking, the authors said.

Smoking history is often the first question doctors will ask for patients coming in with symptoms that could be an early warning cancer, but not smoking could give false reassurance and send them down the wrong diagnostic path.

“Despite advances in our understanding, most people who have never smoked do not believe they are at risk and often experience long delays in diagnosis, reducing their chances of receiving curative treatment,” Professor Mick Peake, co-author from the University College London Hospitals said.

“The stigma of smoking has been the major factor behind the lack of interest in, knowledge of and research into lung cancer.

“Therefore, in many ways, never-smokers who develop lung cancer are, as a result, disadvantaged.”

(Source: *The Independent*)

Here's why kids need regular blood pressure screenings too

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death among adults in the United States, but now experts are looking at kids' health to determine who is most at risk of developing cardiovascular disease in the future.

Updated guidelines that classified more children with elevated blood pressure are better at predicting which children may develop heart disease as adults, a new study finds.

A report in the American Heart Association's journal Hypertension evaluated the 2017 American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines. Prior to the 2017 update, the standards had not been since 2004.



“Based on our results, the guidelines are pretty accurate at identifying individuals who go on to have adult hypertension or other indicators of heart disease risk,” Dr. Lydia A. Bazzano, senior author of the study and associate professor of epidemiology at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans, told Healthline. “That is actually a good thing because it allows parents and kids to make changes if needed that can benefit their health over a lifetime.”

■ What the study found

Her review found that compared with children with normal blood pressure, those reclassified as having elevated or high blood pressure were more likely to develop adult high blood pressure, thickening of the heart muscle wall, and metabolic syndrome — all risk factors for heart disease, explained.

The study Bazzano used followed 3,940 children for 36 years and provides useful follow-up data.

According to Bazzano's review, the newer guidelines would identify 11 percent of participants as having high blood pressure, compared to 7 percent using the 2004 guidelines. Also, 19 percent of children with high blood pressure under 2017 guidelines developed thickening of the heart muscle during the follow-up period, compared with 12 percent of those considered to have high blood pressure according to the 2004 guidelines.

The new guidelines also mean that not all children classified with high blood pressure will require medication for the condition.

The 2017 guidelines set parameters for cutoffs based on children of normal weight; the older guideline included overweight and obese children, which skewed the cutoffs to a higher threshold. The update enables a more precise classification of blood pressure levels according to age, sex, and height.

“This change is more in line with adult hypertension guidelines,” Bazzano explained.

More children may be diagnosed as hypertensive, but it can also encourage better health awareness and reduce future heart disease risk, according to a 2018 study released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There were some limits to the research, as it doesn't record actual heart attacks and strokes the children followed had in adulthood. The children studied were also from one community in Louisiana, and may not reflect the nation as a whole.

■ Kids need regular screenings too

For most children with high blood pressure, lifestyle changes are the leading treatment. This includes avoiding excess salt in the diet, exercising regularly, eating well, and maintaining a healthy weight, Bazzano noted.

Dr. Joshua Samuels, a professor of nephrology and director of the hypertension program at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, hopes parents remember that elevated and high blood pressure affects children as well as adults.

“You'll never know that your kid has a BP problem unless it gets measured,” Samuels told Healthline. If your child is over the age 3, make sure the doctor takes a reading during routine well visits.

Children under 13 have different blood pressure thresholds than adults. For adults, anything at or under 120/80 is normal. Depending on a child's weight, height, and sex, their levels vary. In general, children have lower blood pressure than adults. Doctors must use a specific calculation based on percentiles to evaluate what's normal, elevated or high.

If your child has an elevated or high reading, a doctor should take it on two more occasions. Some children have elevated blood pressure from “white coat syndrome,” where being in the doctor's office can cause stress and elevated blood pressure.

In those cases doctors may have an ambulatory monitoring device to gauge blood pressure readings for 24 hours. This enables them to tell if the child's level falls when they are out of a medical setting, and if the elevated numbers are due to medical anxiety compared to a health ailment.

Other reasons for elevated or high blood pressure in children can be heart and vascular issues, kidney issues, or endocrine system issues. This is why ruling out white coat syndrome is so important. Doctors want to make sure they treat any underlying condition that causes elevated or high blood pressure. This way they can tell who needs medication for blood pressure compared to who does not.

“There are a lot of medications that are safe and effective at treating hypertension in children,” noted Samuels, who last year published a report on the 2017 guidelines.

Doctors typically try to manage lifestyle issues if the rise in blood pressure is related to weight.

■ What elevated blood pressure means for kids

While no study has shown that increased blood pressure in childhood leads to an early death as a result of cardiovascular issues as an adult, there is enough research to show that children with hypertension turn into adults with hypertension, which is a risk factor for cardiovascular issues, Samuels said. This is why it's vital that parents are aware of any blood pressure issues in children.

“Under the new definition we're better able to find kids at risk — we think that's a precursor to later cardiovascular issues,” he noted.

“Blood pressure is important in children and adolescents and should be measured at routine healthcare visits,” Dr. Stephen R. Daniels, pediatrician-in-chief at Children's Hospital Colorado.

Parents don't need to keep a certain number in mind because the numbers can change as the child ages. Pediatricians must discern if blood pressure is not normal and help parents understand the reading.

“It's good to have your child's blood pressure checked so you can be aware if it may be high and help prevent heart disease in their future,” Bazzano added.

(Source: *Healthline*)

Flood-hit houses to be fully rebuilt within a year

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The whole housing units undergone devastation by recent flooding will be fully retrofitted and reconstructed by the next year, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli has announced on Sunday. According to statistics and reports, 174,000 damaged houses have to be repaired, he stated, ISNA reported.

Over 100,000 household appliances have been supplied so far to be granted to the families affected by flood, while all 170,000 households must be provided with appliances as soon as possible, he highlighted.

Referring to the housing units being destroyed by flood, he said, “we will rebuild and repair the entire houses which undergone losses within next year.”

Extreme rainfall, starting on March 19, has caused flooding in 28 out of 31 provinces affecting 42,269,129 inhabitants in 253 cities and causing widespread damage to municipal facilities, including roads, sewage systems, health centers, hospitals, etc.

The floods have left 78 people dead and 1,137 injured. As many as 295,787 people have been displaced.

Trees must be planted across area half the size of London every year to offset climate damage of farming

An area nearly half the size of London should be planted with new trees every year to help tackle climate change, environmental experts have said.

Covering 70,000 hectares with new woodland across the UK annually would result in a net total of zero carbon emissions from farming, according to the think tank Green Alliance.

London covers 159,000 hectares.

Calling for more ambitious action on greenhouse gas emissions, a report by the alliance also advises the government to introduce a raft of measures including urging people to eat “less and better” meat and more plant-based foods.

The mass tree-planting scheme needs to start immediately to meet the National Farmers Union’s target of net zero carbon emissions from land use by 2040, the alliance believes.

Agriculture is one of the UK’s biggest greenhouse gas-emitting sectors and, together with other rural land use, in 2016 it produced more than four times the emissions of all UK industry.

Most other sectors of the economy have decarbonised over time, the report notes.

“The rapid rollout of measures in land management, combined with a shift to healthier diets, could cut net emissions from land use by nearly 60 per cent,” the report says.

Caterina Brandmayr of Green Alliance said: “UK farmers and land managers will be the main agents in rapidly cutting greenhouse gas emissions from land use. But the government needs to give them a stronger business case to act and support them through the transition, with incentives to innovate.”

Changes the group advises include: planting the equivalent of twice the area of Sheffield in trees each year across the UK, extensive peatland restoration and ending peatland burning, and new support for lower carbon farming methods, backed up by changes to consumer and business demand and trade deals that specify high environmental standards.

The Green Alliance recommends incentives for land managers to invest in low-carbon farming, peatland restoration and new woodland. The moves would enhance biodiversity, reduce flood risk and increase farm productivity, it claims.

Sir Graham Wynne, former member of the UK Committee on Climate Change, said: “Climate action is a big opportunity for UK farmers and land managers. If we get it right, new, low carbon models of land management will make farms more productive and resilient to the effects of climate change.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Chernobyl Computer Virus

(April 29, 1999)

The Chernobyl computer **virus** wiped the memories of hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide. Chris Nuttall, the BBC’s Internet Correspondent, reported. The Chernobyl virus was discovered last June, but despite warnings about its deadly effects from anti-virus software companies since then, it still appears to have **wreaked havoc** in certain parts of the world. In the West, companies protected their computers with anti-virus programmes which killed it off, but in Asia and the Middle East the same precautions have been ignored in many cases. Chernobyl also spreads through **pirated software**, which is rife in these parts of the world.

The media in China reported as many as a hundred thousand computers affected. South Korean officials estimated two hundred and fifty thousand were hit, and, in India, at least ten thousand PCs **crashed**, including ones run by major industries and financial institutions. In the Middle East, **data recovery experts** said there’d been a catastrophe, with thousands of computers affected. Egyptian firms sent workers home as their systems were **paralyzed**: and there were reports of thousands of computers losing vital information right across the Persian Gulf. Chernobyl has not been **propagated** to the same extent as the recent Melissa virus, which **jammed** networks with e-mail, but it has caused far greater damage.

Words

virus: a virus is usually a living organism, smaller even than bacteria, which causes an infectious disease in a body or plant. A computer virus is a malicious computer programme which damages computer systems.
to wreak havoc: to cause chaos and disorder
pirated software: computer software or programmes which has been copied without permission
is rife: if something is rife, it is very common. If a disease is rife somewhere it is very common or even out of control.
crash: if a computer crashes it suddenly fails
data recovery experts: computer experts who can retrieve information which appears to be lost
paralyzed: here, would not work, stopped
to propagate : to increase in number by reproducing or spreading. We say that plants propagate by seed
jammed: filled completely so everything stopped

(Source: BBC)

‘Proper vegetation cover could reduce flood damage’

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Distinguished environmentalist Mohammad Darvish has said that loss of vegetation cover and conversion of forests to rainfed farmlands has caused the country to be more vulnerable to flooding as proper vegetation cover could reduce flood damage.

“The flood is not always a disaster, but part of its destructive effects is the result of human activities that causes rain and floods to be destructive,” he said, adding, deforestation and lost vegetation are the major reasons behind severe floods in different regions.

Referring to the country’s plant species richness, he regretted that construction measure, tearing down the trees, excessive underground water withdrawal and soil erosion caused by the human have adversely depleted forests and its vegetation cover.

“In recent years, these valuable natural resources have undergone such overexploitation that could not contain flood caused by above normal rainfall,” he lamented, IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to the statistics published last year by Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization, about 55.5 percent of the country’s total land area are covered with watersheds, which accounts for 91 million hectares.

Moreover, some 255 cities amounting to 41.5 percent of the total cities across the country have been built in the riverbanks, 8,650 villages accounting for 12.7 percent of the country’s villages, and about 1



million hectares of agricultural lands, 20,000 qanats and many roads are at high risk of flood, as well.

“Plant species distribution reduces downstream flood levels and flows along with helping soil to absorb more water,” he highlighted, adding, this is while degradation of plant species contributed to catastrophic floods which hit most of the country’s provinces and imposed financial losses on the people.

Over the past six decades, northern forests which once stretched to 3.5 million hectares has dropped to about 1.6 million

hectares, he regretted.

“In Zagros, 30 percent of the forests have been lost and nearly 20 million oak trees were disappeared,” he also lamented.

Other factors contributing to destructive flood is land use changes, transforming forests into rainfed agricultural lands, as a large part of the Zagros forest is converted into farms, he noted, adding, in addition presence of livestock prevent young seedlings from growth.

“Undoubtedly, if the forests were in better condition, flood damage would decrease,” Darvish noted.

Iran loses 12,000 ha of forests annually

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Approximately 12,000 hectares of forests across the country is wiped out annually, an official with Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization has said.

While some 11,800 hectares will undergo reforestation again, however, the reforested land may not have the same biodiversity and vegetation as the original forest, ISNA quoted Reza Bayani as saying on Sunday.

Reforestation is the natural or intentional restocking of existing forests and woodlands (forestation) that have been depleted, usually through deforestation. Reforestation can be used to rectify or improve the quality of human life by soaking up pollution and dust from the air, rebuild natural habitats and ecosystems, mitigate global warming since forests facilitate biosequestration of atmospheric carbon dioxide, and harvest for resources, particularly timber, but also non-timber forest products.

Nonetheless, the reestablishment of forests is not just simple tree planting. Forests are made up of a community of species and they build dead organic matter into soils over time.

Iran has a great share of valuable old-growth forests, some of which, especially in Zagros, age over 300-400 years, he highlighted, implying that these forests are not comparable to the young reforested areas.

Certainly, a long period of time should be spent in



order to ensure that the reforested areas will function as the natural forests, for example, carbon sequestration, water penetration, soil stabilization, erosion prevention and water production will decide whether or not they are functioning, he further explained.

He went on to say that the country’s northern forests have been estimated at 2 million hectares about 60 years ago, and today it is stretching to 2,073,000 hectares taking replanted areas into account.

Referring to illegal logging as the leading cause of forest degradation, he noted that timber smuggling steadily proceeding in the forests poses a serious threat

to the country’s ecology.

Yousefali Ebrahimpour, commander of the protection unit of natural resources and watershed management department of the province earlier in February said that over 450 tons of smuggled log has been seized in the forests in West Azarbaijan province, which were being smuggled to the northern provinces of the country.

Small number of forest protection units, not enforcing laws and low fines are among the other factors exacerbating the condition, Ebrahimpour added.

Pointing out that some believe that the country’s forests will gradually disappear in future, Bayani added that the claim is unscientific and not precisely reliable, thus, there must be a scientific research on the issue to support it.

“We are trying to take more protection measures on the forests preventing them from depletion, and it is scheduled to enhance environmental protection by 90 percent,” he stated.

For instance, Zagros Mountain forests ranging northwest to southeast are currently covering 6 million hectares of the country, but there are no data or photos showing the forest on past decades to determine the changes over the past years, he regretted.

“We are trying to estimate the forest coverage in the Iranian calendar year 1346 (March 1967-March 1968) due to some aerial photos taken at that time, which is the only data we achieved,” he said.

Extinction Rebellion activists stage die-in protests across globe

Extinction Rebellion supporters around the world have held a series of mass die-ins to highlight the risk of the human race becoming extinct as a result of climate change.

Protesters in France, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, The Netherlands, the UK and other countries lay across the ground on Saturday at transport hubs, cultural centers and shopping centers to demand drastic action to avert environmental collapse.

At the Kelvingrove art gallery and museum in Glasgow, about 300 activists lay down beneath Dippy, the famous copy of a diplodocus skeleton which is currently touring the UK, for 20 minutes on the sound of a violin.

Many held handwritten signs with the question “Are we next?”, while children held pictures they had drawn of their favorite at-risk animals as part of the event organized by Wee Rebellion, a climate-change protest group for young people in Glasgow associated with Extinction Rebellion.

Twelve-year-old Lida said: “We want to raise awareness about climate change. If we keep carrying on the way we are humans may become extinct, like Dippy.” Aoibhin, 7, said: “Lots of animals are dying out because of climate change.”

Organizers of the die-in said Wee Rebellion would continue to hold protests until local and central governments committed to zero greenhouse gas emissions within 11 years and established climate citizens assemblies to oversee the changes.

The group said industrial agriculture, overfishing and deforestation could lead to food shortages in the UK and serious flooding in parts of Glasgow.

In Lund, a number of people took to the cobbled streets of the southern Swedish city in the rain, urging people to take greater notice of what they called a looming climate catastrophe.

Meanwhile, in Oslo, about 30 people occupied the floor of a shopping center. Extinction Rebellion Norway tweeted: “Full stoppage at Oslo City while we campaigned against the clothing industry’s wild environmental degradation. It is the world’s second largest polluter after the oil industry.”

Earlier, in Melbourne, protesters held placards saying, “You are never too small to make a difference” and “Species go extinct every day” as they lay on the

pavement outside Flinders Street station.

The actions were part of worldwide celebration at 12.05pm called by Extinction Rebellion Berlin following the protests that began in London in November 2018, which have since spawned a mass movement.

A spokesperson for the group said in a statement: “Our ecosystem is threatened by collapse, which will not only lead to mass extinction of countless species, the loss of soil fertility and more extreme weather but

will also bring with it the social crises of famine, war and migration.

“The small efforts we are doing each and every day, [such as] using less packaging, buying organic food and clothes, stopping drinking with plastic straws are clearly not enough. We need our governments to take their responsibilities seriously in order to ensure a future worth living to the inhabitants of our world.”

(Source: The Guardian)

First Announcement

Permit No.1398.586

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO. : 01-31-9480005

National Iranian South Oilfields Company intends to purchase the following goods

Material Description	Quantity
PARTS FOR “COOPER-BESSEMER” GAS TURBINE TYPE COBERRA-182 SERIAL NOS. SN-401,2,3,4,5 AND 6 RT RP FITTED TO COMPRESSOR TYPE RB7-6B , SERIAL NOS 1045-48-51-53 RC	04 ITEMS INCLUDING 100 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their “intention To Participate” letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir , not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 7,085 EURO or 343,556,814 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: WWW.nisoc.ir-material procurement management tab

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

OREIGN PURCHASING DEPT

Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site) Bldg No.104, Ahvaz, Iran

Tel/ Fax No.: 061 3445 7437

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تهران تایمز نویت اول ۹۸/۲/۹ نویت دوم ۹۸/۲/۱۲

Trump: ‘Saudi Arabia buys a lot, I don’t want to lose them’

➔ Trump went on: “I said we’re losing \$4.5 billion every year, we can’t do this anymore. This is crazy. He [King Salman] got very upset, angry, said this is not fair. I said, of course, this is fair. He said we’ll give you \$500 million more ... I said I want more. We argued. So they paid us more than \$500 million for one phone call, it took me one call.”

He said the king then asked him why he was calling, because “nobody had made such a call”. “That’s because they were stupid!” Trump said.

■ Increased scrutiny

U.S.-Saudi ties have faced increased criticism since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October.

Khashoggi, a longtime royal insider who had become a critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (also known as MBS), was killed and his body dismembered by a Saudi



team, Turkey has alleged.

The murder prompted a global outcry, with several countries imposing an arms embargo on the kingdom in light of the controversy. But Trump stood with the Saudi leadership.

At the time of the murder, Trump said: “If we foolishly cancel these contracts, Russia and China would be the enormous beneficiaries, and very happy to acquire all of this newfound business. “It would be a wonderful gift to them directly from the United States.”

In November, the CIA concluded that MBS, the de facto ruler and heir to the Saudi throne, ordered the assassination.

Saudi authorities have strongly denied the claim, and in private conversations with Western officials have instead criticized Turkish authorities for failing to stop the murder.

“Their intelligence knew that a (Saudi) hit squad was coming. They could have stopped them!” one of them quoted a Saudi official as saying.

Iraq summons U.S., Bahrain envoys over ‘meddlesome’ remarks

➔ The top Bahraini diplomat also lashed out at Sadr for blaming the political crisis in the Persian Gulf kingdom on the Al Khalifah rulers, calling the Iraqi politician a “fool” and a “dog” disguised as a man and claiming that Iran “controls” Iraq.

In a statement, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry condemned the “offensive” remarks and called for an official apology from the Manama regime.

The comments “are totally unacceptable in diplomatic practice. They also harm Iraq, its sovereignty and independence, especially when the Bahraini minister speaks of Iraq being under the control of neighboring Iran,” read the statement.

“Everyone must know their limits, abide by facts and have diplomatic qualifications. Today, Iraq is recovering and strengthening, and will not accept any interference in its affairs, nor will it accept any abuse of its national and

religious symbols,” it added.

■ ‘U.S. must respect Iraq’s ties with neighbors’

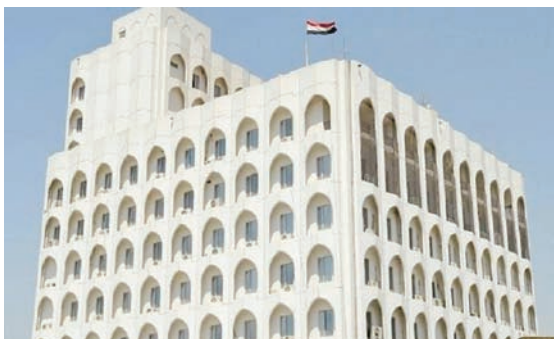
Separately on Saturday, Iraq called in the American chargé d’affaires after the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad posted messages on its Facebook page criticizing Iranian authorities.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the posts “represented a violation of diplomatic norms and international rules governing the operation of missions in host countries.”

It also requested that the U.S. diplomatic mission delete its posts and refrain from releasing messages that run contrary to the Iraqi Constitution and its foreign policy.

“Iraq adopts a policy based on the basic principles that its territory is not a corridor or a platform for harming neighboring countries or friendly countries ... whether by means of media, economy, commerce, military or security,” it said.

“Missions operating in Iraq must respect the rules and



international norms in their conduct and take into consideration in carrying out their duties the Constitution of Iraq and its relations with all neighboring countries,” it added.

‘Baghdadi failed to cross Syria into Iraq’

central province of Homs.

The official further noted that Baghdadi had been trying to enter Iraq for weeks, but could not succeed as strict security measures were being applied on the Iraqi-Syrian border.

He highlighted that the Daesh (ISIL) leader was now supported by a small number of close aides, who were mostly of Saudi, Tunisian and Iraqi origins.

The murder of a large number of Daesh terrorists in Syria and the subsequent elim-

ination of the terror group’s so-called caliphate “prompted Baghdadi to seek return to Iraq,” the source pointed out.

On April 3, Iraqi military aircraft dropped leaflets over desert areas in Anbar province, offering a reward of millions of dollars for intelligence that would lead to Baghdadi’s capture.

According to Press TV, the planes dropped the leaflets over Upper Euphrates towns, Bedouin encampments, and villages adjacent to the borders with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

“The leader of Daesh and his fighters stole your land and killed your people, and now he is hiding in safety away from the death and destruction that he planted. With your intelligence reports, you can avenge,” the leaflets read.

They carried pictures of Baghdadi and a promise of a reward of 25 million U.S. dollars for anyone, who provided information leading to the arrest of Baghdadi. The leaflets also provided two hot lines on WhatsApp messenger.

Four dead, 20 wounded in Tripoli air raids

TEHRAN — Air raids by the self-styled Libyan National Army against the capital Saturday night killed four people and wounded 20 others, Libya’s internationally recognized unity government said.

But Amin al-Hachemi, a spokesman for the Government of National Accord’s healthy ministry, Sunday warned that “the death toll could increase in the coming hours.”

A pro-GNA military source said the victims were civilians, AFP reported.

“Several sites were targeted by air strikes late Saturday night, causing victims among civilians,” the source told AFP. “Most of the strikes hit areas in the district of Abou Slim ... [but] none hit military targets.”

Strongman Khalifa Haftar’s LNA launched an offensive against Tripoli, the seat of the GNA, on April 4.

But after initial gains, Haftar’s forces have encountered stiff resistance on the southern outskirts and his troops have been pushed back in some areas.

At least 278 people have been killed and more than



1,300 wounded in the clashes, according to a toll released Wednesday by the World Health Organization.

The GNA accuses Haftar of using foreign planes to carry out air strikes, without naming a country of origin.

“This criminal conceals his failures and those of his soldiers at the gates of Tripoli by resorting to foreign aviation to hit unarmed civilians in the city,” spokesman Mohamad Younes said on the GNA’s official Facebook page.

Haftar’s offensive has sharpened fault lines in policy towards Libya among world powers.

On April 18, Russia and the United States opposed a British bid backed by France and Germany at the U.N. Security Council to demand a cease-fire in the North African country.

The White House revealed the next day that Donald Trump had reached out personally to Haftar in a phone call, during which the US president “recognized Field Marshal Haftar’s significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya’s oil resources”.

The country has been mired in chaos since the NATO-backed uprising that deposed and killed dictator Moammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Saudi royal adviser missing in Khashoggi trial: officials

TEHRAN- One of the two top Saudi royal officials linked to journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s killing has been absent in the closed-door trial of 11 suspects, multiple sources have told the AFP news agency.

Saudi prosecutors have said that deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Asiri oversaw the Washington Post columnist’s killing in the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate last October and that he was advised by the royal court’s media tsar Saud al-Qahtani.

Both aides were part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s tight-knit inner circle and have formally been sacked over the killing but only al-Asiri has appeared in the five court hearings since January, according to four Western officials privy to the information.

“Qahtani is not among the 11 facing trial,” one of the Western officials told AFP. “What does his absence mean? Are the Saudis eager to protect him or discipline him separately? No one knows.”

The kingdom’s public prosecutor last November indicted 11 unnamed suspects, including five who could face the death penalty over the murder.

Diplomats from the UN Security Council’s permanent members, the US, Britain, France, China, Russia, as well as Turkey are allowed to attend as ob-

servers of the legal proceedings that are held entirely in Arabic.

They are not allowed to bring interpreters and are usually summoned at short notice, the sources said.

Maher Mutreb, an intelligence operative who frequently travelled with the crown prince on foreign tours, forensic expert Salah al-Tubaigy and Fahad al-Balawi, a member of the Saudi royal guard, are among the 11 on trial who could face the death penalty, the officials said.

The defendants are allowed legal counsel. Many of them have defended themselves in court by saying they were carrying out orders by al-Asiri, describing him as the “ringleader” of the operation, according to the officials.

■ Al-Qahtani missing

Al-Asiri, lionised in Saudi military ranks as a war hero, does not face the death penalty, the Western officials added.

Believed to have previously worked closely with US intelligence, he is also not named in two US sanctions lists of Saudis implicated in the murder.

Al-Qahtani, who led fiery social media campaigns against critics of the kingdom and was seen as a conduit to the crown prince, is on both lists.

He met the Saudi hit squad team before



they left for Turkey to share “useful information related to the mission based on his specialisation in media,” according to the Saudi prosecutor’s office.

But he has not appeared publicly since the murder and his current whereabouts are a subject of fevered speculation.

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius reported earlier this year that Prince Mohammed continues to seek his counsel, citing US and Saudi sources.

“Qahtani holds a lot of files and dossiers,” Ignatius quoted one American who met the crown prince as saying.

“The idea that you can have a radical

rupture with him is unrealistic.”

■ ‘Prince Mohammed’s order’

The CIA has reportedly said the murder was likely ordered by Prince Mohammed, the de facto ruler and heir to the throne.

Saudi authorities strongly deny the allegation, and in private conversations with Western officials they have instead criticised Turkish authorities for failing to stop the killing.

“Their intelligence knew that a (Saudi) hit squad was coming. They could have stopped them!” a Saudi official was quoted as saying.

According to al Jazeera, Turkish officials were the first to report Khashoggi’s murder and have continued to press Saudi Arabia for information on the whereabouts of his dismembered body, which has yet to be found.

Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur conducting an independent inquiry into the killing, last month condemned what she called a lack of transparency in the legal proceedings and demanded an open trial.

The kingdom “is grievously mistaken if it believes that these proceedings, as currently constituted, will satisfy the international community,” she said.

It was unclear when the Saudi trial will conclude.

Turkish FM visits Iraq to discuss trade, water

TEHRAN — Turkey’s foreign minister is in Iraq to discuss trade, border security and water resources.

The two-day visit beginning Sunday will include stops in the autonomous Kurdish region and Basra, Iraq’s main oil hub, AP reported.

Turkey is expected to rebalance its oil supplies after the U.S. announced it would end the waivers that have allowed Turkey to import from Iran despite sanctions. Iraq is one of Turkey’s leading suppliers of crude oil.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu met with his Iraqi counterpart, Mohamed Alhakim, in Baghdad Sunday.

He said Turkey would send a special representative to Iraq to discuss water resources after an exceptionally wet winter filled reservoirs and caused flooding in both countries.

Alhakim said Iraq would facilitate trade with Turkey and called on Turkish firms to invest in Iraq.

Sri Lankan police raid extremist group suspected of suicide bombings

Sri Lankan armed police Sunday launched a search of the headquarters of an extremist group, National Thawheedh Jamaath, suspected of being behind the suicide bombings on churches and hotels that killed more than 250 people, a Reuters witness said.

The raid took place at the NTJ’s base in the eastern town of Kattankudy a day after the group was banned under new emergency laws. Police believe that Zahran Hashim, the alleged mastermind of the Easter Sunday attacks, led the group or a splinter faction to mount the attacks in Colombo as well as a church in Batticaloa in the east.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia open to possible new arms control deals with U.S.

TEHRAN — Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov, commenting on a media report that U.S. President Donald Trump wants a new arms control deal with Moscow and Beijing, said Russia was open to the possibility of new arms control deals, but that there were no ongoing talks.

Citing administration officials, The Washington Post reported Thursday that Trump has ordered his administration to prepare a push for a new arms control agreement with Russia and China due to the mounting cost of the 21st-century nuclear arms race, Reuters reported.

Ushakov, in remarks to Russian state TV released Sunday, said Moscow was ready to hold talks about the subject.

“Firstly, what exists already [by way of arms control agreements] needs to be honored,” said Ushakov. “We are also ready for new ones, but for that serious negotiations are needed and unfortunately so far nobody has embarked on any.”

Ushakov’s words were more upbeat than those of a Kremlin spokesman who Saturday dismissed Trump’s proposals on nuclear arms disarmament as “not serious.”

Relations between Moscow and Washington are strained and both countries have said they are quitting the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, stoking fears of a wider arms race.

Spaniards flock to polls in wide-open election after tense campaign

TEHRAN — A divided Spanish electorate flocked to the polls on Sunday, responding to a plea from party leaders for a high turnout in what promises to be the country’s most open-ended and potentially pivotal election in decades.

After a tense campaign dominated by a debate over national identity and other emotive issues such as gender equality, a fragmented parliament beckons - featuring the first bloc of far-right lawmakers since Spain’s return to democracy in the 1970s.

According to Reuters, the Socialists of outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez are expected to finish first. But opinion polls show no single party close to winning a majority, making it likely that any coalition deal will take weeks or months to broker and feeding in turn into a broader mood of political uncertainty across Europe.

A repeat election is a distinct possibility.

“Above all else today, Spaniards should vote in large numbers to send a ... clear message of what we (as a nation) want over the next four years,” Sanchez told reporters after voting at a polling station near Madrid.

Australian PM promises migration cut, refugee freeze if re-elected

TEHRAN — Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, trailing in opinion polls ahead of a May 18 election, on Sunday campaigned on the hot-button issue of immigration, promising to cut annual migrant numbers and freeze the country’s refugee intake.

The pace of migration and the over crowding of Australia’s major cities is a sensitive issue amongst voters in a nation where 29 per cent of the 25.3 million people were born overseas and where migration levels now outstrip the birthrate.

“Managing our population growth is very important to the quality of life that we have in our cities,” Morrison said from a Liberal party rally in Sydney on Sunday.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics says net overseas migration in the year to September 2018 was 240,100.

The prime minister said if his government was re-elected it would cap annual migrant numbers at 160,000 people per year for the next four years.

The restriction does not include more than 350,000 foreign students granted visas each year, the majority of whom end up staying and who pump millions of dollars through the nation’s universities, according to Department of Home Affairs figures.

Voters in the largest cities of Sydney and Melbourne where most migrants settle have growing concerns over congestion, inadequate infrastructure and the rising cost of living.

British police investigate online picture reported to be Sala’s body

British Police said on Sunday they were investigating how a picture reported to be of the body of Argentinian footballer Emiliano Sala had been taken and posted online.

Sala, 28, had been flying from his previous club Nantes in western France to Wales on Jan. 21 to join up with Cardiff City when the single-engined Piper Malibu aircraft disappeared over the English Channel.

Wreckage was found on Feb. 3 following a privately-funded underwater search and a body was recovered three days later. Later that month Sala’s body was flown back to Argentina for his funeral.

“We are aware that a picture reported to be of Mr Sala’s body has been shared on social media channels and are disgusted that someone did this,” a spokeswoman for Dorset Police said in a statement.

“It is clearly a very difficult time for Mr Sala’s family and they should not have to endure additional pain that this shameful act will undoubtedly cause. We are investigating this incident and are working together with a number of agencies to establish how the picture was taken and who is responsible.”

(Source: Guardian)

Norwich seal promotion to Premier League with win over Blackburn

Norwich City sealed promotion to the Premier League with a 2-1 win over Blackburn Rovers in the Championship on Saturday, while Sheffield United are on the brink of joining them after a 2-0 victory over Ipswich Town.

Norwich needed just a point to be sure of a return to the English top flight after a three-year absence, but goals from Marco Stiepermann and Mario Vrancic were enough to secure all three, sending Norwich back to the top of the standings.

Norwich are nine points clear of Leeds United — who have two games left to play — in third, while Sheffield United are six clear of Leeds after goals from Scott Hogan and Jack O’Connell helped them secure a third successive win.

Sheffield United’s far superior goal difference to Leeds’ (13) means it would take a monumental turnaround to deny them a return to the Premier League after 12 years.

“It’s hard to find the right words,” Norwich forward Stiepermann told Sky Sports. “The lads have been outstanding this season - we’ve had such a great spirit and such a great bond in the team.

“It feels completely unreal, it’s a dream come true and I just feel so happy for the players because they all deserve it.”

Sheffield United can still win the league as they trail Norwich by three points, and manager Chris Wilder insists his side are targeting the title, not just promotion.

“There’s still a game to play, and we’re going to go a try and win the Championship,” Wilder said. “It’s not finished yet.

“This has possibly been the longest week of my life. It’s been a bit surreal, one defeat in 13 and an unbelievable run since Christmas.”

(Source: Eurosport)

Murray to attempt comeback if his body allows it

Former world number one Andy Murray said he is under no pressure to return to competitive tennis after undergoing hip resurfacing surgery earlier this year but he would attempt to make a comeback if his body allowed it.

The three-times Grand Slam champion said at this year’s Australian Open that constant pain in his hip had brought him to the verge of quitting the sport but revealed last month that he was pain free after the procedure in January.

“I have been hitting the ball from a stationary position but I haven’t been doing any movement,” Murray told BBC at Sunday’s London Marathon where he was invited to fire the starting pistol for the elite men’s race.

“I don’t feel any pressure to get playing again but if my body will allow, I will try.”

Murray had posted a short video on social media earlier this month which showed him hitting the ball in an outdoor court while rallying with a wall and followed that up with a video of himself playing a round of golf.

“The hip is really good and there is no pain any more,” Murray added. “I’m just a bit weak from the incision in the operation. I’m pain-free, happy and enjoying my life.”

(Source: Reuters)

Neymar says he was wrong to hit fan after cup-final defeat

Brazilian superstar Neymar accepted on Sunday that he had made a mistake striking a fans who insulted Paris Saint-Germain players as they filed up to collect their French Cup losers’ medals.

Neymar scored to put PSG 2-0 up after 21 minutes at the Stade de France on Saturday, but Rennes fought back to tie the game at 2-2 and win the penalty shootout 6-5 after extra time.

As the players climbed the steps to receive their medals, shaking the hands of those nearby, Neymar, one of the last in line, struck one of the fans in the face. The blow was caught on numerous mobile phones, including that of the victim, Edouard, a 28-year-old delivery driver from Nantes.

“Did I act badly?” Neymar asked in an Instagram comment. “Yes. But no one can stay indifferent.”

A Brazilian friend of Neymar’s, Alex Bernardo, posted on Instagram a transcript of the comments audible on Edouard’s video starting with unused reserves goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and defender Layvin Kurzawa.

“Oh, Buffon, dirty Bouffon! Oh, Kurzawa, keep your hand to yourself!”

Then to Marco Verratti: “Oh, racist!” and to Neymar: “Oh, go and learn to play football.”

(Source: AFP)

Racism in football: ‘Worst thing you can do is leave the pitch,’ says Mido

Former Egypt international Mido says players leaving the field of play even if they’ve suffered racist abuse from fans is “the worst thing you can do.”

Mido’s comments come amid renewed pressure on football governing bodies to tackle the issue of racism in the sport after a number of high profile incidents.

Most recently, fans of Italian football club Lazio chanted racist abuse at AC Milan midfielder Tiemoue Bakayoko and, last month, players of the England national team were abused during a match against Montenegro.

UEFA announced on Friday that Montenegro would play its next home match behind closed doors as punishment.

“I still think that a player should never leave the pitch if racist chants happen,” Mido, 36, told CNN Sport, when asked what he deemed to be the correct course of action for player to take.

“Score goals, try to stop them by playing well and win.”

■ ‘You need punishment’

The striker, who made 94 appearances in the English Premier League, revealed he experienced racism “many times” during his playing career at Middlesbrough, England, and believes nothing much has changed since he left the club 10 years ago.

He also called upon the Football Association (FA), English football’s governing body, to hold clubs responsible for the behavior



of their fans.

“I don’t think the FA is doing enough to stop racism,” said Mido. “I know a lot of campaigns are coming out but campaigns are not enough, you need punishment.

“If someone goes to the stadium and starts racist chants then the club needs to be punished as well. If the club is punished, then believe me, it would stop.”

The FA has a number of schemes which it hopes will “eradicate” racism in football, while the EPL launched the “No Room for Racism” campaign, which it says demonstrates

its “continued commitment to equality.”

■ Sterling example

Mido says he’s been inspired by the character shown by England and Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling.

The 24-year-old Sterling has spoken out on the racism both he and his fellow teammates have experienced and has become an unofficial spokesperson in the fight.

He was presented with the Integrity and Impact Award at the BT Sport Industry Awards on Thursday for his role in tackling discrimination.

Vardy scores twice as Leicester dent Arsenal’s top-four hopes



Jamie Vardy scored twice as Leicester inflicted a blow to Arsenal’s hopes of qualifying for the Champions League with a dominant victory at the King Power Stadium.

The unmarked Yuri Tielemans headed in a cross from James Maddison just before the hour mark, before Vardy struck late on with a header and a tap-in from close range.

Arsenal played almost an hour of the contest with 10 men after Ainsley Maitland-Niles was sent off.

A third successive Premier League defeat left them a point behind fourth-placed Chelsea, who face Manchester United at Old Trafford at 16.30 BST on Sunday.

Leicester still have a slim chance of finishing seventh - they are five points behind Wolves - which could earn a Europa League place depending on the outcome of the FA Cup final.

Arsenal’s task was made significantly more difficult after Maitland-Niles was sent off for the first time in his career following two bookings in the space of 28 minutes - for a soft foul on Ben Chilwell and then needlessly scything down Maddison near the halfway line.

However, a three-goal margin flattered Arsenal and, even with a full complement of players, it is difficult to envisage a different outcome such as the conviction of the performance of Brendan Rodgers’ Leicester.

Arsenal were indebted to goalkeeper Bernd Leno for a string of fine saves, the pick a magnificent one-handed diving effort to paw away a Wilfred Ndidi header.

■ Deja vu for Gunners and Vardy

Arsenal fans must be fed up with the sight of Vardy, such is the England’s striker’s potency against them.

He has scored eight goals in as many matches against the Gunners - and now has 10 in his past nine appearances against any opposition.

While much has been made of the young squad that Rodgers will seek mould at Leicester, 32-year-old Vardy remains an influential presence.

He may not quite have the explosive pace which fired Leicester to the title in 2015-16, but the intelligence and timing of his runs remain sharp.

His first goal came after he lifted the ball over Leno, watched it rebound against the crossbar, then headed it home.

His second, in the fifth minute of stoppage time, was a routine finish from Ricardo Pereira’s low cross.

(Source: BBC)

Police investigate Sancho incident amid fan trouble in Dortmund



German police are investigating an incident in which England international Jadon Sancho was struck by what appeared to be a cigarette lighter thrown from the away block during Borussia Dortmund’s 4-2 defeat to local rivals Schalke on Saturday.

A number of arrests were made amid trouble from both sets of fans, during a tense day on which Schalke dealt a severe blow to their rivals’ Bundesliga title bid.

TV footage showed Sancho, 19, being hit by a projectile as he celebrated Dortmund’s opening goal with teammates just in front of the Schalke fan section. He was briefly taken off the pitch for treatment, but returned to play the rest of the game.

In a statement on Saturday, police said they had opened criminal proceedings on the basis of aggravated battery.

The Ruhr derby is generally subjected to a high level of security, with hundreds of police officers deployed to keep opposing fan groups separated both at the game and on their way to and from the stadium.

Saturday’s game in Dortmund was nonetheless overshadowed by a handful of ugly incidents, involving what police called an “unteachable and violent minority” of fans.

Despite Sterling confessing that he “didn’t mean to be a leader”, Mido wants other players to follow his example.

“I’m really proud of Sterling. To see someone stand up for the cause and take responsibility. It’s something that we want to see players doing,” he said.

“He’s been brilliant, the way he has developed as a character has been brilliant through the the years. It’s amazing to see a guy like him taking responsibility.”

On Monday, Sterling fronted a campaign led by UK newspaper The Times, calling for the footballing authorities to change the way in which it tackles racism, as well as demanding stronger sanctions for those found guilty of the abuse.

In his own article as part of the launch of the action plan, Sterling wrote: “I don’t want the next generation to suffer like me.”

In its response to The Times’ manifesto the FA said that it agreed that there needed to be “radical change” at the top.

“In 2018 The FA launched its equality, diversity and inclusion plan, ‘In Pursuit of Progress’ where we set out clear targets, as the manifesto requests, for BAME coaches, employees and leaders,” said English football’s governing body.

“We have set ourselves the target to reach 16% BAME employees by 2021 [from 13%] and 11% in leadership positions [from 5%].”

(Source: CNN)

Relentless Barca in Liga of their own

Barcelona underlined their hegemony of Spanish football by clinching the La Liga title with three games to spare after Lionel Messi came off the bench to fire them to a 1-0 win over Levante on Saturday in front of a 91,000-strong Nou Camp crowd.

Captain and all-time top scorer Messi hoisted the trophy into the Barcelona sky to signal his side’s 26th title overall, their eighth in 11 years, and for the second season in a row, no-one in Spain has come close to competing with the Catalans.

Barca’s dominance of Spanish soccer has been so pronounced that newspaper Marca recently described their vice-like grip on La Liga as “a dictatorship”, adding that “the domestic competition has become Barcelona’s comfort zone”.

After a stuttering start to the campaign in which Sevilla and Atletico traded places with Ernesto Valverde’s side at the top of the standings, Barca rose to the summit again at the start of December and rarely looked like being unseated.

Their last defeat was in early November, when they were humbled 4-3 at home by Real Betis and questions were raised about their fragile defence, with Messi coming out and publicly urging his team mates to improve at the back.

His criticism had the intended impact. After dropping points in five of their opening 12 games, Barca went on a relentless run after the Betis loss, winning 18 of their next 23 matches to get their hands on the trophy.

“Barcelona is a great club but we have made it even greater,” said midfielder Sergio Busquets, who was celebrating his eighth title with the club.



“Of course having the best player in the world with you makes things easier, but we have all contributed to this.”

Barca effectively banished Real Madrid from the title race with a 1-0 win in the Clasico in March, inflicting more pain on their biggest rivals, who have endured a harrowing season and sacked two managers before re-appointing Zinedine Zidane.

Atletico ran Barca a little closer but never really looked like catching the Catalans, who wrapped their tentacles around the title by beating Diego Simeone’s side 2-0 this month with late goals from Messi and Luis Suarez.

■ THICKER SKIN

Messi and Suarez may have led from the front but Barca have also developed a thicker skin this season, backed up by the remarkable consistency of Gerard Pique, who has only missed two games and played every minute when available.

His defensive partner Clement Lenglet, meanwhile, has adapted superbly to his first campaign at the club, as have fellow new arrivals Arthur Melo and Arturo Vidal.

Even Ousmane Dembele, who was seen to have serious discipline problems after oversleeping and failing to turn up to two training sessions, has turned into a crowd favourite.

“Winning La Liga gives you satisfaction because it tells you over time who is the best over the whole season,” said Barca coach Valverde.

“But I have one advantage: my players are magnificent, so it’s easier to achieve what we have done. This is a group which always prepares mentally for every competition. Whenever we have faced top level opponents we have always responded well.

“La Liga is our daily bread, it consumes you from August to May and we really appreciate what we have achieved because we have had to come through some difficult moments.”

With the title in the bag and their domestic dominance beyond doubt, Barca’s main challenge is to put right their recent failures in continental football and add the Champions League, which they last won in 2015.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran lose to S. Korea at AFC U19 Women’s Championship

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Korea Republic maintained their perfect record in the AFC U19 Women’s Championship Thailand 2019 qualification, moving to within touching distance of the Finals with a 2-0 win over Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday.

A goal in each half secured victory for Hur Jung-jae’s side, who had begun the final stage of qualifying with a 9-0 win over Lebanon on Friday.

Iran’s defeat comes as a blow to their chances of reaching Thailand 2019, but it is by no means a fatal one, with their destiny to be decided on the final Matchday on Tuesday.

As the two-time Asian champions at this age level, the Koreans began strongly and took the lead through Jo Min-ah, who found the back of the net in the 28th minute to give the East Asian side a 1-0 half-time lead, the-afc.com reported.

Iran had performed well in the second half of their opening-night tie with group hosts Vietnam, and they did the same here, with only a late second goal from 18-year-old midfielder Hye Jong giving Korea Republic breathing space with five minutes remaining.

Korea Republic will face Vietnam in Tuesday’s final Matchday, while Iran will be fighting for qualification against Lebanon on the same day.



Ali Davoudi claims gold at Asian Weightlifting Championships



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ali Davoudi took a gold medal in super heavyweight of the 2019 Asian Weightlifting Championships in Ningbo, China on Sunday.

The Iranian weightlifter lifted 195kg in the snatch and 237kg to end on a total of 432kg in the men’s +109kg weight category.

Chen Shih-chieh from Chinese Taipei claimed a silver medal, lifting a total of 422kg and Hojamuhammet Toychiyev from Turkmenistan snatched a bronze medal

overall on 421kg.

Reza Beiralvand had won a gold medal in the 102kg on Friday.

Ali Miri (89 kg), Ayoub Mousavi (96kg) and Amir Hoghoughi won three silver medals in the competition.

The 2019 Asian Weightlifting Championships took place in Ningbo, China from April 17 to 29. Over 460 athletes from 29 countries and regions, including China, Iran, Japan, South Korea and India partook at the competition.

Iranian woman makes history by winning first medal in Asian Cycling Championships



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Somayeh Yazdani wrote her name in the history book, becoming the first Iranian woman to win a medal in the Asian Cycling Championships underway in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Yazdani won the bronze medal at the road event with a time of 3:10:04.

Uzbekistan’s Olga Zabelinskaya claimed the gold medal, clocking 3:09:05.

Na Ah-Reum from South Korea claimed a silver with a time of 3:09:52.

More than 500 athletes from 40 Asian countries and regions are taking part in the most prestigious cycling competition of the continent in Uzbekistan, according to the joint statement of the Asian Cycling Confederation and Uzbekistan’s Cycling Federation.

Cyclists compete for the 57 sets of medals, as well as for tickets to take part in the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in Japan.

Karim Ansarifard nets Nottingham Forest winner

Martin O’Neill joked that he could have ‘killed’ Karim Ansarifard, prior to seeing the striker score the vital goal that earned Nottingham Forest a precious 1-0 win at QPR.

The Iranian international was twice denied by fine saves from Joe Lumley, before finally beating the Hoops keeper to net the only goal in the 55th minute.

Reds stopper Costel Pantilimon also had to produce some heroics - including a superb late penalty save - to help O’Neill’s side secure their first away win since November and their first back-to-back wins since September.

But it was Ansarifard who was to produce the other significant moment of the game, as he latched onto a pass from Joao Carvalho, to net his second goal for the club in emphatic fashion.

Even if O’Neill was frustrated not to see the 29-year-old net before then.

“QPR were throwing everything at us. But we had a number of chances ourselves on the break,” said O’Neill. “The most clear cut chances fell to us.

“Karim scored a very good goal, having had a very good chance in the first half, to give us the lead. When the game is like that, things are always in the balance.

“Karim is a very good finisher. So we were a little bit disappointed that he did not put his previous chance away.

“I could have killed him for that! But he pulled it around in the second half.



“He took his chance brilliantly, when you consider that might have been at the back of his mind, his previous failure to score.”

Forest’s hopes of reaching the play-offs had been dashed by a run of four Championship defeats.

But they responded with a thumping 3-0 win over Middlesbrough on Monday, before following that up in the capital with a stereotypical away win, that saw them defend solidly to secure a 1-0 success.

“Obviously I am delighted to have won the game; to

have won away from home for the first time in a long time, while getting consecutive wins - they are all monkeys off our back,” said O’Neill.

“It was nice to win and it was a great goal to win the game.

“We had to withstand pressure; it was a totally different game to last week. But naturally I am delighted to have won.

“QPR did put a great deal of pressure on us, but we withstood it. Pantilimon made a big save for us.

“Whether it was a penalty or not is debatable, but he made a big save and we were delighted to see it through.”

Forest named a very similar side to the one that had beaten Middlesbrough, with Sam Byram coming into the starting XI in place of Pele, who had a thigh problem.

But O’Neill had warned his players that it was likely to be a very different game, prior to kick-off.

“It was a totally different kind of win and that was our message to the players, this week,” he said.

“We played well against Middlesbrough and we went into this game with confidence. But we did not expect the same amount of room as we had at the City Ground.

“I saw QPR play exceptionally well against Derby. This was always going to be difficult for us.

“The wind caused a few problems during the match, but when the ball was down on the ground and played, it was fine.

“The goal that we worked was terrific.”

(Source: Nottinghampost.com)

Japan double golden delight at badminton Asia Championships

Japan’s world number one Kento Momota roared back from a game down to defeat Shi Yuqi of China and retain his Badminton Asia Championships title on Sunday.

On a red-letter day for Japan in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Akane Yamaguchi became the first Japanese to win the women’s crown with an emphatic victory over home player He Bingjiao.

In a repeat match of last year’s World Championships final, second-ranked Shi powered into a 6-0 lead in the first game.

Momota -- who beat Shi to win the world title -- briefly drew level, before the 23-year-old Chinese took the opening game 21-12.

The 24-year-old Momota appeared to lack his explosive best and was behind early in the second game too, before forcing level at 11-11.

The Japanese top seed then belatedly found his rhythm and sealed the second game 21-18 with a delicious smash.

The momentum was all with Momota now and he clinched the title in 69 minutes by easily winning the third game 21-8 against a badly deflated Shi.

There was more joy for Japan at the home of their arch rivals as Yamaguchi, a silver medallist two years ago, romped to victory against fifth-seeded He 21-19, 21-9.

The 21-year-old Yamaguchi, the third seed, raced out of the blocks in both games against her stunned opponent from China, who is a year older.

Yamaguchi went 12-2 up in the first game and was ahead 11-1 in the second on the way to the title in just 42 one-sided minutes.

“Becoming the first Asian women’s singles champion from Japan is not that important to me,” said Yamaguchi with a hint of mischief.

“Instead, I was proud to be on the top of the podium surrounded by three Chinese opponents,” she added, referring to He and bronze medallists Chen Yufei and Cai Yanyan. (Source: AFP)



Iran Greco-Roman wrestling team crowned in Asia

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian Greco-Roman grapplers claimed the title of the 2019 Asian Wrestling Championship on Sunday.

The Iranian wrestlers won four gold medals and three bronzes in the competition held in Xi’an, China.



Hossein Nouri and Amir Ghasemi Monjezi claimed two gold medals in the 87kg and 130kg in the Day 1 of the competition.

Iranian wrestlers also won two bronze medals on Saturday. Saman Abdevali in the 63kg and Mohammad Ali Geraei in the 77kg earned two bronze medals on Saturday.

On Sunday, Mohammad Reza Geraei won the gold medal in the 72kg.

Saeid Abdevali also took Iran’s fourth gold at the 82kg.

Mahdi Aliyari claimed a bronze medal in Day 2.

Iran freestyle team had already won title in the competition.

Esteghlal FC reportedly suspends Winfried Schäfer till season end

MNA — Managers of Tehran-based Esteghlal FC have reportedly suspended the activity of the team’s head coach Winfried Schäfer due to team’s failures.

Winfried and his son, Sascha Oliver Schäfer, have been suspended till the end of the season, Varzesh3 website reported. As the German coach’s contract expires at the end of next season, Esteghlal managers are trying to agree with him to end his contract sooner.

Farhad Majidi, a fans’ favorite and Schäfer’s assistant, is going to be the caretaker coach of the team in the remaining games of the season both in Iran Professional League and in the AFC Champions League.

Hours after the news broke out, Esteghlal FC President Amirhossein Fathi denied it as ‘media speculations’, saying that the club has not yet decided on the case. “We have lost an important game but no decision has been adopted by us about dismissing Schäfer and his replacement with Majidi.”

Esteghlal has almost lost hope to gain IPL title with a 1-0 Saturday loss to 5th ranked Padided. The Blues now have 50 points and stand third in the table, 6 points behind their arch-rivals Persepolis. The Tehran-based team have been eliminated from this season’s Hazfi Cup. Esteghlal are also seated third in Group C of ACL with 4 points, having a faint hope to advance to the round of 16.

Pericles Chamusca takes over at Al Hilal

Al Faisaly’s Pericles Chamusca has replaced Zoran Mamic as the new Al Hilal first team coach according to a club statement.

The 53-year-old Chamusca took charge of a training session of the Riyadh-based club, who currently sit on top of Group C in the 2019 AFC Champions League, on Saturday.

Mamic’s final game for the 2017-18 Saudi Pro League champions was Friday’s 5-0 defeat against Al Taawoun in the 2019 King’s Cup semi-finals. “Al Hilal Club Board of Directors decided on Saturday to terminate the contract of the Croatian first team manager Zoran Mamic, as the club Board reached an agreement with Al Faisaly club management for the services of Brazilian manager Pericles Chamusca on loan until the end of the season, in which the Honorary Member of the club His Royal Highness Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal funded the cost of the agreement,” read the statement on the club’s Twitter account.

Chamusca’s first test for the 15-time league champions will be against Al Taawoun in the Saudi Pro League at the King Saud University Stadium on Monday.

(Source: Al Hilal Football Club)

Kipchoge runs second-fastest marathon for fourth London win

Kenya’s Eliud Kipchoge stormed to a record-breaking fourth victory in the London Marathon on Sunday with the second-fastest time ever seen over the distance.

Olympic champion Kipchoge’s time of two hours two minutes and 37 seconds was second only to the 2:01:39 he ran in Berlin last year.

The 34-year-old, whose previous London triumphs came in the 2015, 2016 and 2018 editions, was in imperious form as he powered ahead from the 14-mile mark, with Ethiopia’s Mosinet Geremew and Mule Wasihun second and third respectively.

“I’m happy to win on the streets of London for the fourth time and to make history, on a day that the event has raised £1 billion (for charity),” Kipchoge told the BBC.

“The crowd in London is wonderful and that spirit pushed,” added Kipchoge, who has now won 11 of the 12 marathons he’s contested. Asked where he would run next, he replied: “As usual, I do not chase two rabbits, I only chase one and that was London. I have caught that rabbit so I will discuss with my team what follows.”

Britain’s Mo Farah, whose build-up to race day was overshadowed by an extraordinary row with distance great Haile Gebrselassie over an alleged robbery in a hotel owned by the Ethiopian great, could not cope with the pace as he finished in fifth place.

Gebrselassie responded to Farah’s allegations by saying the four-time Olympic champion and his entourage had featured “multiple reports of disgraceful conduct”.

“It didn’t distract me at all,” he insisted. “What I said is the truth and it was all about the London Marathon today. I didn’t mean to take any limelight away from the sport... Had I won the race, it would have been a different story, but I think I will take time to think about the next step.” (Source: Eurosport)

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There is enough good breeding in you
to avoid what evil you see in others.

Imam Ali (AS)

Farabi director meets CEOs of Dhaka, Slemeni film festivals

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The director of Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation, Alireza Tabesh, has met the director of the Dhaka International Film Festival, Ahmed Mujtaba Jamal, and the manager of the Slemeni Film Festival, Fuad Jalal Rashed.



Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation director, Alireza Tabesh (L), and Dhaka International Film Festival director Ahmed Mujtaba Jamal meet in Tehran.

The meetings were organized during the 37th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran that ended last Thursday, the foundation announced on Sunday.

Ways to cooperate on joint film projects and to screen Iranian films in Bangladesh and Iraqi Kurdistan were discussed during the meetings.

Tehran cinematheque to review Stanley Kubrick's "Shining"

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The cinematheque of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) will review American filmmaker Stanley Kubrick's 1980 horror film "The Shining" today. Iranian critic Saeid Aqiqi will attend the review session, which will be organized after a screening at 5 pm.

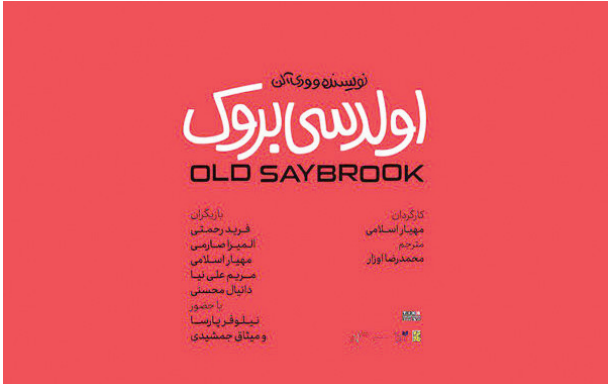
Starring Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall, "The Shining" is about Jack, a writer and recovering alcoholic, who becomes the off-season caretaker of the isolated historic Overlook Hotel in the Colorado Rockies, and has to spend the whole winter there with his wife, Wendy and little son, Danny.

After a winter storm leaves them snowbound, Jack's sanity deteriorates due to the influence of the supernatural forces that inhabit the hotel, placing his wife and son in danger.

Woody Allen's "Old Saybrook" to return to Tehran theater

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mahyar Eslami plans to stage Woody Allen's play "Old Saybrook" at Tehran's Divare Chaharom Theater on May 5.

The absurdist play is about Max, a writer who has left his play unfinished. Characters in the play finally get bored and a fight breaks out between the characters and the writer.



A poster for Woody Allen's play "Old Saybrook".

Farid Rahmati, Elmira Saremi, Mahyar Eslami and Nilufar Parsa are the main members of the cast for the play, which will be on stage for about one month.

Earlier in March, director Sajjad Qatei staged a reading of the play at Shahrzad Theater in Tehran.

Venice Biennale to showcase works by three artists from Iran

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Works by Iranian artists Reza Lavasani, Samira Alikhanzadeh and Ali Mirazimi will be put on display at the Venice Biennale this year.

The 58th edition of the international art exhibition, which has chosen the slogan "May You Live in Interesting Times", will take place from May 11 to November 24. Ralph Rugoff, the current director of the Hayward Gallery in London, is the curator of the event.

Ali Bakhtiari is the curator of the exhibition, which will be organized at Iran's pavilion under the title of "Of Being and Singing", a verse from a poem by contemporary Iranian writer Mohammadreza Shafiei Kadkani.

"Works by these three artists are much closer to the world contemporary art," Visual Arts Office director Hadi Mozaffari said in a press release published on Sunday.

"The exhibitors will help represent the art of Iran praising the glory of 'being and singing', the identities and memories as well as reality and dreams through their works," he added.

"They actually try to showcase the global aspects of Iranian art through their specific works, different from what the world has seen and perceived about Iranian art," noted Mozaffari, who is also Iran's commissioner at the Biennale.

The artists have been selected by an expert team composed of painter Farah Osuli, art critic Amir Soqrati, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art director Ehsan Aqai, dean of the Art University Hassan Soltani and art scholar Mohsen Soleimani.

Lavasani works in various media and will be taking a set of installation works named "Life" to the biennial.

Alikhanzadeh is scheduled to showcase a collection of digital prints created based on a series of old family photos.

Mirazimi also put on display a set of installation works on the perception of dreams.

The Iranian pavilion is located at Fondaco Marcello, San Marco 3415.



"Life", a papier-mache by Reza Lavasani.

Iranian director turns spotlight on Nobel laureate Nadia Murad



Iranian Kurdish director Jamil Rostami (L) plans to make a film on Nadia Murad (R), the Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Kurdish director Jamil Rostami plans to make a film on Nadia Murad, the Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for her efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict, the Persian service of ISNA reported on Sunday.

Rostami, director of acclaimed movies such as "Requiem of Snow" and "Jan-i-Gal", is currently working on the film's script and plans to make trips to Iraq and several countries in Europe to complete his research for the project.

He is scheduled to shoot the movie on

locations in Iraq, America and several countries in Europe.

Murad was a 19-year-old student living in Kojo, Iraq. In 2014, Daesh terrorists attacked her village and killed 600 Yazidi men, including several of her family members.

She and other young women were taken prisoner and subjected to beatings and rape. She managed to escape, however, and make her way to a refugee camp, where she was offered the opportunity to move to Germany, where she now lives. Murad currently works to help women and children who are victims of abuse and human trafficking.

Ahmad Dehqan to donate book proceeds to flood victims



Front cover of writer Ahmad Dehqan's short story collection "War Celebration".

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Writer Ahmad Dehqan has announced his plan to donate all the proceeds from his latest book "War Celebration" to help people in the Iranian regions hit by recent flooding.

Published by Neyestan Publications, the book has been offered at the 32nd Tehran International Book Fair.

The proceeds from the book will be allocated to provide equipment for libraries in Pol-e Dokhtar and Mamulan, the two cities in Lorestan Province which were almost totally devastated by the floods.

The book, like other works by Dehqan, is about the repercussions of the 1980-1988

Iran-Iraq war.

"This collection of ten short stories has been created based on ideas that have popped into my head over the past years," Dehqan said about the book earlier in March.

"The stories of 'War Celebration' are sometimes set in the war and sometimes occur in the aftermath of the war, but in all of them, the fates of people are very important for me," Dehqan added.

"A Vital Killing" is Dehqan's other noteworthy credit, which has been translated into English by Caroline Crockery, the American translator of a number of works from contemporary Persian literature.

"Star Wars" Darth Vader costume could go for \$2 million at auction

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A man who made appearances as Darth Vader at film premieres and fan conventions will sell a costume created in 1979 by the "Star Wars" design team at an auction of classic movie memorabilia next month, auction house Bonhams said.

The 17-piece ensemble includes the villain's black mask, boots, a pair of capes and a cod piece, said the auctioneers, who estimated it could sell for between \$1 million and \$2 million.

The seller is Bryce "Kermit" Eller, whose deep voice helped him land a job making public appearances as Vader at premieres, book signings, conventions and the 1978 Academy Awards.

The costume going up for auction is one of a handful of Vader outfits produced in 1979 by the team of "Star Wars" costume designer John Mollo in London for the movie "The Empire Strikes Back," Bonhams said. It is unclear if any pieces were used on screen before they were given to Eller.

The components are made from leather, wool, silk, fiberglass and other materials, Eller said in an interview.

"It's really, really hot," Eller said. "You've got multiple layers. It takes about 25 minutes to put it on, and you've got to have assistance."

In fact, Eller said he once fainted after wearing the costume for hours and becoming dehydrated. Paramedics came



A mannequin dressed in one of the original Darth Vader costumes from the Star Wars movies is seen during an exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney in November last year. (Reuters Photo)

to his assistance and wanted to cut it off.

"I said 'absolutely not,'" Eller said.

"I said 'I'll heal. The costume won't.'"

The outfit will be part of a public exhibition with Turner Classic Movies starting on May 4 before going on sale on May 14.

Props and costumes from "Star Wars", one of the most popular film franchises, have fetched high prices at auction.

In 2017, a complete R2-D2 droid used in the first, 1977 "Star Wars" movie sold for \$2.76 million, and a lightsaber used by hero Luke Skywalker fetched \$450,000.

Taylor Swift releases upbeat new single and video "ME!"

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Grammy-winning singer Taylor Swift on Friday released a cheerful pop duet called "ME!" along with a colorful video filled with pastel-drenched images of butterflies, rainbows and a young couple in love.

"ME!" features Brendon Urie, the lead singer of Panic! at the Disco, who at the video's start is fighting with Swift in a conversation in French. The video turns upbeat as the music starts. "I promise that you'll never find another like me," Swift sings.

"I'm the only one of me. Baby that's the fun of me," she adds.

Swift, 29, had been teasing an announcement for days on social media with pastel images that turned out to be scenes from the new video.

"ME!" is a song about embracing your individuality and really celebrating it and owning it," Swift said hours earlier during an interview with ABC TV host Robin Roberts on the network's broadcast of the National Football League draft in Nashville.

"With a pop song, we have the ability to get a melody stuck in people's heads and I just want it to be one that makes them feel better about themselves," she said.

Swift began her career as a country singer in Nashville, Tennessee, at age 15 before branching out with pop hits such as "Shake It Off" and "Bad Blood."



Taylor Swift poses upon arriving for the Time 100 Gala celebrating Time magazine's 100 most influential people in the world in New York, U.S., April 23, 2019. (Reuters/Andrew Kelly)

On Thursday afternoon, Swift surprised hundreds of her fans by joining them at the unveiling of a butterfly wing mural in the Gulch area of Nashville. "ME!" was written in the center of the mural as a hint to her evening announcement.

The new video and single provided a stark contrast to her last album, 2017's "Reputation," which included songs such as "Look What You Made Me Do" that took aim at people who had attacked her personally and professionally.