



Iran marks International Quds Day

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PERSPECTIVE

Najeeb Maigatari
Journalist from Nigeria

Understanding the Israeli occupation of Palestine

The idea of nation and nationalism came of age during the early nineteenth century and the trend started with the establishment of modern state in Western Europe. Until then, the predominant form of political organization in the world was 'premodern' in nature, formally the empire state. It was the European aspiration to colonize and dominate most of the countries, in part which it actually did; that awakened the people to the idea of depending their nations (nationalism).

This same idea of colonialism also, on the other hand inspired the Zionists, who are mainly -if not all, European in origin to settle, dominate and fulfill their aspiration of establishing an independent apartheid Jewish nation in Palestine.

Before the British mandate on Palestine which lasted from 1922 to 1939, the significant political and trade centers of the land were under the dominion of the Ottoman (present day Turkey) empire namely Jerusalem, Nablus and Acre districts.

Nevertheless, there were several thousand Arab nomads who were not counted as Ottoman subjects and mostly lived in several hundred rural villages. During the reign of the empire, Palestine was exclusively an Arab dominant nation (mostly Muslims and Christians) with insignificant number of Jewish inhabitants.

Palestinians therefore, as history entails; witnessed the first notable trend of Jewish migration into their land in the mid19th century when the Ottoman Empire was about to fall. This early set of immigrants were however religious who at that moment engaged in traditional, orthodox Jewish practices and dedicated most of their time studying religious texts.

They were then concentrated in four cities with religious significance: Jerusalem (which will later become a site of great dispute), Hebron, Safad and Tiberias. Their attachment to the land was therefore religious rather than national and were strongly not in support of or even condemned at its entirety, the Zionist Movement which began in Eastern Europe and brought to Palestine in 1882 by another set of Jewish immigrants. →7

Trump's sanctions hit OPEC oil output despite Saudi boost: survey

TEHRAN (Reuters) — Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia has raised production in May, a Reuters survey found, but not by enough to compensate for lower Iranian exports which collapsed after the United States tightened the screw on Tehran. The 14-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries pumped 30.17 million barrels per day (bpd) in May, the survey showed, down 60,000 bpd from April and the lowest OPEC total since 2015, the Reuters survey showed. The survey suggests that even though Saudi

Arabia is raising output following pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump to bring down prices, the kingdom is still voluntarily pumping less than an OPEC-led supply deal in place this year allows it to. "We are seeing OPEC supply falling in May to its lowest in numerous years," said an industry source who monitors OPEC output. "There are not many big increases this month, and lots of countries posting lower supply."

Despite lower supplies, crude oil has fallen from a six-month high above \$75 a barrel in April to below \$68 on Thursday, pressured by concern about the economic impact of the U.S.-China trade dispute. An OPEC delegate said most countries had kept a lid on output in May, although they might have sought to boost sales in the faster-growing Asian market. "Producers may change the portfolio to target Asia but not increase production generally," he said. →3

Bank, the secretary of Free Zones High Council, 2600 industrial, service and tourism units are operational in Iran's free trade zones.

The official said 1.3 quadrillion rials (over \$30.95 billion) of investment have been made in these zones over the past five years.

Free zones play some significant role in development of the country, Bank noted. →4

Annual exports from free zones at \$17b

TEHRAN— The value of domestically-made products exported from Iran's free zones stood at \$17 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), according to an official with Iran's Free Zones High Council.

In an interview conducted by IRIB, Akbar Eftekhari, the deputy secretary of Free Zones High Council for production, exports and tech-

nology affairs, also put the value of commodities produced in the free zones at \$28 billion in the past year. The official said that about 500,000 people are working in 1,700 production units in the country's free zones.

There are seven free trade zones and 25 special economic zones in Iran, according to Eftekhari. And as previously announced by Morteza

most famous example dotted by caravanserais. Cozy chambers that are meticulously laid out around a vast courtyard may easily evoke spirits of the past. It's not hard to fancy the hustle and bustle of merchants bargaining on prices, recounting their arduous journeys to one another while their camels chewing hay! You can also conceive the idea of local architectural style and material in its heyday.

Passing major roads in the country, one may see crumbling caravanserais many of which abandoned for ages. In the Information Age, such guest houses have largely lost their actual usage. However, a couple of years ago, Iran tourism body introduced a scheme to keep them alive and profitable; tens of caravanserais are ceded to the private investors for better maintenance. Now, some are exclusively renovated, repurposed into boutique hotels and tourist lodgings. →10

Caravanserais and time travel to forgotten ages

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — For many travelers to Iran, staying in or even visiting a centuries-old caravanserai, can be a wide experience; they have an opportunity to feel the past, a time travel back into a forgotten age!

Such roadside inns were originally built in various epochs along ancient caravan routes in the Muslim world to shelter people, their goods and animals. The former Silk Roads may be the

most famous example dotted by caravanserais. Cozy chambers that are meticulously laid out around a vast courtyard may easily evoke spirits of the past. It's not hard to fancy the hustle and bustle of merchants bargaining on prices, recounting their arduous journeys to one another while their camels chewing hay! You can also conceive the idea of local architectural style and material in its heyday.

Passing major roads in the country, one may



Iran start 2019 Volleyball National League on high

TEHRAN — Iran beat Italy 3-1 (20-25, 25-23, 25-23, 25-23) in Pool 1 of the men's 2019 FIVB Volleyball Nations League week 1 at the Jiangmen Sports Center Gym in Jiangmen, China on Friday.

Amir Ghafour scored 20 points for Iran, while Gabriele Nelli was Italy's top scorer with the same points.

Iran, Italy, Germany and hosts China are in Pool 1 and try to book their place at the final six tournament in Chicago. Igor Kolakovic's men will play China on Saturday and meet Germany on Sunday. →15



ARTICLE

Maryam Qarehgozlou
Head of the Tehran Times
Social Desk

Encouraging large families entails deliberate, sensible policies

While governmental bodies are beset by major, growing worries regarding low birth rate in the country, it is important to formulate and adopt deliberate and sensible policies to address the issue.

Policies enforced during 1370s (1991-2000) aiming at population decline decreased replacement level fertility to lower than 2.1, and despite reconsidering the policies to encourage population growth the rate has not reached satisfying levels yet.

Replacement level fertility is the total fertility rate—the average number of children born per woman—at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next, without migration. This rate is roughly 2.1 children per woman for most countries, although it may modestly vary with mortality rates.

Population growth will lead to economic development in the country, while currently the country's population is rapidly aging.

Hassan Salmannejad, head of the secretariat national council of the elderly said in late December 2018 that older person's population will grow three-fold within the next 30 years in Iran, as some 700,000 people are added to the aging population of over 60 each year. He also added that the population of senior citizens currently exceeds 8 million in Iran and the annual growth rate of the country's aging population is about 3.8 percent.

Hamed Barakati, an official with Ministry of Health, has also said that over the years 1395-1396 (March 2016-March 2018) the number of births decreased by 40,000.

Additionally between the Iranian calendar years of 1376 (March 1996-March 1997) to 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), the average age at first marriage for females increased from 19.8 to 23.0 and for males increased from 23.6 to 27.4, so that on average each couple has 11 years to have children.

Normally couples wait 5.2 years to have their first child and this is while women are most fertile and have the best chance of getting pregnant in their 20s and some studies suggest that it is fine to have a last baby before age 35. →12

Deal of century shows business attitude of U.S. towards anything: Larijani

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Friday that the so-called “deal of the century” for the Palestinian territories shows the U.S. administration’s business attitude towards any issue.

During a speech at the Friday prayers in Tehran, he said that the proposed plan shows “emptiness” of the U.S. politics which has its roots in Washington’s ideology.



He also noted that roots of the U.S. ideology causes chaos at the international level.

The top parliamentarian, who was speaking on the date marking International Quds Day, told worshippers that the U.S. administration is seeking to humiliate Muslims and put pressure against them.

According to an Israeli intelligence website, U.S. President Donald Trump has proposed to establish a Palestinian state with limited sovereignty over around half of the West Bank and Abu Dis as its capital.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in July 2018 that deal of the century for the Palestinian territories will not come true.

The Leader said this “devil policy” is doomed to failure.

“The Americans have named their devil policy on Palestine ‘the deal of the century’ but they should know that, by divine grace, this deal of the century will never materialize,” he asserted.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the Palestinians will stand against this policy and all the Muslims will support them.

The Leader added though certain Muslim governments, which do not believe in Islam and have become “ready-to-die followers of the Americans out of foolishness”, the Islamic Ummah, including the Palestinians, will win over the enemies and will “see that day when the fake Zionist regime” will vanish.

During a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani criticized the secretive and controversial U.S.-devised deal for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Washington has kept the plan, which Trump has hailed as “the deal of century,” under wraps. Leaked information, however, indicate that it features serious violations of the Palestinian’s age-old demands.

Rouhani lambasted the plan as “the failure of the century,” warning, “Today, a plot is in the works against not only Palestine but the entire region.”

Expediency Council to decide about CFT soon

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Hossein Mozaffar, a member of the Expediency Council, has said that the council will decide about the CFT (the convention combatting financing of terrorism) and Palermo bill by end of the current Iranian calendar month (which ends on June 21).



He told IRNA Plus on Wednesday that the issue is being studied currently.

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

In October 2018, the global watchdog had given Iran until February to complete an action plan of reforms that would bring it in line with global norms, or face consequences.

The FATF concluded at its February 22 meeting that “there are still items not completed” and said in a statement it “expects Iran to proceed swiftly in the reform path”, according to Reuters.

One of the actions Iran is required to take to appease the FATF is joining the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which is also called the Palermo Convention, a 2000 United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime.

The other action is to ratify the CFT.

On October 7, 2018, the Majlis (parliament) voted in favor of the CFT. However, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill by finding 22 faults with it.

To become a law, the Guardian Council should vet the bill for compliance with the Constitution.

In cases when the parliament and the Guardian Council disagree on a bill, the issue is referred to the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

Envoy: S. Arabia, Israel, Egypt, and UAE have been developing missiles with long ranges

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Hamid Baedinejad, Tehran’s ambassador to London, has said Iran’s missile program is not the only one in the region, IRNA reported on Friday.

In a post on his Instagram page, the ambassador said information from missile programs by certain regional countries indicates that despite the propaganda campaigns launched against Iran’s missile program, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, and even the UAE have devised large-scale missile programs in collaboration with other countries for decades and produced missiles with long ranges.

He said since the Iraqi war against Iran in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia has been developing four or five missile submarines under the management of the strategic missile forces by purchasing technology of Chinese rocket, Dong Feng.

In addition to short-range missiles of up to 1,000 kilometers, Saudi Arabia also has a variety of mid-range ballistic missiles, the ambassador explained.

He added that Israel has designed and implemented a large-scale missile program to support its nuclear weapons program and conventional weapons program.

The diplomat also said the concerns expressed about Iran by the U.S., Israel and their allies are because Iran’s high deterrence power.

Iran marks International Quds Day

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranians d e s k poured into the streets in large numbers in different cities across the country to mark International Quds Day, which falls on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

People and officials showed their solidarity with Palestinians who have been under the Israeli occupation for seven decades and subjected to different kinds of violence.

This year’s demonstrations revolved around the slogan of “The International Quds Day, failure of deal of the century and stabilization of the Palestine cause”.

Under the deal of the century, U.S. President Donald Trump has proposed to limit Palestine to around half of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The demonstrators chanted slogans of “Death to Israel” and “death to the U.S.”

International Quds Day was initiated by the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to express solidarity with Palestinians and oppose the Zionist regime.

Rallies are held each year in various cities around the world by both Muslims and non-Muslim communities. Many Jewish people also attend the rallies in order to draw a line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

■ Palestine will be a place for Muslims, Christians and Jews

Participating in the rallies in Tehran, President Hassan Rouhani said that the plots against Palestine and the noble Quds will not bear results.

“I have no doubt that the final victory belongs to Palestine which will be a place for Muslims, Christians and Jews,” Rouhani remarked.

He added, “There is no doubt that deal of the century will turn into ‘failure of the century’, and will not yield results.”

■ Quds cannot be sold

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also said that al-Quds cannot be sold.

“The U.S. cannot sell Quds to Israel,” he said.

Ahead of Quds Day marches, Zarif issued a message on his Twitter page saying “Iran stands with Palestine”.

Pointing to the U.S. recognition of al-Quds



as the capital of Israel, Zarif said, “Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is neither America’s to give away nor Israel’s to take.”

The chief diplomat also said Quds is “NOT for brutal accomplices to try to buy.”

He added, “Quds belongs to Palestine and Palestinians: history shows that whomever ignores this is condemned to ignominious failure.”

■ Muslims will practice “resistance of the century”

Ebrahim Raeisi, the Judiciary chief, said Muslims will exercise “resistance of the century” in their opposition to the deal of the century.

■ Arab leaders accompanying Israel will be ‘ashamed’

First Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri said that the deal of the century will be defeated and certain Arab leaders who accompany the Zionist regime of Israel will be ashamed.

Senior White House adviser Jared Kushner is currently leading a U.S. delegation in the Middle East seeking to boost support for the Bahrain “workshop”, in which Kushner is expected to unveil the first stage of U.S. President Donald Trump’s deal of the century.

A number of Arab states, including Saudi

Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, will attend.

■ Failure of deal of century is noticeable

Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said that the deal of the century will reach nowhere and signs of its failure can be seen.

Several Palestinian American community organizations have denounced the “workshop” in Manama as “treason”.

The conference is slated to be held on June 25 and 26. The meeting is supposed to bring together business, government and civic leaders from the region in order to facilitate discussions about bringing economic investments to the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Palestinian American business and community leaders have expressed concern that the gathering is an attempt to give “Arab cover” to the maintenance of Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories, Al-Jazeera reported.

■ Awareness is anti-dote to deal of the century

Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami, who joined marches in the city of Zanjan, said, “Muslims’ awareness will defeat the deal of the century”.

Rouhani says ‘deal of century’ is a plot against Palestine cause

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said that the so-called “deal of century” is a plot to undermine the Palestine cause and spread occupation.

It is also an aggression against the Islamic countries, Rouhani said.

In a message to heads of Islamic states attending the Mecca Summit, Rouhani called for resisting this “dangerous” plan and defending the rights of the Palestinians.

“I call on heads of Islamic states to use the opportunity of this summit to counter the dangerous conspiracy of deal of the century,” Rouhani stated.

He added, “Unfortunately, we are witnessing divisive acts in line with deflecting attentions from the issue of Palestine, as the prior issue of the world of Islam, in a situation in which unity and solidarity are needed the most.”

He also condemned the U.S. act in re-

“Unfortunately, we are witnessing divisive acts in line with deflecting attention from the issue of Palestine, as the prior issue of the world of Islam, in a situation in which unity and solidarity are needed the most.”

Deal of century will end in failure: Shamkhani

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Thursday that the so-called “deal of century” proposed by the U.S. is doomed to failure.

“This shameful plot will be defeated by the hands of the Palestinian resistant people,” he told a conference through a video link held in the Gaza Strip under the title of “No to Deal of Century”.

Shamkhani said, “The U.S. administration seeks to waste the Palestinian people’s blood over the last 70 years through ending the issue of the Palestinians’ return (to their homeland) with the help of Arab countries’ money.”

He noted that the plan is aimed at “complete elimination of Palestine”.

Elsewhere, he said that International Quds Day is the “day of Islam and using the world of Islam’s capacities” to continue fight for liberating the noble Quds and forming Palestinian government in the occupied lands.

International Quds Day was initiated by the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to express solidarity with Palestinians and oppose the Zionist regime.

Shamkhani said that Iran continues to



support resistance groups.

“In line with the viewpoint of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, we once again in the Islamic Republic insist on supporting the resistance, especially in the occupied Palestine, and will not cease this support despite all hardships, political pressures and economic sanctions, as the Islamic Republic considers supporting the resistance fighters a religious obligation,” Press TV quoted him as saying.

Shamkhani also highlighted how the victory of Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979 was followed by creation of resistance movements that defeated Israel in all confrontations with the regime, liberating Gaza and southern Lebanon. He saluted the resistance fighters, who brought about the victories.

Top general says occupiers doomed to leave Palestine

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri said he has every confidence that the Zionist usurpers of Palestine will be terminated and that an “independent and mighty” Palestine will be revived.

In a statement released on Wednesday ahead of the International Quds Day, Major General Bagheri said the Iranian people will once again attend massive rallies on Friday to demonstrate that the cause of Palestine and al-Quds is never-ending and the occupiers of Palestine are doomed to fail by God’s grace.

Liberation of the occupied territories and return of the displaced Palestinians will heal the wounds of the first Qibla of Muslims and revive a “mighty, independent and dignified Palestine,” he stated.

Highlighting the Islamic community’s resolve to reaffirm allegiance to the goals of Palestine in the Quds Day rallies, the general said the demonstrators are going to condemn the “occupying, fake and child-murdering Zionist regime and its regional and ultra-regional sponsors.”

He went on to say that the U.S. ruling regime has to face the collapse of “the abortive deal of century” it is trying to

He noted that the U.S. puts pressure against Iran, because it is aware that Iran is “core of awareness and resistance” and is able to bring the deal of the century to a failure.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has called the deal of the century as “the deal of shame” which will “go to Hell.”

He also said that the Palestinian Authority will not accept the economic workshop in Bahrain or its results. Abbas said the workshop is nothing more than “illusions” and that the money promised to the Palestinians will never arrive.

■ Palestine belongs to Palestinians

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, said, “Today’s rallies bear the message that Palestine belongs to the Palestinians and nobody can sell it.”

■ Rallies have confused Israel

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said that the Zionist regime of Israel is close to annihilation.

“Israel and its allies have been confused. Thanks to the resistance movement, the Palestinians’ empty hands have turned into missiles. Missiles are launched whenever Israelis dare to take any action,” he stated.

Vice President for Women’s and Family Affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar said that the Iranians have stood and will continue to stand beside the Palestinians forever.

■ Zionist regime doomed to annihilation

Hossein Ta’eb, the head of the IRGC intelligence unit, said that Iran’s support for the Palestinians will continue powerfully.

He said that the Muslims’ participation in Quds Day rallies indicates that Israel is nearing its end.

Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader, said that the Zionist regime of Israel is doomed to defeat and annihilation.

■ Quds Day is a movement

Ayatollah Kazem Seddighi, the interim Friday prayer preacher of Tehran, said, “The Quds Day is not just a day. It is a movement. It is what prevents marginalization of the Palestine issue.”

“Quds Day is the day of Islam for us,” he added.



tine under the deceitful title of deal of the century,” he noted.

He highlighted the importance of unity in the Islamic world.



impose on Palestine, stressing that the American plot will suffer the same fate as the debacles of “Greater Middle East” or “Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates”.

Pro-Palestinian people across the world are going to mark the International Quds Day on Friday, an annual event during which demonstrators express their solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian territories by the Zionist regime of Israel.

This year’s Quds Day on the last Friday of Ramadan will be marked against a backdrop of growing anti-US and anti-Israeli sentiments among Muslims, aggravated by the White House’s push to hammer out what it calls a peace deal between Palestine and Israel, known as the “deal of century”.

Trump growing angry with warlike planning by advisors: Washington Post

President Donald Trump is frustrated with some of his top advisers, who he thinks could rush the United States into a military confrontation with Iran and shatter his long-standing pledge to withdraw from costly foreign wars, according to several U.S. officials, the Washington Post reported recently.

Trump prefers a diplomatic approach to resolving tensions and wants to speak directly with Iran’s leaders, the Post said.

Disagreements over assessing and responding to the recent intelligence that Iran is preparing attack on U.S. interests are also fraying alliances with foreign allies, ac-

cording to multiple officials in the United States and Europe.

Trump grew angry recently about what he sees as warlike planning that is getting ahead of his own thinking, said a senior administration official with knowledge of conversations Trump had regarding national security adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

“They are getting way out ahead of themselves, and Trump is annoyed,” the official said. “There was a scramble for Bolton and Pompeo and others to get on the same page.”

Bolton, who advocated regime change in Iran before joining the White House last year, is “just in a different place” from Trump, although the president has been a fierce critic

of Iran since long before he hired Bolton. Trump “wants to talk to the Iranians; he wants a deal” and is open to negotiation with the Iranian government, the official said.

“He is not comfortable with all this ‘regime change’ talk,” which to his ears echoes the discussion of removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before the 2003 U.S. invasion, said the official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.

While Trump grumbles about Bolton somewhat regularly, his discontent with his national security adviser is not near the levels it reached with Rex Tillerson when he served as Trump’s secretary of state, the official added.

Riyadh continues to sow division among Muslim, regional states, Iran regrets

Iran: Arab League statement doesn't reflect the real stance of all members

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Tehran has condemned a statement issued by the heads of certain Arab states at the end of an emergency meeting in the holy city of Mecca, rejecting the "unfounded" accusations raised against Iran in the statement.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that the Islamic Republic has no doubt that the contents of such statements don't reflect the real stance of all member states, the Foreign Ministry's official website reported.

The spokesman also expressed regret over Saudi Arabia's abuse of its privilege as the host of the emergency summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Mousavi said Saudi Arabia has made instrumental and political use of the holy month of Ramadan as well as the holy city of Mecca to level accusations against Iran in a statement attributed to the participating delegations.

"Instead of seizing the opportunity of International Quds Day as well as the summit of Arab and Islamic states to raise and pursue



The Foreign Ministry says Saudi Arabia has made instrumental and political use of the holy month of Ramadan and the holy city of Mecca to level accusations against Iran in a statement attributed to the participating delegations.

the issue of the holy Quds and the Palestinian people's rights, Saudi Arabia has opted for the wrong approach and continued to sow division between Islamic and regional countries, which is the wish of the Zionist regime," he said.

"We see the attempts by Saudi Arabia to rally neighboring and Arab countries against Iran as the continuation of futile attempts by America and the Zionist regime against the Islamic Republic," he added.

The spokesman finally expressed hope that Saudi Arabia's failure to support the cause of Palestine and the wrong approach adopted by certain Islamic states of the region during the summit of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council in the holy city Mecca could be compensated.

He also called on Muslim states not to let the issue of Palestine and the holy Quds be overshadowed by such divisive policies and strategic mistakes, because it has been the long-time dream of the Zionist regime that Islamic and Arab states forget about their main and joint enemy and get involved in their internal affairs.

U.S. pressure campaign meant to blackmail Iran: Russia

Ryabkov refutes Bolton's claim that Iran had a role in UAE oil tankers attack

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Russia's deputy foreign minister has said that Washington is exerting pressure on Iran in a bid to "blackmail" the country, adding that Washington does not seem to be sincere in its offer to engage in dialog with Tehran.

In an interview with Russia's Rossiyskaya Gazeta daily released on Wednesday, Ryabkov complained that the U.S. was just stepping up its pressure campaign against Iran without providing "alternative options" for the Islamic Republic.

"We can see the severe pressure on the part of the United States toward Iran and the attempts to blackmail this country," he said, according to a translation of the interview by Press TV. "At the same time, there is no positive agenda and the United States is not suggesting any alternative options. It only declares, including on the high level, that it is open for dialogue. But it is not a basis for real talks."

If the U.S. was willing to hold talks with Iran, it should make suggestions on what it was ready to offer Iran in exchange for the discussions, he added.

Last year, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and unleashed the "toughest ever" sanctions against Tehran, notably targeting its key oil exports.

Recently, Washington beefed up its military presence in the Persian Gulf, citing alleged and unspecified threats posed by the Islamic Republic to American troops and interests.

On May 8, the first anniversary of Washington's exit from the JCPOA, The Islamic Republic announced its decision to stop exporting excess uranium and heavy water for a 60-day period, during which the remaining signatories would have to honor their promises and ensure that is no more deprived of the economic benefits it was promised under the agreement.

Elsewhere in his interview, Ryabkov warned against the consequences of Tehran's strengthening intentions to withdraw from the JCPOA.

"This may pave the way for a collapse of the JCPOA and the emergence of a chaotic situation, in which risks of a military confrontation would further increase," he said.

On Wednesday, the Russian official met with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi in Tehran to discuss the fate of the nuclear accord.

Following the meeting, Ryabkov said that Tehran would undoubtedly take new steps to suspend its commitments



Ryabkov says outward claims that the U.S. is open for dialogue do not provide a basis for real talks.

under the JCPOA unless the deal's balance is restored.

"Amid a lack of progress on how to restore a balance inside the JCPOA, Iran's next steps will become inevitable. We have no doubt about that," he told Russia's TASS news agency.

■ Ryabkov refutes Bolton's claim of Iran's role in UAE oil tankers attack

Elsewhere, the top Russian diplomat said his country does not trust claims by U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton that Iran was engaged in recent "sabotage" attacks targeting vessels off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.

On Wednesday, Bolton alleged that the May 12 incident involving four commercial vessels near the port of Fujairah had been caused by Iranian naval mines, without providing any evidence to substantiate his claim. "I think it is clear these (tanker attacks) were naval mines almost certainly from Iran," claimed the American official, speaking at a press conference in Abu Dhabi.

Ryabkov fundamentally questioned the remarks in an interview with Sputnik, which the Russian news agency published on Thursday.

"We've seen countless situations when Americans adjusted certain facts or events to political orders and their own narrow national beliefs of what happens and how it happens, and how something should be done," Ryabkov said, adding, "This is not even the UK 'highly likely,' this is something worse. They are just presumptuously imposing their opinion on the whole world or at least trying to do so."

The Russian official also warned that such unfounded statements served to escalate tensions. "Such policies are especially dangerous in the Middle East."

"This is why we will continue calmly making effort to ensure that common sense eventually prevails," he noted, advising adoption of "a more sensible approach" where "responsible officials engage in diplomacy rather than propaganda."

Bolton has earned notoriety as the most hawkish figure in the U.S. administration, openly promoting military conflict with Iran and other countries.

Iran has called Bolton a member of the anti-Iran B-Team -- also featuring Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman -- which is trying hard to target the people of Iran with "economic terrorism."

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been supportive of the U.S. policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran, which has seen Washington returning its sanctions against Tehran, and militarizing the region.

Earlier this year, the Arab states vowed to make up for potential shortages of Iran's crude after the U.S. vowed to reduce Iran's oil exports to "zero" as part of the maximum pressure campaign.

■ Russia supports Japan's plan to deescalate U.S.-Iran tensions

Meanwhile, a Japanese official said on Thursday that Russia has expressed support for Japan's plan to play a role in easing tensions between Iran and the U.S.

The Japanese official made the remarks to during a media briefing after a meeting of Japan and Russia's foreign and defense ministers, Press TV reported.

"Traditionally Japan has had friendly ties with Iran," the official said, adding, "There were comments from the Japanese side that Japan aims to play a role by taking advantage of such ties. The Russian side made a very positive comment in response."

Russian ambassador: U.S. to bear guilt for possible collapse of JCPOA

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Russia's ambassador to Iran says the U.S. is to be accountable for a probable collapse of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, from which Washington withdrew in 2018.

In an interview with the Russian newspaper Izvestia, Levon Dzagharyan said Moscow is trying to persuade Tehran to refrain from exiting from the deal, adding that only the U.S. will be to blame for a collapse of the accord if the Russian efforts fail.

Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 and ordered sanctions on Iran. This happened despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is tasked to monitor Iran's compliance with the terms of the JCPOA, has issued numerous reports each time confirming Tehran's full commitment to the multinational agreement.

However, on May 8, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) issued a statement declaring partial suspension of its undertakings under the JCPOA. The SNSC said if the remaining parties to the JCPOA fail to reach an agreement to redress sanctions, Iran will take the next steps. The ultimatum is for two months.

"There is still some time left for diploma-



cy. Together with our nuclear deal partners, we will continue to work to prevent events from developing under a negative scenario," Dzagharyan said, according to a translation of the interview provided by Russia's Tass news agency.

He also said, "Of course, Iran's potential pullout from the JCPOA and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

(NPT) will be regrettable."

"At this stage, we are continuing explanatory work with the Iranians, cautioning them against refusing to honor their commitments under both the nuclear deal and the Additional Protocol to the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, whose provisions, by the way, Tehran complies with on a voluntary basis. If Iran, nevertheless, decides to quit

the JCPOA, the responsibility for the collapse of that international recognized agreement will lie entirely with the U.S., which grossly violated its obligations, withdrew from the JCPOA and continues to step up pressure on Tehran by imposing illegitimate unilateral sanctions," the Russian ambassador stressed.

On the prospect of Iran's cooperation with international associations, particularly with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the ambassador said Moscow supports Tehran's desire to be granted full-fledged membership in the SCO.

"We expect the issue to be discussed in detail during the organization's next summit in Bishkek scheduled for June 13-14," he added.

Asked about plans to lift visa restrictions for Russian and Iranian travelers, the ambassador said the two countries' foreign ministers had recently signed a protocol on the amendments to the 2015 intergovernmental agreement on mutual travels.

"This document provides for issuing visas to entrepreneurs based on written requests from interested organizations, government agencies or local authorities. That, of course, can be a positive impetus for intensifying ties between the two countries' business communities," Dzagharyan concluded.

Trump's sanctions hit OPEC oil output despite Saudi boost: survey



1 → OPEC, Russia and other non-members, an alliance known as OPEC+, agreed in December to reduce supply by 1.2 million bpd from Jan. 1. OPEC's share of the cut is 800,000 bpd, to be delivered by 11 members - all except Iran, Libya and Venezuela.

The producers are scheduled to meet in June to decide whether to extend the deal or adjust it.

In May, the 11 OPEC members bound by the agreement achieved 96 percent of pledged cuts, the survey found, compared to 132 percent in April, due to the rise in production in Saudi Arabia, and increases in Iraq and Angola.

But a drop in supply in two of the exempt producers more than offset these gains, the survey found. Iran posted OPEC's biggest supply drop this month of 400,000 bpd.

The United States reimposed sanctions on Iran in November after pulling out of a 2015 nuclear accord between Tehran and six world powers. Aiming to cut Iran's sales to zero, Washington this month ended sanctions waivers for importers of Iranian oil.

Iraq has nonetheless sent abroad about 400,000 bpd so far this month, less than half as much as it exported in April.

In Venezuela, supply fell by 50,000 bpd in May due to the impact of U.S. sanctions on state oil company PDVSA and a long-term decline in production, according to the survey.

Output also dropped in Nigeria - which last month overproduced its target by the largest margin - because of a pipeline shutdown that disrupted exports.

Among countries pumping more, Saudi Arabia boosted supply by 200,000 bpd to 10.05 million bpd, the survey found. This is still below its OPEC quota of 10.311 bpd.

Iraq boosted exports and Libya, which is volatile due to unrest, enjoyed a period of relative stability.

Even so, May's output is the lowest by OPEC since February 2015, excluding membership changes that have taken place since then, Reuters surveys show.

The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consulting firms.

Iran strongly rejects Saudi claims of 'regional interference'

TEHRAN (Press TV) — A senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official has strongly denounced fresh claims made by Saudi Arabia about what Riyadh describes as Iran's meddling in the internal affairs of regional countries.

"The Islamic Republic considers the accusations thrown by the Saudi foreign minister at the conference invalid," Reza Najafi, director general of the International Peace and Security Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry said.

He added as one of the founders of the 57-member OIC, the Islamic Republic wishes the gathering would be used to "reinforce unity among the Muslim Ummah."

Opening a gathering of the foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Jeddah on Wednesday, the kingdom's Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf claimed that Iran is interfering in "other nations' affairs" and urged "firmness and determination" over the recent mysterious attacks on commercial vessels off the coast of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates. He made the remarks just hours after U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton alleged Tehran was "almost certainly" behind oil tanker attacks.

Najafi, who heads the Iranian delegation to the summit, also urged that the summit turn its focus to the "main issue of the Muslim world, which takes precedence over all others, namely the issue of Palestine."

On Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi responded to Bolton's allegations that the May 12 attacks on four oil tankers -- an Emirati, a Norwegian and two Saudi vessels -- had been caused by Iranian naval mines.

Mousavi dismissed the allegations as "ridiculous" and said, "Bolton and other warmongers need to know that the strategic patience, high vigilance and full defense readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which emanates from the strong resolve of its great nation, will not let them fulfill their ominous schemes to create chaos in the region."

Speaking at a press conference in Abu Dhabi earlier on Wednesday, Bolton alleged that the May 12 incident had been caused by Iranian naval mines, without providing any evidence to substantiate his claim.

Saudi Arabia, the United States' strongest ally among the Persian Gulf's littoral states, and other U.S.-friendly regional states have been cooperating with Washington in its policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran.

The policy has seen Washington reinstating economic sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic following the U.S. withdrawal from a multilateral nuclear deal with Iran, and dispatching an aircraft carrier strike group, a bomber taskforce, an amphibious assault ship, and 1,500 additional troops to the region.

Since early May, the U.S. has also been targeting the countries buying Iran's oil with "secondary sanctions." Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates immediately reported after the U.S. decision that they would be making up for potential shortages of the Iranian crude.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	224476.8
IFX	2800.2

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,781 rials
GBP	53,043 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$63.87/b
WTI	\$55.41/b
OPEC Basket	\$68.84/b
Gold	\$1,296.75/oz
Silver	\$14.53/oz
Platinum	\$795.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran, China call for expansion of economic ties

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand received the Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Pang Sen on Thursday to discuss trade and to pay gratitude for the ambassador's efforts during his five-year mission in Iran.



Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand

As reported, Sen also expressed his gratitude for Iran's finance minister, saying "the economic relations between the two countries has expanded significantly in the past few years."

Pang Sen's five-year mission in Iran will soon end.

In the meeting, Dejpasand emphasized the great potentials for cooperation between the two countries and called for the two sides to take advantage of such capacities in order to expand economic ties.

Dejpasand further thanked Sen's constructive efforts during his five-year mission in Tehran and expressed hope that the new ambassador would help to further develop bilateral cooperation.

Referring to the strategic relationship between the two countries, he called for the Chinese embassy to continue its efforts for boosting bilateral economic relations.

Annual exports from free zones at \$17b

1 → Establishment of free trade zones in Iran dates back to Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989- March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote the non-oil exports.

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the south of country. The first one was Kish Free Trade Zone established in 1368 on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf and the second one was Qeshm Free Trade Zone established the year after on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

Some five other free trade zones have been also established in the country since then, including Chabahar in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Arvand in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Anzali in northern Gilan Province, Aras in East-Azarbaijan Province and Maku in West-Azarbaijan Province, both in the northwest of the country.

Szijjártó: Japanese companies important for Hungarian economy

Japanese companies are an important factor in Hungary's growing economy, contributing to its Europe-topping first quarter annual growth of 5.3 percent, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Thursday.

According to hungarytoday.hu, speaking ahead of a working lunch with Japanese investors organizsd by the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency (HIPA) in Budapest, Szijjártó said that cooperation between Japan and Hungary had always been based on mutual respect.

"(Cooperation) has never been as stable and fruitful as it is today," he said.

Japanese investments in Hungary are worth 2.5 billion US dollars and over 160 Japanese companies employ 34,000 people here, he noted.

Over the past five years, HIPA held successful talks with Japanese firms on 21 occasions and signed agreements resulting in 808 billion dollars-worth of investment and 3,000 new jobs, Szzijjártó said.

He expressed thanks to the heads of Japanese companies investing in Hungary for placing trust in the Hungarian economy and people. He highlighted Osamu Suzuki, chairman and CEO of Suzuki Motor Corporation, who was the first Japanese businessman to set up a factory in Hungary. The investment was made soon after the end of the communist era and it is still the only Suzuki plant in Europe, he added.

Szjijártó said Hungary's economy was undergoing structural changes. While the global economy has slowed down, it is important that the Hungarian government is making decisions to keep economic growth 2 percentage points above the European Union average.

TEDPIX gains 9,308 points in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran **d e s k** Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) increased 9,308 points or 4.3 percent to 224,447 during the five dealing days (Saturday-Wednesday) of the past Iranian week ended on Friday, Tasnim news agency reported.

As reported, some 15.718 billion securities worth 49.806 trillion rials (about \$1.185 billion) were traded through 1.177 million deals at TSE.

The first market's index rose 6,543 points to 167,686 and second market's index added 20,000 points to 436,064, showing 4.06 percent and 4.81 percent growth, respectively,

in the mentioned week.

Based on the already released reports and data, Iran's exchange markets witnessed fruitful performances and results in the past Iranian calendar year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019).

Applying new financial instruments in Iranian capital market was another achievements of the exchange markets during the past year, as TSE officially launched "futures" in mid-December 2018 for more risk management and Iran Mercantile Market (IME) launched "option" in early March 2019 in an approach to diversify financing methods for agricultural products.



Nearly 400,000 tons of basic goods unloaded at Shahid Rajaee Port in 2 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Nearly 400,000 tons of basic commodities have been unloaded at Iran's largest container port, Shahid Rajaee, during the two-month period from the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21), Director General of Ports and Maritime Department of Hormozgan Province Allah-Morad Afifipour announced.

The official further underlined the measures taken by his department since the year start for expediting the unloading of basic goods, IRIB vessels.

Besides berthing the vessels out of turn and allocating them special facilities for the rapid unloading of their cargos, some coordination has been made with the related organizations such as the customs office in a way that the



basic goods can be exited from the port at the least possible time to be transported to the specified destinations, Afifipour highlighted.

on May 21, the deputy director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said following a directive by President Hassan Rouhani, IRICA is providing new facilities for importers of basic goods which makes them able to clear their commodities in less than an hour, IRNA reported.

"For basic goods such as meat, system formalities and clearance procedures will be carried out in less than an hour and importers can transport their goods soon after," Mehrdad Jamal Orounaqi said.

Japan factory output rebounds, but retail sales slow as trade war risk grows

Japan's industrial output rebounded in April, though retail sales grew at a slower pace, suggesting that both domestic and external demand could come under severe pressure in a blow to the economy as a U.S.-China trade war intensifies.

According to analysts, caution that it is too early to turn optimistic on Japan's factory output as hopes fade for a quick resolution to the trade row between the United States and China, the world's two largest economies.

Adding to uncertainty over trade policy, Japanese auto shares fell on Friday after the Trump administration said it will impose tariffs on all goods coming from Mexico until illegal immigration is stopped.

Economists also say that Japan's government and central bank may be forced offer some form of stimulus if growth prospects deteriorate further.

The "data doesn't fully reflect the impact of the latest round of U.S. tariff hikes (on China). Japan's output is likely to adjust lower in the future," said Hiroaki Muto,

chief economist at Tokai Tokyo Research Center.

■ Asset purchases

"If the yen surges, the Bank of Japan may do something with forward guidance or asset purchases, but normal fiscal stimulus won't work."

Industrial production rose 0.6 percent in April from the previous month, more than the median estimate for a 0.2 percent increase and following a 0.6 percent decline in March.

Output was pushed up by an increase in production of cars, airplane parts, and machines used to make flat panel displays, the data showed.

The rise in industrial output was partly because Japanese companies front-loaded production before a 10-day public holiday from late April to early May, economists said.

However, in a more worrying sign, inventories of semiconductors and electronic parts rose at the fastest pace in seven months, suggesting weak demand in that sector will also weigh on output in the future.

Manufacturers surveyed by the Ministry of

Economy, Trade and Industry expect output to rise 5.6 percent in May but decline 4.2 percent in June, the data showed.

Tension between Washington and Beijing escalated sharply earlier this month after U.S. President Donald Trump's administration accused China of having "renege" on its previous promises to make structural changes to its economic practices.

Washington later slapped additional tariffs of up to 25 percent on \$200 billion of Chinese goods, prompting Beijing to retaliate.

A slowdown in China hurts Japan because many of its manufactures rely on selling heavy machinery and electronic parts to factories in the world's second-biggest economy.

■ Japan's economy

Japan's economy in the first quarter unexpectedly accelerated but the surprise expansion was mostly caused by imports declining faster than exports, showing both external and domestic demand were weak.

Separate data showed retail sales rose 0.5 percent in April from a year ago, less than the median estimate for a 0.8 percent

annual increase.

However, that was a slowdown from a 1.0 percent annual increase in the previous month as shoppers reduced spending on clothes and autos, suggesting some consumers may be turning cautious before a nationwide sales tax hike scheduled in October.

"We are not seeing a pickup in durable goods purchases, which suggests consumers are tightening the purse strings," said Hiroshi Miyazaki, senior economist at Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities.

The "government may have to come up with even more stimulus after the sales tax hike if the economy doesn't pick up."

Tokyo's core consumer prices (CPI) index, which includes oil products but excludes fresh food prices, rose 1.1 percent in May from a year earlier, compared with a 1.3 per cent increase in April.

A slowdown in electricity and gas price rises capped gains in the index, data showed.

The jobless rate improved to 2.4 percent in April from 2.5 percent in March, and the jobs-to-applicants ratio was steady at 1.63.

Narrow tax base could hamper Malaysian fiscal consolidation: report

Malaysia's efforts to improve public finance in the midst of continued fiscal consolidation is commendable, but a narrow tax base could hamper medium-term consolidation, according to the latest Asean+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) country report released on May 31.

According to businesstimes.com.sg, the 2018-19 Annual Consultation Report noted that Malaysia's economy continues to grow above potential despite growth having eased to 4.7 percent in 2018, down from the three-year high of 5.9 percent in 2017. AMRO expects growth to stay moderate through 2020 at around 4.6 to 4.7 percent, due to external headwinds and fiscal consolidation.

Fiscal consolidation has continued under the new government that took power after the surprise 2018 general election result.

Although budget deficit targets were revised upward for 2018 and 2019, the adjusted fiscal deficit is set to decline in 2019, excluding one-off expenses and revenue items.

"Fiscal consolidation should continue given the sizable debt burden, especially when transfers for the servicing of some of the government-guaranteed debt are included," said the report.

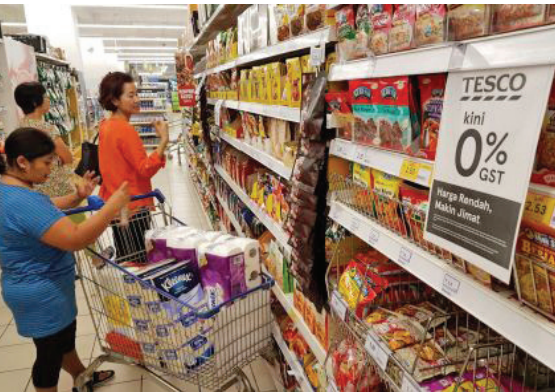
But it warned that a narrowing domestic tax base could impede this if not reversed. The tax-to-GDP ratio has declined since 2015, and the tax base decline has been intensified by the shift from the goods and services tax back to the sales and services tax (SST) in September 2018.

The narrowing tax base will also limit the fiscal space to counter adverse economic shocks, noted the report.

The establishment of a Tax Reform Committee in 2018 was a crucial move to facilitate a review of the tax system, but tax reform momentum must intensify by realigning taxation with economic activities.

Efforts to streamline tax incentives and strengthen tax collection should also continue.

"Overall, revenue-mobilization efforts should aim at



reversing the decline in the non-petroleum-related tax-to-GDP ratio," concluded the report.

South Korean economy edging out of the doldrums

By Lee Shin-Hyung

EconomySouth Korea's industrial output and facility investment continued to rise in April for the second consecutive month, indicating that the economy, plagued in the first quarter with surprise minus growth, has broken out of its worst phase.

If so, that is good news, given the consensus opinion was that Asia's fourth-largest economy — also seen as a weather vane of global trade trends — would not see an upturn until the second half.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) announced Friday that the country's industrial output rose 0.7% in April from the previous month, following a 1.5% gain in March.

Production in mining and manufacturing rose 1.6% due to increased production in the semiconductor and oil refining sectors. Chip production rose 6.5%, while oil refining posted an 11.2% increase. Automobile production also rose 2.5%.

Year on year, mining and manufacturing production also grew 0.7%, shifting from a 0.5% decline in March. The output of cars and chemicals rose 14.2% and 15.3%, respectively.

The average manufacturing capacity utilization rate rose to 72.6%, a 1.0 percentage point rise from a month earlier, marking the second straight month of rises. However,



operation rates remain low level, falling short of last year's 73.5%.

Exports, however, are not out of the doldrums. Manufacturing shipments fell 0.8% while manufacturing inventories rose 2.5%, mainly due to an inventory rise of 15.3% among chip makers. Inventory rates stood at 115.1%, up 3.7% from the previous month.

■ A rise in inventory

A rise in inventory rates usually means the economy is not doing well, but in some cases, inventories rise as companies increase production ahead of future sales increases.

"We understand that semiconductor companies have increased their inventories in

preparation for the new release of Samsung's mobile phones and a possible rise in memory chip demand for servers," an official at the Ministry of Finance told Asia Times.

Production in the service sector rose 0.3% from the previous month, marking the second straight month of increases. Wholesale and retail fell 1.1%, but lodging and restaurant businesses gained 0.3% on a rise in foreign tourists, extending their gains for a second month.

Facility investment rose 4.6% from the previous month for a second consecutive month led by the semiconductor industry.

Construction investment, however, fell

2.8% month on month due to the sluggish real estate market.

■ The April index

The "economy was at its worst in the first quarter, and we expected it to improve gradually in the second and third quarters," the finance ministry official said. The "April index is in line with this expectation."

But all is not rosy, and "due to external conditions, it is difficult to look at the economy only with optimism. In particular, we should wait and see the index in May as the trade disputes between the U.S. and China have intensified."

He noted that the KOSPI stock exchange and consumer sentiment index fell due to the trade war.

Jung Sung-tae, an economist at Samsung Securities, told Asia Times that the economic slowdown was easing. He predicted the economy would rebound strongly in the fourth quarter after moderate improvements in the second and third quarters.

"For now, it seems to be more like a psychological factor than a big impact on the real economy," Chung said of the trade war. A "prolonged trade dispute will affect the real economy, but we believe that it will end by the third quarter in some way."

(Source: asiatimes.com)

Asia’s imports of Iranian oil surge to 9-month high

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Asia’s imports of Iranian oil in April hit a record nine-month high as buyers rushed to ship in purchases before their waivers from U.S. sanctions on Iran expired in May, Reuters reported on Friday citing data from government and trade sources. Top buyers of Iranian oil in Asia namely China, India, Japan and South Korea imported a total 1.62 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude from Iran in the mentioned month, up 3.2 percent from the previous month to the highest since July. As reported, China’s intakes of Iranian oil in April nearly reached 800,000 bpd, a level not seen since 2014.

South Korea imported about 416,000 bpd to become the second-largest importer of Iranian oil in April. Japan imports of Iranian oil in the said month also reached over 150,000 barrels per day (bpd), 4.5 times more than the figure for last year’s same time span, data from Japan’s ministry of economy, trade and industry showed. The Asian country shipped in 676,000 kiloliters or 151,000 bpd of oil in April compared to last April’s 47,000 kiloliters (33,000 bpd). Japan’s oil imports from Iran dropped 53 percent in April from the previous month. The country shipped in 322,000 bpd of oil



from Iran in March. The United States last year demanded that nations cut all Iranian oil imports when it reimposed sanctions on the country’s petroleum sector on November 4. However, Washington granted temporary exemptions to some of Iran’s biggest oil clients. As one of Iran’s top oil buyers, Japan was among the eight countries which received a 180-day waiver from the U.S. to keep importing Iranian oil through May 4. Later in April 2019, the Trump administration announced that it would no longer extend the waivers for Iranian oil buyers, namely China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece. Trump asked all Iranian oil buyers to stop their business associations with the Islamic Republic or face penalty.

HK disparages U.S. warnings on violating Iranian sanctions

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Hong Kong has dismissed U.S. threats of penalty for receiving an oil vessel which carries Iranian oil to the autonomous city, Sputnik reported on Thursday. “The normal energy dealings between Iran and the international community, including China, that is within the framework of international laws, are reasonable, lawful, and should be respected and protected,” the Hong Kong government said in a statement. “Certain countries may impose unilateral sanctions against certain places on the basis of their own considerations. Those sanctions are outside the scope of the UN Security Council sanctions” implemented by Hong Kong, the statement reads. As reported by the Gulf News, the oil tanker, called Pacific Bravo, is owned by China’s Bank of Kunlun, according to a senior U.S. official. A senior U.S. official said on Tuesday, speaking on



condition of anonymity, that Washington wants to put China and the autonomous city on notice that it will aggressively and consistently enforce anti-Iranian

sanctions. Since Trump withdrew from Iran’s nuclear deal in November, the U.S. government and its allies have been putting all their efforts together to isolate Iran and make the Islamic country bend under economic pressure and doing so, cutting Iran’s energy exports has been Trump’s top agenda. In May 2018, Donald Trump officially withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA. Later in April 2019, The Trump administration announced that it would no longer extend the waivers for Iranian oil buyers, namely China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece which allowed them to ship in limited amounts of oil from the country. Trump asked all Iranian buyers to stop their business associations with the Islamic Republic otherwise face “harsh penalties”.

20 new petchem projects to go operational by 2022: NPC

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iranian oil ministry plans to complete 20 prioritized petrochemical projects across the country by the end of the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (March 2022), IRIB reported quoting the head of National Petrochemical Company (NPC). According to Behzad Mohammadi, of the mentioned projects, three will be inaugurated by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020). The official noted that currently there are 64 petrochemical projects underway across the country with physical progresses between 20 and 99 percent. “With the completion of the underway projects, the country’s petrochemical output will reach 92 million tons in the Iranian calendar year of 1400 and the industry’s revenues will hit \$25 billion,” Mohammadi said. He further noted that six of the above mentioned projects are feedstock supply projects and with these projects completed, the industry’s feedstock capacity is going to increase by 15 million tons.



According to the official, some \$8.3 billion has been invested in these six projects which are going to create several projects in the industry’s downstream sector. The official put the country’s current petrochemicals output at 55.5 million tons, of which 21 million tons is being exported to 30 different destinations across the

globe. According to the NPC managing director, the value of Iran’s petrochemical exports stands at \$17.1 billion. Earlier in May, Mohammadi had said that Iran’s petrochemical industry is not like oil and it is practically unactionable. “For oil the ways of selling and the costumers are specific and limited but that is not the case with petrochemicals. There are hundreds of holdings which are eager for buying our diverse petrochemical products”, the official told the Tehran Times in a press conference on the sidelines of the 24th Iran International, Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2019). “However, we are holding meetings with our costumers to explore various aspects of possible impacts of the U.S. sanctions on our trade”, he added. 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.

Renewables are set to outprice oil and gas by 2020

By Alex Kimani

Swanson’s Law is the observation that solar PV panels tend to become 20 percent cheaper for every doubling of cumulative shipped volume. It’s the solar industry’s equivalent of Moore’s Law, which predicts the growing computing power of processors. But as the semiconductor industry has discovered, the observation that processing power increases exponentially at a two-year or so cadence has hit a physical limit. Fortunately, Swanson’s Law is yet to come up against such a brick wall, and solar energy costs have continued to come down precipitously for decades – without exception. And now the renewable energy industry is about to cross a major milestone that will truly set it on the path towards becoming the world’s predominant energy source. According to a report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) cited by Reuters, beginning in 2020, electricity generated by solar PV and onshore wind is set to become consistently cheaper than the most cost-effective fossil fuel alternative, without subsidies. **Coal-fired sources** In essence, more than 80 percent of solar PV and 75 percent of onshore wind power deployments to be commissioned next year will be cheaper than the cheapest new oil, natural gas, or coal-fired sources as per the report. This report has a pretty wide scope, having been compiled from IRENA’s own members, governments, consultancies,

industry groups, business journals, auctions, and tenders. IRENA’s membership includes research institutes, project developers, utilities, and power companies across 160 countries, all of which contribute data for its Renewable Cost Database. According to the IRENA report, the global weighted average cost of power generated using solar energy fell another 26 percent last year compared to the previous year. Bioenergy costs declined 14 percent, solar PV and onshore fell 13 percent, hydropower was 12 percent lower, while offshore wind was 1 percent cheaper last year. Costs of as low as \$0.03-\$0.04 per kilowatt hour (kWh) for solar PV and onshore wind have already become a reality in some parts of the globe. IRENA estimates that the global average cost of electricity for solar PV will clock in at \$0.055/kWh in 2020, then fall another 13 percent to \$0.048/kWh in 2021. As for onshore wind, corresponding estimates are \$0.049/kWh and \$0.045/kWh in 2020 and 2021, respectively. At the turn of the century, the idea that renewable energy could become a major source of energy during our lifetimes would have sounded incredible, even preposterous. After all, fossil fuels were just too dominant and much cheaper, while renewable energy faced seemingly insurmountable technical, cost, and integration challenges. Over the past decade, renewable energy has experienced transformative changes, enabling it to play a very significant role in our energy industry. The solar industry has in particular been a standout performer thanks

to remarkable price declines by solar PVs and increasing grid flexibility. **■ The solar PV capacity** According to data by the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), U.S.’ cumulative operating solar PV capacity stood at 62.4 GW by the end of 2018 – about 75 times the installed capacity just a decade ago -- supplying 1 percent of the country’s electricity needs. The future of renewable energy is looking brighter than ever. Energy Company BP has projected that solar and other renewables will supply 30 percent of the world’s electricity needs by 2040 and up to 50 percent in regions such as Europe. That’s an upgrade from the firm’s last year forecast of 25 percent by 2040. BP estimates that renewables will only take 25 years to go from 1 percent to 10 percent of global energy compared to 45 years for oil and more than 50 years for gas. The funny thing is, growth of solar has been consistently underestimated over the past decade, with actual installations outstripping projections. This means there’s a fair chance that even the most optimistic current projections might still fall short of reality a decade or two from now. The repercussions for the global economy are bound to be enormous. Other than the potential to stop climate change in its tracks, renewable energy will likely negate at least some of the nearly \$300 billion in annual energy subsidies provided by the world’s governments. (Source: oilprice.com)

India’s green vision to see full duty exemption on LNG

In a bid to promote a gas-based economy, the new government may cut customs duty on liquefied natural gas (LNG) to zero percent from 2.5 percent, to cut cost of power further and aid city gas distribution (CGD) projects besides boosting fertilizer production, according to official sources. As per hellenicshippingnews.com, Petroleum Ministry officials said they are hopeful that this cut would be included in the Union Budget 2019-20 proposals to be presented in Parliament this July. The matter has already been discussed with the Finance Ministry. LNG is a clean fuel and its imports currently attract 2.5

percent basic customs duty. In addition, a social welfare surcharge of 10 percent is levied that takes the effective customs duty on LNG to 2.75 percent. This adds up to the cost of imported gas as LNG requires additional cost for reconversion into gas and transportation. The industry and the Petroleum Ministry have been pitching for exempting LNG from import duty for some time now as there is a shortage in domestic production. **■ Using gas as a fuel** The center has exempted domestic power generators using gas as fuel to import LNG without payment of any duty. It has, however, kept a vast section of user industries

such as fertilizer, LPG, CNG, PNG and petrochemical out of this duty relief. This is likely to be corrected this year to provide a level playing field to all gas users in the country, said sources. “With domestic production of gas still unable to meet the demand, there is an urgent need to allow duty free access to LNG without end use restrictions to allow all sectors to access this clean fuel,” said a government official not willing to be named. Cheaper access to LNG is expected to keep power tariff low while also allowing the government to save on fertilizer subsidy as cost of production will reduce.

China’s Iranian oil intakes skyrocket in April: report

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — China has significantly increased its imports of Iranian crude in the last month before the expiration of U.S. sanctions waivers, Sputnik reported on Thursday citing Business Times. According to the information from China’s customs administration, Beijing shipped in 3.24 million tons of Iranian oil in April, 21 percent more than that of the last year’s same month, and a four percent rise compared to March 2019. The news comes amid a report by The Wall Street Journal saying that China has complied with the U.S. sanctions and stopped purchasing crude from Iran following the end of Washington’s waivers. However, Iran’s Deputy Oil Minister Amir Hossein Zamaninia stated on May 5 that the country is planning to continue selling its oil in a “grey market” even after the expiration of the U.S. waivers. The U.S. granted waivers to eight countries buying Iranian oil - China, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey after imposing sanctions on Tehran’s energy, banking and shipping sectors in November 2018. In April 2019, Washington announced that it wouldn’t extend the waivers, with the expressed aim to drive Iran’s oil exports down to “zero”. In early May, Chinese Commerce Ministry announced the country’s opposition to unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran, saying that cutting Iranian oil supplies will only worsen volatility in global energy markets. China is Iran’s largest oil customer with imports of 475,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the first quarter of this year, according to Chinese customs data.

Oil drops 1%, set for biggest monthly fall since November as trade wars spreads

Oil prices fell by more than 1% on Friday and were on track for their biggest monthly fall since November as trade conflicts spread and U.S. crude output returned to record levels. Reuters reported, front-month Brent crude futures, the international benchmark for oil prices, were at \$65.97 at 0639 GMT, down by 90 cents, or 1.4%, from last session’s close. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$55.92 per barrel, down 67 cents, or 1.2%, from their last settlement. WTI earlier marked its lowest since March 8 at \$55.66 a barrel. The drops mean that crude oil futures are on track for their biggest monthly loss since last November. U.S. President Donald Trump ramped up trade tensions globally by vowing to slap tariffs on all goods from Mexico, firing up fears over economic growth and appetite for oil. The Mexico trade dispute adds to a trade war between the United States and China, which many analysts expect to trigger a recession. “All is not well with the economic world, at least according to bond and commodity traders,” Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at futures brokerage CMC Markets in Australia, wrote in a note published on Friday. “These (price) moves signal deteriorating sentiment about the outlook for global growth,” he said. Crude prices have also been under pressure from a much smaller-than-expected decline in U.S. stockpiles and U.S. crude oil production’s C-OUT-T-EIA return to its record 12.3 million barrels per day. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said U.S. crude stocks fell by around 300,000 barrels last week, to 476.49 million barrels C-STK-T-EIA. That was much less than the 900,000-barrel decline analysts forecast in a Reuters poll and well below the 5.3 million-barrel drawdown the American Petroleum Institute (API) reported on Wednesday.

First Announcement



National Iranian Oil Company
IRANIAN OFFSHORE OIL COMPANY
INVITATION TO COMMON BID
TENDER No. AT/97/131
Pre-Qualification
1398.1282

Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) intends to tender for " Replacement, damaged subsea cables platform AB to platforms AA & A18 in Aboozar complex(Kharg Island)

The required services include the following

Replacement, damaged subsea cables platform AB to platforms AA & A18 in Aboozar complex(Kharg Island)

Location:

Iranian waters in Persian Gulf - Kharg Island

Performance Period:

16 months

Provision:

- A: Iranian companies / Joint-venture of Iranian/Foreign companies with previous experience in similar projects or
- B: Bidders should have at least one completion certificate for a project similar to subject tender and submit the same to Company.
- C: Company shall reserve the right to accept or reject any or all of proposals or part(s) thereof without giving any reason or explanation whatsoever.
- D: Bid proposals should be submitted with no qualification, condition, provision, specification or stipulation of the Bid Package.
- E: Article of Association for Company perusal
- F: Bidders who have ability and are willing to participate in the Pre-qualification are requested to submit a written request enclosing their Company resume, experience and Article of Association to Contract Department, within 7 days from Second Announcement.

Note1: Closing Date for submission of the Bids shall be up to 14 days after the Second Announcement.

Note2: Bidders shall submit their Bids to IOOC Contract Department at **5th Floor, #12, Touraj St., Khakzad st., Vali-e-Asr Ave., after Balal Mosque, before Modarres Crossroad, Tehran, Iran.**

Telephone: **+98 21 23 94 25 26**

Fax: **+98 21 22 66 42 34**

Additional information is available at IOOC website address:

WWW.IOOC.CO.IR

Iranian Offshore Oil Company Public Relations

Barry Grossman: UN remains silent over Palestinian cause



TEHRAN (FNA) — Barry Grossman, international lawyer and human rights activist, says while the UNSC has turned into “a vehicle for its permanent members to push their own agendas”, the International Court of Justice has been threatened by the US and Israel to shut down if it holds Israel accountable for its war crimes against Palestinians.

In the exclusive interview with FNA, Grossman further noted the Atlantic World nations are recasting the Palestinian cause from a territorial cause into a human rights cause, to safeguard Israel from the consequences of its land-grabbing in Palestine.

Barry Grossman is an international lawyer and political commentator focused on human rights related issues. He has been extensively published on various legal subjects and is a frequent commentator on political affairs. He has taught law at the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Law and Monash University's Faculty of Law.

The full text of the interview is as follows:

■ Israeli forces have on numerous occasions been caught on camera brutally killing Palestinians. How is the regime not practically condemned by the international community?

A: Frankly, I am surprised that anyone still expects the “international community” to do anything. Quite apart from its corruption, the UN General Assembly is a dull instrument and at best public relational exercise, while the Security Council has become nothing more than a vehicle for its permanent members to push their own agendas. As for other non-political and legal mechanisms for holding Israel accountable for its war crimes and other atrocities, the ICJ has been cowed by the US and Israel which, despise having often openly threatened to shut it down, only tolerate its continuing existence so they can use it as a tool to advance their own agendas against non-Atlantic World nations. On the political and diplomatic side of things, very few nations have the courage, integrity, and political will to express anything more than token criticism of Israel's worst excesses, knowing full well that anything more robust will not only result in their own nation being targeted but also eliminate any scope for sharing in the orgy of corruption which sees the world's diplomatic corps enjoy such luxurious and prosperous lifestyles. On the other hand, we have seen the Palestine cause colonized by well intended liberal Zionists and other self-professed people of conscience in Atlantic World nations who have slowly recast

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the Palestinian cause from fundamentally being a territorial cause that raises humanitarian issues, into being a human rights cause, all with the implication that everything will be okay as soon as the European squatters of have usurped almost all of Palestine in open violation of International Law, start being just a little bit nicer to any Palestinians who are still left.

■ Israeli settlers enjoy total immunity, no matter what crime they commit against Palestinians. Why is not the Zionist regime officially branded as “racist”?

A: I find it surprising that people still have such naive faith in Atlantic World criminal justice systems, including the one deployed in occupied Palestine. The simple fact is that in those systems, people can indeed get all the justice they can afford to pay for but only as long as their position, irrespective of what the law actually states, is not inconsistent with official policy. The rule-of-law, if it ever in fact existed as more than a pipe dream, has now well and truly been buried in favour of rule by policy and it does not require anyone to be a scholar of history or jurisprudence, in order to recognise that Atlantic World policy both within occupied Palestine and in the wider Atlantic World, is all about supporting the Zionist view that Israel is entitled to do whatever it deems necessary to advance its agenda of securing all of historic Palestine as a special enclave in which individuals who identify and are accepted as Jews enjoy special rights while all others are compelled to settle for whatever they are grudgingly given.

■ With Netanyahu's forming the next cabinet, is there any room to hope for lowered Israeli attacks?

A: It is going to get a lot worse before there can be any hope of things getting any better.

After all, in the ten years that followed the 2nd Intifada, Palestinians unilaterally opted to reduce armed attacks by the resistance on occupation targets, with the result being that, even based on the occupation's own skewed data, the incidence of lethal attacks by Palestinians on Israelis was reduced by more than 90% throughout the entire ten year period, in comparison to the already, relatively low levels that prevailed during the Intifada years. In return for Palestinians choosing to give peace a chance, the occupation unleashed successive, fully militarised attacks on the civilians of Gaza, while ramping up their land grabs in the West Bank. It should therefore be clear to anyone who takes a sober look at the situation that Israel and its enablers will settle for nothing less than a full capitulation by Palestinians.

Translated by Ali Emami

PRAVDA WEBSITE — The American withdrawal from the JCPOA, the famous nuclear deal between the United States and Iran, which at the time was also sponsored by Russia and the European Union, opened the door to more than one possible scenario but when nations clash, their people pay the consequences. So what is the current situation in Iran? How do the Iranian people experience American decisions? Since the narrative proposed by the great Western media side with the American line, I tried to enrich the visual with some questions to Davood Abbasi, of ParsToday.

■ Already in the aftermath of the signing of the JCPOA treaty, Barack Obama's America imposed a new series of sanctions against Iran, in fact immediately beginning to betray its part of the agreement. Why did Iran trust Americans?

A) I think Iran knew very well that the Americans would not have kept the agreement. The dark period of American rule in Iran, at the time of the last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the actions over the last 40 years, period of life of the Islamic Republic, have taught all Iranians that the United States cannot be trusted. Therefore, I do not believe that illustrious personalities such as President Rohani or Foreign Minister Zarif really trusted the signing of the Americans. Their move was clever in the same way, because unfortunately the Western media and even part of the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, had the habit of insinuating that Iran was planning the bomb. With the agreement and the presence of the international inspectors in Iran, this accusation can no longer be addressed and even in the case of a Tehran withdrawal from this agreement, it will be possible to establish and verify that the Iranian program is solely civil.

■ At that time there were no alternatives to the agreement?

A) There were alternatives but I believe the choice was right. The country's economy needed to take a breath, there was a need to buy some new airplanes, there was a need for at least a period of reduction in sanctions. The right spirit, however, as anticipated, was to know from the beginning that it would not last long and think from the beginning to the next. We will have to wait for the next few months to see if this has actually been done. For now, the resilience of the Iranian economy and government in the face of “the toughest sanctions in history” is truly exemplary and there are no particularly critical phenomena within Iran. People continue their activities, the economy continues for its course and I believe we can say that the country is immune to any kind of sanctions. In these days it was knew that China purchased 700,000 barrels of crude oil a day in April; India, just in the previous hours, had declared that it will resume its purchases, estimated at around 300,000 barrels a day. With this million barrels sold per day (admitted and not granted that Iran does not sell well elsewhere), the Iranian government can easily manage the economy, the internal market and carry out its functions. Actually, it could do it even with half of these sales, so I would say that the sanctions are proving an incredible fiasco for the Trump administration.

■ So what will President Trump do? Will he opt for military attack?

A) You see, if the US had only one chance of success in a military conflict against Iran, eager for wars as they are, they would have already attacked it a hundred times, as they did with other countries in the past. The problem is that the United States knows perfectly well that Iran is



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too strong; therefore they will never attack, but they use psychological warfare: with troop and military movements they want to make people believe that they have considered the option of war. I believe that right now President Donald Trump is in great difficulty on the issue of Iran and to witness his bewilderment, there are his statements to say the least contradictory. Within a week, he said earlier that the end of Iran had come and then he also said that Iran could become a great country with the government it has today and that he would like to negotiate. Trump is aware that the elections are approaching and he, in about two years, will have to be able to tell the American electorate what he did about the Iran dossier. If the electoral campaign started today, the Democrats would say that with the agreement with Iran, they had peacefully resolved the issue, they had established excellent contacts with Tehran and had made happy European and Asian allies. Trump, at this moment, would have nothing to say except to have violated the agreement, demoralizing among other things the allies of the United States, Europe in the first place, who had great economic interests in collaboration with Tehran. It is clear that the whole history of harsh sanctions, military threats and heavy rhetoric are an attempt by Trump to force Iranians to sit down at the table and renegotiate another agreement, more advantageous to the West. Unfortunately, however, the work of President Trump is so childish, primitive and amateur, that even if Iran wanted to make more concessions, now it is no longer in a position to do them. The Iranian population would never, ever accept a negotiation with a nation that has just violated the nuclear agreement. The Iranian population would never accept to sit at the negotiating table with those who turn badly to the country and with those who threaten Iran and moreover imposed harsh sanctions that go above all to hit the people.

■ President Rohani's position, known to Westerners since the Iran-Contras affair, came out stronger after the agreement was signed. And now that Trump tore him up?

A) Needless to say, Trump's withdrawal

from the agreement has embarrassed the Iranian reformists in front of the population. They had convinced the electorate to vote for them, promising to solve the differences with the rest of the world and to abolish the sanctions; they had also succeeded, but then Trump's withdrawal from the agreement and the return of the sanctions showed that their predictions were not correct. In fact, in light of this, I foresee that a conservative will win in the upcoming presidential elections and that the reformists are in a fairly weak position.

■ Is it true that President Rohani proposed a popular referendum to decide on the continuation of the nuclear program? However, wouldn't it be a risky move and with a desperate taste?

A) President Rohani does not have the power to hold such a referendum. And then it would not make sense to make a referendum about an inalienable right of the country, also recognized by international law. The non-proliferation treaty, of which Iran is a signatory, consents to the development of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. For the production of medicines and electricity. Ironically, Iran, with the sanctions existing, needs both. Assuming that the referendum is done, over 90% of people would vote yes for nuclear power, because they considers it as a right and something necessary for the progress of the country.

■ What was the reaction of the Iranian armed forces to Trump's decision?

A) The armed forces are on maximum alert to be able to respond to any aggression; this is their duty. Among other things, having also played a role in the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq in recent years, they are very well-prepared armed forces. As an experience, they also have the 8-year war against Iraq. I believe they are the most prepared in the region and I believe they are absolutely respectable also in terms of equipment. Precisely for these reasons, the option of attacking Iran is only a propaganda gimmick. Their reaction, therefore, was to raise the level of the alert.

■ And that of the political forces present in the parliament?

A) The political forces present in Parliament are composed of reformists and con-

servatives. The conservatives immediately declared that the facts show what they had always told: you can't deal with Americans, because they are not worthy of trust and they understand only the language of bad manners and not those of good ones. The reformists tried to justify their position a little but later gave up. At the moment there is a certain unity and the bipartisan goal is to approve measures that reduce the pressure of sanctions on people.

■ How did the clergy express themselves and, in particular, the Supreme Guide, the Ayatollah Khamenei?

A) The clergy condemned the position of the United States, considering it in any case aligned with the historical role of this country and Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated that the country must invest in its indigent forces, in its internal production, in its capacities, and therefore develop even more what is called the “economy of resistance”. Among other things, visits to neighboring countries by the president and foreign minister indicate that Iran is trying to weave a network of exchanges with its neighbors that sanctions cannot stop.

■ After Trump's decision to withdraw from the treaty, have ordinary people and the Iranian youth felt defrauded of a part of their future?

A) They felt deceived by the United States. The anger was univocal because this time Iran had signed an agreement and it was US who failed in their commitments.

■ How does the Iranian population live this moment so tense, in which any accident can trigger a terrible war with the Americans?

R) In reality there is not all this tension within the country. People have been used to threats from the US for 40 years and don't take them seriously. Life goes on carefree and happy, and this can be confirmed by the many Italian tourists who have been to Iran in the last period. Everyone talks about a welcoming, happy, smiling people. I interviewed many of them for IRIB “Italian Tourists in Iran” section and I could also make audio files available to you. In Iran nobody is worried and they also knows that in the remote case of a war, the country would be able to defend itself.

■ Relations between Russia and Iran sometimes seem to be those of a difficult collaboration, based on necessity rather than on real trust. What do you think?

A) Russia is not our ally. Russia is nobody's ally. And this is also Russia's biggest weakness. Americans, for many years, have been trying to play in the international arena with allies: Europe and some Asian powers such as Japan, South Korea, India. Sometimes they even struggle to keep them in line, but in the end they treat them as allies. Russia plays alone on the international scene, does not trust anyone and if there are potential allies, it sells them as soon as it can as a bargaining chip, in its interactions with the West. This is serious and the first to pay the price are the Russians themselves. It is clear that in such a situation, Iran cooperates with Russia when interests are common, but does not trust it and, in my opinion, has every reason not to trust.

■ There is a lot of mistrust towards Iran. Because of the more traditional aspects of Shiite Islam or its aspects of social justice, which could supplant the old political paradigms that are already very decadent?

A) I don't understand this question well. I can only say that Iran represents that part of Islam that is wise, responsible and moderate and that the West would do well to strengthen and have as an ally. The West, primarily the USA, has always chosen the alliance with sectors of Islam that are very dangerous and intransigent: Saudi Arabia is the most obvious example.

China's entity list sends clear signal



China's Ministry of Commerce announced on Friday that the country will release its non-reliable entity list. Foreign entities, individuals and companies that block and shut the supply chain, will be included in the list.

GLOBAL TIMES —China's Ministry of Commerce announced on Friday that the country will release its non-reliable entity list. Foreign entities, individuals and companies that block and shut the supply chain, or take discriminatory measures over non-commercial reasons, and when their actions endanger the business of Chinese companies will be included in the list.

The US recently put Huawei on its entity list and threatened to blacklist more Chinese high-tech companies. Meanwhile, some US companies have taken part in cutting supplies to and blocking Chinese companies. China's non-reliable entity list comes out under this background.

The first signal of this move is that China will never yield to US pressure and China will take active countermeasures instead of reacting passively under US suppression.

The move also shows that China is improving laws and regulations in its contention with the US, and China can take precautions ahead of any US crackdown against Chinese enterprises.

The entity list is a long-term endeavor. Its deterrence will help protect Chinese companies. But China will stick to its commitments of opening up. The country will not discriminate against foreign companies and will not weaken China's opening-up efforts. Rather, it will make rules clearer and draw a more certain line of relations between foreign companies and the Chinese market. This is another signal the entity list conveys.

China will not make unprincipled compromises in the

wake of unreasonable demands of the US and will take countermeasures when necessary. But the trade war will not affect China's attitude toward foreign companies. It will continue to open its market to US companies. This is China's existing policy and also a consensus of Chinese society.

Resolve and calmness are two sides of the coin of determination in the eyes of the Chinese people. The US side has been saying that high tariffs have brought a destructive impact on China and foreign companies are leaving China. China's response is to calmly signal that it may restrict rare-earth exports to the US and announce the establishment of the non-reliable entity list. The prosperity of China can't be impeded by US imposing higher tariffs. Washington's arrogance is merely the bubble in the air.

China is ready for a long-term trade battle with the US. Compared to last year when the US started the trade war, the Chinese public is more supportive of the government taking tough countermeasures. More and more Chinese people now believe that the real purpose of some Washington elites is to ruin China's development capabilities, and these people have hijacked the US' China policy.

Peace-loving Chinese people do not want to see a worsening relationship with the US, nor will they want to be involved in a long trade battle with the US. But they also know that fair negotiations can only be achieved with a resolute fight. To safeguard China's right to develop and strive for a fair and just international environment for China's development, Chinese society will fight to the end of the trade war.

Understanding the Israeli occupation of Palestine

1 → With the downfall of the Ottoman empire after the first world war, British government took over Palestine (known as the British mandate on Palestine) which at that moment, and still, serve as link between various such Arab nations as Jordan, Iraq, Syria etc; the center of which lies numerous petroleum pipelines. In fact, it was the British took over of Palestine that gave Zionism an upper hand towards the realization of its core objective in various ways. Until then, Zionist Movement is as insignificant as the existence of Jews themselves in Palestine.

By issuing the 'Balfour Declaration' in 1917 announcing total support for the establishment of 'national home' for the Jewish people in Palestine, the British government proved its complicity in the illegal occupation of Palestine. And it was exactly the very moment, for the first time in history, that Zionists aspiration to establish an apartheid state in Palestine came out to the open and suddenly gain momentum.

As the Balfour declaration gave them the legal right to own lands in Palestine, not minding whether or not the idea is legally justifiable; they immediately and systematically start buying more of it and as a matter of fact sometimes even forcibly displacing the helpless Palestinians out of their homes.

Notwithstanding, when the Palestinians start to resist, gorilla Zionist militia trained by the British army was already in place to quell the anticipated revolt. And no sooner did clashes became the order of day in Palestine, but as the Zionists were by far more militarily sophisticated and well equipped owing to the support from Jewish National Fund (JNF), a European organization that fund all the movement's activities. Palestinians were therefore overpowered and killed in dozens and sometimes even a hundred, while the Jews only sustained from varying degrees of less serious injuries to no casualties.

Out of fear of an effective revolt (from Palestinians) and for the fact that Palestine is gradually turning into a war zone with the Palestinians resisting, with their lives; the combined tactics of European and Zionist usurpation of their land, as if not enough the British government with the help of Zionist militia in 1936 brutally suppressed the Palestinian revolt as a result of which so many frontline activists were either killed or jailed.

Men, women, young children and the aged were massacred. Thousands of innocent civilians were forced to flee their homes in search for shelter to another area where Palestinians still hold ground. This on the other hand only strengthened the Palestinians to resist even harder; as Nelson Mandela says: "Cowardice is no characteristic of a Freedom fighter".

The Massacre gained worldwide condemnation and due to the growing tension in Palestine and the daily killing of innocent Palestinians, the UN in a bid to



By issuing the 'Balfour Declaration' in 1917 announcing total support for the establishment of 'national home' for the Jewish people in Palestine, the British government proved its complicity in the illegal occupation of Palestine.

calm situations proposed a plan in 1947 known as the 'UN partition plan'. The plan recommends the segregation of Palestine to what is the present day Israel, West Bank and the Gaza Strip thereby establishing a home for both Palestinians and Jews in the embattled land.

According to the partition plan the Jews who are still in minority as compared to the Palestinians would occupy 56% of the total land mainly Israel; and the Palestinians 43% mainly the Gaza strip and East Jerusalem and the rest (the west bank) would be considered an International zone.

The Palestinians strongly rejected the partition questioning the allocation of more land to the Jews, while the Jews publicly welcomed the idea which they consider the first step in the 'possession of the land of Palestine as a whole' and a year after in 1948 the hidden motive behind their acceptance of the partition plan was publicly made known by declaring Israel an independent Jewish nation.

Therefore, in essence, the partition plan did not hold as Israel violates the agreement. More and more tension grew in the region, Jews further persecuting Palestinians in a bid to take over control of the whole land; and the armistice agreement was drafted after which Jordan took control of some part of Jerusalem while Egypt took over the Gaza strip.

The International community witnessed, at the interim of 1949 - early 1960s, the systematic and horrible 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians by the Israelis. First, from those Palestinians who based on the partition plan fall into the established Israeli state

and subsequently extending the mission to other neighboring Palestinian areas?

The cleansing strategy include systematic expulsion of inhabitants of about 500 Palestinian villages, intimidation, land confiscation and worse yet, public execution. Before the end of 1960s so many a great number of Palestinians were forced to flee their land and settle in various Arab states as victims of organized crime and refugees of continuing Zionist extermination.

By the end of 1967 Israel, abetted by the British, preemptively attacked and defeated the combined forces of Syria, Jordan and Egypt in a war that lasted for six days; and has since then took over the control of Jerusalem and the Gaza strip which is again a clear violation of both the UN partition plan and the armistice agreement.

The illegal occupation paved way for the emergence of the first Palestinian 'Intifada Resistance' in 1987 and the second in the January of 2000 owing to the continued persecution from Israeli forces.

The Intifada resistance signifies an uprising against apartheid system of government and the Palestinians will to reclaim their usurped land and freedom; among of which include freedom of liberty, freedom of speech and freedom of political associations.

Mass clampdown on peaceful protesters, illegal detention without trial, bombing and killing of young children, in a vicious bid to jeopardize the future of Palestinians; has since the illegal occupation been the order of day in the occupied lands. According to March 2019 UNICEF report, at least 56,000 Palestinian children have been imprisoned

on various occasion since the beginning of Israeli illegal occupation.

Over millions of people have been incapacitated from either gunshot wounds or the use of chemical weapons indiscriminately on innocent civilians including women and young children by Israeli forces; while several thousand-if not million, have since then been rendered homeless. And to this date, Palestinians are suffering on their own land, at the hand of ungrateful, greedy guests they generously sheltered who were then 'stateless' and not even their brothers could take them in.

The supreme leader and founder of the Islamic republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini on September 1981 proclaimed the last Friday of every Ramadan as International Quds Day, also called the International Day for the Oppressed, where he calls upon people of conscience across the globe to show their solidarity to the oppressed people of Palestine and their course, while at the same time condemning all forms of tyranny meted on other oppressed people the world over like the present day Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq etc.

Since then, more than hundreds of countries participate in the annual pro-Palestinian procession with people from across all walks of life in attendance; Christians, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Humanists, Men and women, children and the aged.

The Islamic Movement in Nigeria under the auspicious guardianship of his eminence Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky is no exception to this march of humanity. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government is not buying the idea of its citizens supporting the course of the oppressed Palestinians- of truth, justice and humanity, as it seems; and therefore intimidate and more often than less attack the followers of the Sheikh whenever they come out to mark the International Quds day.

For example, the Nigerian military on broad daylight attacked and killed 34 people altogether during the procession in Zaria in July 2014; among of which one is a Christian by name Julius Anyanwu and the rest 33 are followers of the Sheikh including 3 of his biological namely Ahmad, Hameed and Mahmud who were taken alive to Basawa Barrack and tortured to death; the fourth, Ali Haider was lucky to escape with a comminuted fracture of the thigh but was later killed in cold blood 18 months later alongside his brothers Hammad and Humaid; before the eyes of their parent.

The case for Palestine is undoubtedly a trial to humanity. Where do you belong? The side of the oppressed or the side of the oppressors? Remember, neutrality during oppression is complicity! The Islamic Movement's support for the oppressed Palestinians is from the river to the sea and no amount of persecution can change this fact.

The Slogans "Death to Israel", "Freedom for Palestine" will continue to echo every day and most especially on the last Friday of Ramadan.

'Deal of the Century' against intl. law: Mahmoud al-Zahar



TEHRAN (MNA) — Mahmoud al-Zahar, a co-founder of Hamas resistance movement, says that the Bahraini-hosted meeting to discuss the economic aspects of the 'Deal of the Century' is doomed to failure due to its contradiction with international law.

In an interview with Mehr, the Hamas senior official Mahmoud al-Zahar referred to the Bahraini-hosted meeting to discuss the economic aspects of the 'Deal of the Century', which is scheduled to be held in Manama on June 25 and 26, and said that the meeting will fail as no Palestinian is going to accept any bribes in exchange for giving up the Palestinian cause.

Al-Zahar said that the Palestinians are not going to exchange their own lands, their holy sites, and the right to return of all Palestinian refugees with money. The senior Hamas official added that the Palestinians want back the entire Palestinian lands and will not exchange Palestine with anything else.

On the impact of the world-wide rallies for the International Quds Day, which was initiated by late Iranian Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in 1979, the co-founder of Hamas said "of course measures such as holding Quds Day rallies have had great effects."

He went on to explain that the Quds Day rallies have led to the "reopening of Gaza borders and the entry of food, medicine and humanitarian aid to Palestinians and people of Gaza."

On the cooperation of some Arab states with the US-Israeli plan for the Palestinian issue, Al-Zahar expressed his regret over the Arab countries' submission to the deal.

He went on to state that "Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and Iran have expressed their opposition to the implementation of the 'Deal of the Century', while other countries have been silent."

He added that the dissolution of Israeli Knesset had nothing to do with the debates on the 'Deal of the Century' and the dissolution of the Israeli regime's parliament was due to internal power struggle.

The Hamas senior official further noted that the implementation of the 'Deal of the Century' has been postponed as many western countries also oppose it, adding that only two "marginal countries" have so far moved their embassies to Jerusalem Al-Quds. He furthermore added "the trend of the 'Deal of the Century' will not succeed and will not be completed as it is against the international law."

This year's Quds day was special due to 'Deal of the Century'



TEHRAN (MNA) — In an interview with Mehr, Sheikh Hassan Izaddin, the Hezbollah official for Arab-African affairs said that this year's Quds Day was special due to widespread opposition to 'Deal of the Century'.

Sheikh Hassan Izaddin, the Hezbollah official for Arab-African affairs told Mehr correspondent that the so-called 'Deal of the Century', proposed by Donald Trump and backed by those who seek to put an end to the Palestinian issue, will not succeed.

Izaddin also said that the reactionary Arab countries in the region such as the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as Bahrain, which are the main backer of Trump's 'Deal of the Century' will get nowhere with their new conspiracy.

He further condemned the Manama meeting to discuss the economic aspects of the 'Deal of the Century' on 25-26 of June, saying that the Arab states' cooperation with the Israeli regime is aimed at distracting attention from their arch-nemesis Israel.

The Hezbollah official went on to highlight that the Manama conference aims to force Palestinians to give up their rights in exchange for money, stressing that the 'Deal of the Century' will be a 'stillborn'.

Izaddin further noted that no Palestinian political group is going to attend the Manama meeting as none of them will accept to give up the Palestinians' rights and sell out their lands for money.

Furthermore, he praised the role that the International Quds Day plays in solidifying the Islamic unity, adding that this year's Quds Day was special in opposing Donald Trump's moves against Palestine and huge turnout of the people across the world that showed their support for Palestinian resistance.

Joe Catron: International campaigns against Israeli occupation of Palestine Vital for Resistance

TEHRAN (FNA) — Joe Catron, political activist, says "for every international activist on the ground in Palestine, we need a thousand or more fighting in our own countries," to circulate the information through global networks, and tell the world about horrific atrocities by Israeli forces.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, the American activist said thanks to activism, now the world has become familiar with the ruthless crimes against Palestinians, and with resistance figures like Ahed Tamimi, leading to solidarity with Palestinians even between US politicians.

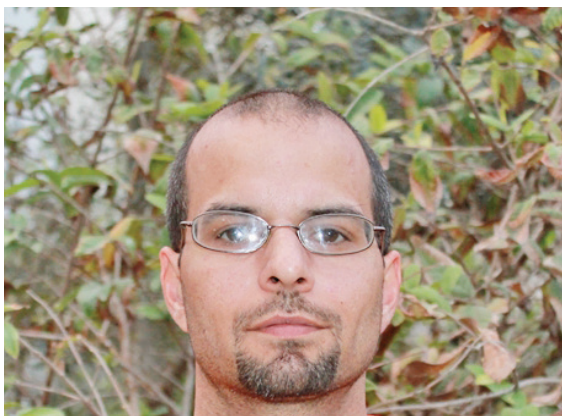
Joe Catron is an American activist. He went to Gaza Strip in March 2011, on the first international solidarity delegation to cross the Rafah border and lived there through October 2014. His writings and photography from Palestine have appeared in various media. He is currently the US coordinator of Samidoun: Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network.

Below is the full text of the interview:

■ There are non-Palestinian individuals who make it to the West Bank or Gaza. They mainly report Israel's atrocities against Palestinians. How do you value their works?

A: My personal experience has taught me how important the work of international solidarity activists in Palestine can be, as well as how unfair the reasons often are. During Israel's 2014 massacre in the Gaza Strip, its murder of Salem Shammaly on July 21, followed by its destruction of Al-Wafa Hospital two days later, drew worldwide condemnation, largely because I and a few others were present to document these crimes, then circulate our information through global networks. As horrific as these atrocities were, that was the only factor setting them apart from many others. Israel bombed multiple hospitals, and shot and killed countless Palestinians. Unfortunately, few received the same attention. During less intense periods, I often heard from Palestinians engaged in a range of activities, from farming and fishing to demonstrating at the Israeli barrier around the Gaza Strip. They valued our presence and saw it as a deterrent to Israel's routine attacks.

■ How are anti-occupation activists treated in the Western countries?



Without the support of the movements in our own countries who support us, put the information and connections we send them to work and use them to resist our countries' complicity in Israel's crimes, solidarity activists would serve little purpose under the occupation. For every international activist on the ground in Palestine, we need a thousand or more fighting in our own countries.

A: At a popular level, it's an exciting time to be a supporter of Palestine, especially in the United States. Israel's ruthless crimes against Palestinians, along with new exemplars of Palestinian resistance like Ahed Tamimi and the Great March of Return, have driven both solidarity with Palestinians and revulsion at Israel to new heights. For the first time in decades, we even see breaches in US politicians' unqualified support for Israel. Many candidates running for our presidency have felt obligated to criticize the crimes of the Israeli state, even if they prefer to speak of "the Netanyahu government." And H.R. 2407, a bill in our House of Representatives to sanction Israel for its military detention of Palestinian children, is rapidly accumulating supporters not only at the grassroots, but also among members of Congress. This is a striking change from past years. Despite these developments, not as much has changed at the official level. Supporters of Israel still maintain firm control of our government, not only in the Trump administration, but also the Democratic leadership, as well as among decision-makers in education and the media.

■ Reporting from inside Gaza during the Israeli bombardment, or campaigning internationally on a weekly basis; which one do you see more helpful to put an end to Israeli's occupation of Palestine?

A: Without the support of the movements in our own countries who support us, put the information and connections we send them to work and use them to resist our countries' complicity in Israel's crimes, solidarity activists would serve little purpose under the occupation. For every international activist on the ground in Palestine, we need a thousand or more fighting in our own countries. And for many of us, the most valuable aspect of our time in Palestine is the education we acquire for the struggle here at home. The organizing I do today in solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners is helped tremendously by the training I received over years of working alongside prisoners' families and supporters. And the same is true for activists I know in campaigns against illegal West Bank settlements, or the siege of Gaza. Our experience in Palestine aids the work here, but the fight in our own countries is what will ultimately make the difference.

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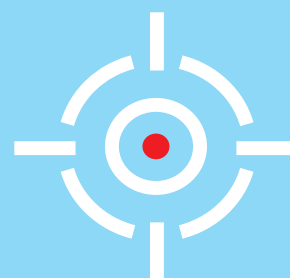
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NASA awards first contract for lunar space station

NASA has contracted Maxar Technologies to develop the first element of its Lunar Gateway space station, an essential part of its plan to return astronauts to the moon by 2024.

Astronauts arriving from Earth in the Orion crew capsule will dock at the gateway, which will be in orbit around the moon, before transferring to a lunar landing module and descending to the surface. It will also double as a research outpost for astronauts who do not become moonwalkers.

Maxar Technologies will build the power and propulsion element (PPE), which is scheduled to launch in late 2022. The company is

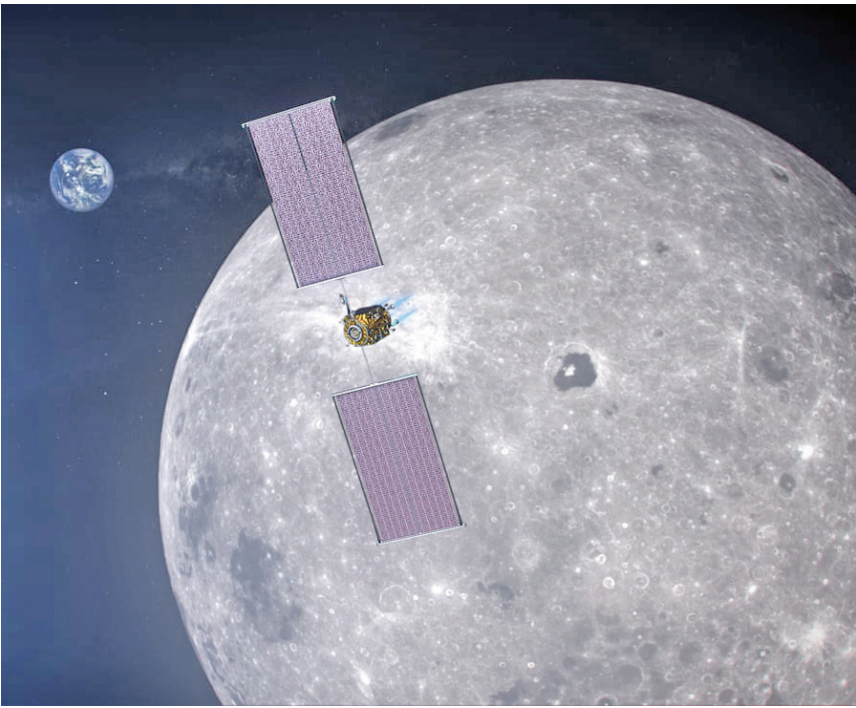
a privately owned manufacturer best known for building communications satellites.

The contract is worth \$375m (£295m) and Maxar will work with Blue Origin and Draper to deliver the spacecraft. Maxar won against competition from some of the biggest names in US aerospace including Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

The PPE will power a utilization module, which has yet to be contracted but will serve as a small habitation space and docking node.

The Orion crew capsule is well into production, but the contract for the lunar lander is still to be awarded.

(Source: The Guardian)



Unusual melting patterns spotted beneath Antarctica’s Ross Ice Shelf



New data collected by the ROSETTA-Ice project, a three-year survey of Antarctica’s largest ice shelf, suggests unique geologic formations beneath the Ross Ice Shelf dictate the inflow of penetrating ocean water, as well as the outflow of melting ice.

The Ross Ice Shelf is a massive floating sheet of ice. It acts as a stopper, slowing the advance of interior ice toward the ocean. Without it, Antarctica’s grounded ice would slip into the ocean, raising sea levels dramatically.

Because of its importance to the stability of Antarctica’s interior glaciers, scientists are keen to understand the ice shelf’s dynamics.

The Ross Ice Shelf is already melting at an accelerated rate -- 10 times faster than the global average, in fact. To better understand the interactions between ice, ocean, atmosphere and geology that define the Ross Ice Shelf, scientists with the ROSETTA-Ice project have been collecting data using a variety of instruments.

One of those instruments is a magnetometer, which measures Earth’s magnetic field. Scientists used data collected by the so-called IcePod to model the contours of the seafloor beneath the Ross Ice Sheet. Their efforts revealed a unique formation in the middle of the ice shelf, a geologic boundary between east and west Antarctica.

“We could see that the geological boundary was making the seafloor on the East

Antarctic side much deeper than the West, and that affects the way the ocean water circulates under the ice shelf,” Kirsty Tinto, researcher at Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, said in a news release.

Researchers used their new map of the floor of the Ross Sea to model ocean circulation beneath the Ross Ice Shelf. The new simulations showed an ocean pattern called the Ross Shelf Polynya prevents warm water currents from reaching the Ross Ice Shelf for most of the year. However, the model also showed the ice shelf’s leading edge is especially vulnerable to warm summer water.

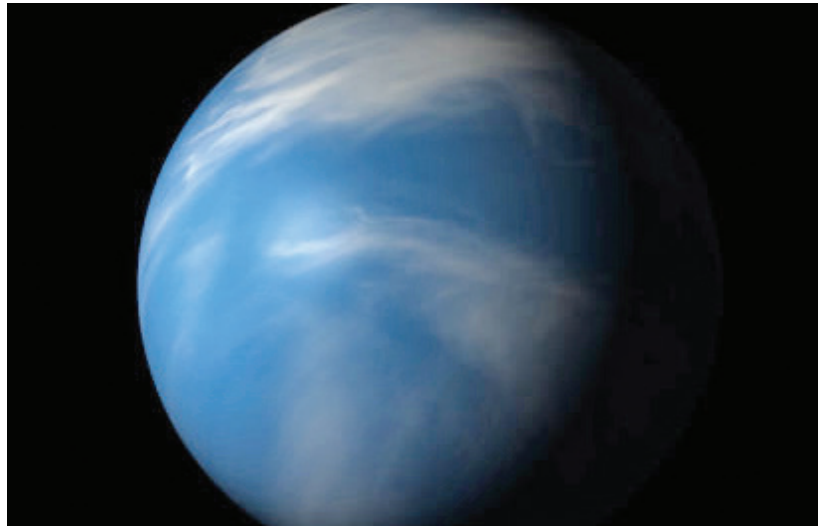
“We found that the ice loss from the Ross Ice Shelf and flow of the adjoining grounded ice are sensitive to changes in processes along the ice front, such as increased summer warming if sea ice or clouds decrease,” Columbia senior scientist Laurie Padman said.

The findings, published this week in the journal Nature Geoscience, suggest unique geologic patterns can inspire seemingly small-scale ocean patterns with a significant influence on melt rates along an ice shelf’s front lines.

“We found out that it’s these local processes we need to understand to make sound predictions,” said Tinto.

(Source: UPI)

Astronomers find ‘Forbidden’ planet in ‘Neptunian Desert’ around its star



An exoplanet smaller than Neptune with its own atmosphere has been discovered in the Neptunian Desert around its star by an international collaboration of astronomers, with the University of Warwick taking a leading role.

The rogue planet was identified in the new research, led by Dr. Richard West including Professor Peter Wheatley, Dr. Daniel Bayliss and Dr. James McCormac from the Astronomy and Astrophysics Group at the University of Warwick.

NGTS is situated at the European Southern Observatory’s Paranal Observatory in the heart of the Atacama Desert, Chile. It is a collaboration between UK Universities Warwick, Leicester, Cambridge, and Queen’s University Belfast, together with Observatoire de Genève, DLR Berlin and Universidad de Chile.

NGTS-4b, also nick-named ‘The Forbidden Planet’ by researchers, is a planet smaller than Neptune but three times the size of Earth.

It has a mass of 20 Earth masses, and a radius 20% smaller than Neptune, and is 1000 degrees Celsius. It orbits around the star in only 1.3 days -- the equivalent of Earth’s orbit around the sun of one year.

It is the first exoplanet of its kind to have been found in the Neptunian Desert.

The Neptunian Desert is the region close to stars where no Neptune-sized planets are

found. This area receives strong irradiation from the star, meaning the planets do not retain their gaseous atmosphere as they evaporate leaving just a rocky core. However NGTS-4b still has its atmosphere of gas.

When looking for new planets astronomers look for a dip in the light of a star -- this the planet orbiting it and blocking the light. Usually only dips of 1% and more are picked up by ground-based searches, but the NGTS telescopes can pick up a dip of just 0.2%

Researchers believe the planet may have moved into the Neptunian Desert recently, in the last one million years, or it was very big and the atmosphere is still evaporating.

Dr. Richard West, from the Department of Physics at the University of Warwick comments:

“This planet must be tough -- it is right in the zone where we expected Neptune-sized planets could not survive. It is truly remarkable that we found a transiting planet via a star dimming by less than 0.2% -- this has never been done before by telescopes on the ground, and it was great to find after working on this project for a year.

“We are now scouring out data to see if we can see any more planets in the Neptune Desert -- perhaps the desert is greener than was once thought.”

(Source: Science Daily)

Neanderthals may have died out because of infertility, new model suggests

The mystery of how and why our prehistoric relatives, Neanderthals, went extinct 40,000 years ago has baffled anthropologists for decades.

Many believe they were killed off by Homo sapiens while others say environmental catastrophe or disease led to their demise.

But a new paper, published in the Plos One journal has thrown another idea into the ring: Neanderthals could have gone extinct because young females became infertile.

The theory is based on an extinction model that has been put forward by Anna Degioanni from Aix Marseille Université.

She told The Independent the idea was “robust and plausible”.

“This study does not attempt to explain ‘why’ the Neanderthals disappeared -- but to identify ‘how’ it may have taken place,” she said. “First-time pregnancies, especially in young females (less than 20 years old), are on average more at risk than second and other pregnancies... a slight decrease in food may explain a reduction in fertility, especially among first-time mothers.”

Current research suggest Neanderthals went extinct over



a period of 4,000 to 10,000 years. Their demise was not believed to be brutal and occurred over a long period of time.

Dr Degioanni’s model suggests extinction would have been possible within 10,000 years if there was a 2.7 per cent decline in fertility rates of Neanderthal women under the age of 20. If they fell by eight per cent extinction occurred within 4,000 years.

She said theories that suggest Neanderthals died out

because of epidemics or conflicts are unlikely to be correct because they would have caused the population -- estimated to be made of 70,000 individuals -- to be wiped out considerably faster.

“A very slight decline exclusively for the youngest women makes it possible to obtain the disappearance of the population within the known times,” she added.

Along with her fellow researchers, Dr Degioanni created the demographic parameters of their model using observational data on modern hunter-gatherer groups and large apes as well as paleo-genetic information on Neanderthals.

They defined populations as extinct when they fell below 5,000 individuals.

Neanderthals arrived in Europe 250,000 years ago. This is the first study to use empirical data to suggest that relatively minor demographic changes, such as a reduction in fertility or an increase in infant mortality, might have led to Neanderthal extinction.

“Our results open the way to non-catastrophic events as plausible explanations for Neanderthal extinction,” researchers said.

(Source: The Independent)

2 Russians venture into open space from Space Station

Two Russian crewmembers on the International Space Station ventured into open space Wednesday to conduct scientific research and help maintain the orbiting outpost.

Oleg Kononenko and Alexey Ovchinin worked to retrieve several scientific experiments intended to study the impact of space flight that were mounted on the space station’s exterior. They also cleaned some of the space station’s windows, mounted handrails to facilitate future spacewalks and performed

other maintenance.

The spacewalk was scheduled to last 6½ hours, but the two managed to do the job quicker and wrapped up the mission in just over six hours. It was the fifth spacewalk for Kononenko and the first one for Ovchinin.

Their crewmates -- NASA’s Anne McClain, Nick Hague and Christina Koch and David Saint-Jacques of the Canadian Space Agency -- watched their progress from inside the orbiting outpost.

Kononenko is set to return to Earth with



McClain and Saint-Jacques next month following a 6 1/2-month stint in orbit. Ovchinin will replace him as the station’s commander.

For the spacewalk, the two attached stickers to their spacesuits paying tribute to Alexei Leonov, a legendary Russia cosmonaut who became the first human to walk in space on March 18, 1965. Speaking from the open space, they congratulated Leonov on his 85th birthday, which was on Thursday.

(Source: AP News)

Significant number of UFOs spotted over U.S. airspace by Navy pilots

A significant number of strange UFOs have been floating over the U.S., according to Navy pilots.

Numerous experienced pilots spotted the mysterious objects, flying at speeds and for lengths of time that would seem impossible with known technology, flying around in U.S. airspace.

The mysterious objects look like huge, white Tic Tacs and fly with no visible engine or exhaust fumes coming out of them. They appear to be able to execute manoeuvre that human pilots would never be expected to pull off: rotating in the air, and accelerating and stopping at possibly fatal speeds.

The latest reports are just the latest in a series of mysterious and unexplained reports of UFOs by U.S. pilots. They have become so prevalent -- and so little appears to be understood about where they have come from -- that the U.S. Navy has changed its reporting procedures in an attempt to learn more about where they are coming from.

The pilots involved have said they will not speculate on the origin of the aircraft. “We’re here to do a job, with excellence, not make up myths,” one told the New York Times, which interviewed five pilots about their previously undiscussed experience.

But the craft are moving in such strange and apparently impossible ways that no normal explanation has yet been made. Experts say that any alien explanation is unlikely, though they have not yet been able to rule it out, but it is more likely that it is the result of more mundane effects like bugs in the tracking systems and cognitive overload from such intense flights.

The new reports come from pilots who had been flying through 2014 and 2015 over the East Coast of the U.S.

Pilots first became aware of the craft when it showed up on radar tracking systems, they said, and initially thought it was the result of a secret drone program. But they became more mysterious when they started seeing them in real life.

One pilot said that he had almost crashed into one of the objects, which was described as looking like “a sphere encasing a cube”. Because the pilots were in danger of hitting the objects, they complained that if the craft were part of a secret program it could be putting their lives at risk.

In one of the sightings, which was captured on video, a pilot said he had nearly crashed into an object that was flying at a shocking speed. In the footage, pilots express wonder at the objects’ flight, exclaiming: “Wow, what is that?” and “Look at it fly!”

One of the pilots said that the planes appeared able to stay in the sky far longer than any known aircraft would normally be able to.

“These things would be out there all day,” Ryan Graves, a pilot who has flown with the Navy for more than 10 years and reported his sightings to the U.S. government, told the NYT. “Keeping an aircraft in the air requires a significant amount of energy. With the speeds we observed, 12 hours in the air is 11 hours longer than we’d expect.”

And they were flying in ways that could kill a human crew, seeming to accelerate, stop and turn almost instantly.

“Speed doesn’t kill you,” Lieutenant Graves said. “Stopping does. Or acceleration.”

The pilots, who all refused to comment on what the craft could be, said the reports stopped after they moved out of U.S. airspace.

(Source: The Independent)



Defying scientists, Hungary will overhaul academic network, website reports

Hungary is preparing legislation to strip the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of its research network, giving the government more control over scientific activity, the news website index.hu reported on Tuesday.

Hungary’s oldest and largest academic institution, the Hungarian Academy (HAS) is solely funded by the government but self-managing, with a network of scientific research bodies employing about 5,000 people.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Hungary’s right-wing leader, has tightened control over the country’s courts, media, economy, education and now scientific research. His aggrandizing measures have triggered criticism from the European Union.

A months-long tussle between Orban’s government and academics resisting the reforms is moving towards its final stages with the impending submission of a bill to parliament in the coming weeks, index.hu said citing the draft legislation.

No one from the government was immediately available for comment.

The overhaul, which Budapest said was needed to reap more economic benefits as Hungary tries to shift towards more innovative industries, has triggered protests from civil groups and academics.

A resolution passed by the Academy earlier this month said it disagreed with what it called the “political motivation for the arbitrary restructuring of the institutional network”.

The academy, which carries out scientific research using a network of specialized research institutions, receives 40 billion forints (\$137.27 million) a year from the government.

Index said the government proposal would move all the research units into a new public institution with a 13-member governing board comprising six government and six academy delegates. Orban would appoint the chairman based on a joint proposal by the board.

That would go against calls by scientists for only a third of board members to be picked by the government.

Index also said a new National Scientific Policy Council chaired by Innovation and Technology Minister Laszlo Palkovics, the architect of the academic overhaul, would make the proposals for main areas of research to be funded.

The legislation would force the academy to hand over the buildings and assets of its research institutions to the new state-run organization, the report said.

(Source: Reuters)



Ancient DNA yields snapshots of vanished ecosystems

Somewhere in a remote cave in western Georgia, a few dozen miles east of the Black Sea shore, scientists on an archaeological dig were searching among scattered stalagmites for pieces of the past. Ancient bones were strewn about on the floor of the cave, but those held only mild interest for the team. Instead, they gathered buckets of sediment, on the hunt for ancient DNA.



Ancient DNA, like that extracted from the mummified remains of Copper Age humans and frozen mammoths, used to be a precious find obtained only through the careful sequencing of nicely preserved fossils and bones. Finding the stuff was not easy and usually required a lengthy trek to the Arctic, a large research budget and a fair amount of luck. But now, scientists are finding it everywhere.

The results of the cave study, published this past April in Scientific Reports, showed that bears, roe deer and bats were present in this region at least as far back as 80,000 years ago. But finding traces of late Pleistocene animals is just scratching the surface of what can be done with environmental DNA, or eDNA, the traces of genetic molecules from long-dead organisms that survive as cell-free residues in the soil or other terrain. One of its strengths is that it can detect the remnants of organisms with soft bodies, allowing scientists to reconstruct entire ecosystems complete with plants, algae and more. Environmental genomics (or metagenomics, as it is also known) truly lets us see the ancient world in a few grains of sand.

According to Laura Parducci, an evolutionary plant ecologist at Uppsala University in Sweden who was not involved with that paper, “The big benefit [of metagenomic techniques] is that you can get DNA from species that are actually not visible in the fossil records.” Parducci studies ancient ecosystems by extracting eDNA from sediments from lake beds in Scandinavia.

She hopes to understand how plant communities responded to climate change in the past. Gleaning insights into animal plants has traditionally lagged behind that of animals because plant remnants like seeds and wood typically decay more readily than durable animal bones and can be harder to find in the geologic record. Moreover, Parducci also wants to reconstruct the past of organisms such as microbes, which leave no obvious trace.

The moment an organism dies, its body begins to decompose. Its cells rupture, and their contents spill into the environment. What scientists have realized over the past two decades is that even though the physical structure of a body disappears, its DNA can last for centuries.

(Source: quantamagazine.org)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Gyeongju Historic Areas

A World Heritage, the Gyeongju Historic Areas contain a remarkable concentration of outstanding examples of Korean Buddhist art, in the form of sculptures, reliefs, pagodas, and the remains of temples and palaces from the flowering culture of Silla dynasty, in particular between the 7th and 10th century.

The Korean peninsula was ruled for almost 1,000 years (57 BC – 935 CE) by the Silla dynasty, and the sites and monuments in and around Gyeongju bear outstanding testimony to its cultural achievements.



These monuments are of exceptional significance in the development of Buddhist and secular architecture in Korea. The property comprises five distinct areas situated in the center of Gyeongju and in its suburbs.

The Mount Namsan Belt lies to the north of the city and covers 2,650 ha. The Buddhist monuments that have been excavated at the time of inscription include the ruins of 122 temples, 53 stone statues, 64 pagodas and 16 stone lanterns. Excavations have also revealed the remains of the pre-Buddhist natural and animistic cults of the region. 36 individual monuments, including rock-cut reliefs or engravings, stone images and heads, pagodas, royal tombs and tomb groups, wells, a group of stone banner poles, the Namsan Mountain Fortress, the Poseokjeong Pavilion site and the Seochulji Pond, exist within this area.

The Wolseong Belt includes the ruined palace site of Wolseong, the Gyerim woodland which legend identifies as the birthplace of the founder of the Gyeongju Kim clan, Anapji Pond, on the site of the ruined Imhaejeon Palace, and the Cheomseongdae Observatory.

(Source: UNESCO)

HERITAGE & TOURISM

JUNE 1, 2019

Caravanserais and time travel to forgotten ages

1 → Caravansary is a compound word combining “caravan” with “sara”. The first stand for a group of travelers and sara means the building.

They often had massive portals supported by elevated load-bearing walls. Guest rooms were constructed round the courtyard and stables behind them with doors in the corners of the yard.

Iran’s earliest caravanserais were built during Achaemenid era (550 -330 BC). Centuries later, when Shah Abbas I assumed power from 1588 – to 1629, he ordered construction of network caravanserais across the country.

Here is comments of two international travelers to the restored Zein-o-din caravanserai in Yazd province, central Iran: “A great way to experience Iran,” Paula G. from London posted to TripAdvisor in April.

“There are nearly a thousand of these caravanserais dotted all over Iran, some

in disastrous states of disrepair some like Zein-o-din restored to the glory days when camel trains spotted here on the return from the Orient laden down with silk and spices. Sleeping arrangements are basic but the food is hearty & tea never ending. One can wander in the desert before locking up time (but beware, the local wildlife is speedy) & then watch the sun descend below the mountains from the rooftop as the sky comes alive with stars. Alternatively should the night prove too chill the central courtyard may be the place for entertainment until the eyelids become too heavy,” she wrote.

Another visitor to the caravanserai says, “We came across Zein-o-din Caravansary on our roadtrip. It has been a haven for wear travelers including us for hundreds of years. We had chai (tea) and great exploration of the building, and the needed bathroom break. We even took a peek at the different rooms. The



A view of the restored Zein-o-din caravanserai in Yazd province, central Iran.

It’s not hard to fancy the hustle and bustle of merchants bargaining on prices, recounting their arduous journeys to one another while their camels chewing hay!

bathroom is very clean and well supplied. I will definitely consider staying there on my next trip to Iran.”

From another point of view, caravanse-

rais acted like a bridge facilitating travel, commerce and cultural exchanges for centuries between East, Central Asia, Middle East and the West.

Restorers working on flood-hit Sassanid bridge



A view of the ruined Kashkan Bridge in Lorestan province.

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A team of restorers is working on the remains of Kashkan Bridge, a pillar of which has been tilted forward due to a flooding in March.

“Restoration of the sections of the Sassanid Kashkan Bridge, which were tilted at the time of the flood, has begun and a tilted base is being stabilized,” provincial tourism chief Amin Qasemi said on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

The devastating flood inflicted damage to tens of cultural heritage sites

in Lorestan; for instance it washed away parts of a historic hill, on top of which the famed Falak-ol-Aflak Castle is nested.

Kashkan Bridge is 300 meters long, and it originally had 11 columns and 12 arches, some parts of which are ruined or wiped away. Its height varies between 10 to 26 meters.

Inscribed on the list of National Heritage, the bridge is one the most spectacular attractions of the ancient region.

Iranian police recover haul of ancient relics



Artefacts rescued by the Iranian police are on display.

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iranian authorities have recently seized a haul of historical relics from a smuggler who was illegally embedded them in his car in Markazi province.

“In an inspection of a car at Tureh checkpoint (along the Arak-Boroujerd road), 80 pieces were found that includes metal objects and potteries, seals, beads, a thermos made of glazed clay, bowls, pots, bracelets and rings,” CHTN quoted provincial tourism chief Alireza Izadi as

saying on Thursday.

“Of the recovered objects, according to a cultural heritage expert, 20 metal works such as bowl, bracelet and a ring date from the first million BC, and thermos dates from the Sassanid era (224–651).”

The official added some 60 engraved beads were considered as counterfeit artifacts or just simple handicrafts that do not bear [special] cultural and historical values.

The accused was detained in this regard and surrendered to judicial authorities for further investigation.

Indie travel app Lambus makes group trip planning easier

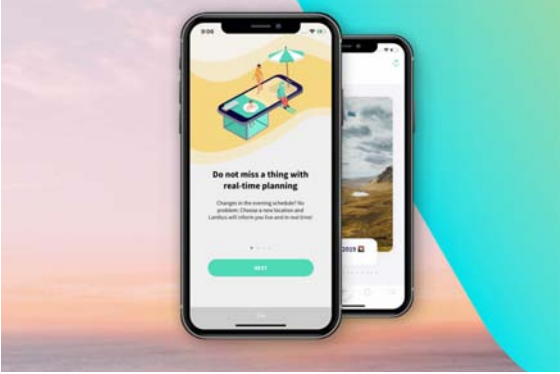
There are plenty of travel apps for researching flights and hotels or generally organizing your trips, but indie German developer Hans Knoechel struggled to find one that could gather all his travel-related information in one place, in addition to allowing a group of friends to collaborate on the trip-planning process. So he built one for himself: Lambus, an app that lets you organize your travel documents, manage expenses, plus collaborate and chat with fellow co-travelers about the trip being planned.

Previously a senior software engineer at Appcelerator in San Jose, Knoechel came up with the idea for Lambus after being on the road a lot himself, and finding existing travel apps lacking.

“When traveling, you either use a manual folder with dozens of pages for all your information — or countless apps to display travel expenses, booking confirmations and waypoint planning. Alternatives like Google Trips, Sygic and Roadtrippers were always limited to one person and never offered all the features I needed during the trip,” he explains. “This gave me the idea for Lambus: A collaborative platform on which travel groups — in real-time — can display all the properties of the trip in an easy-to-use platform: Waypoints, travel expenses, booking documents, notes, photos and chat,” he says.

The resulting app he refers to as a “Swiss Army Knife” for travel planning.

Like TripIt and others, travel documents can be shared with Lambus by forwarding emails to a unique personal email address. The imported documents — like plane tickets or Airbnb stays — will then be made available to all group attendees automatically. This is handy for group trips where often multiple people take turns making the various reservations, but don’t have any easy way to share the information with others beyond forwarding emails or



writing down information in a shared online document.

Documents can also be uploaded through an “Import PDF” feature, as an alternative to email sharing. And photos can be added by snapping a picture or importing from the phone’s Camera Roll, as well.

The photo feature is handy for saving those miscellaneous pieces of travel information — like how to access an Airbnb upon arrival, travel directions posted on an event or venue’s website, a helpful online review you saved and more. It’s also a fast way to import any other information, without having to rely on email or uploads.

In the expenses section, you can keep track of either private or group expenses by entering the amount and what it was for, and, optionally, if it’s been paid.

While largely aimed at group travel because of the collaboration and built-in chat features, the app can be used for solo trips, too.

In testing the app, we found there were a few kinks that still needed to be corrected.

separated in the storm.

Named for the number on its yellow leg band, No. 492 was at the zoo for such a short period of time that keepers didn’t even get a chance to determine its sex, only deepening the exotic bird’s mystique. What they do know, is that the five-foot-tall pink flamingo is approximately 25 years old and capable of living 50 years or more in the wild.

No. 492 has done quite a bit of traveling since its jailbreak. Over the years it has been seen in Texas several times, as well as in Louisiana and Wisconsin. Just last week, Texas



Parks and Wildlife announced via Facebook that it was spotted by photographer John Humbert wading in Lavaca Bay in Southeast Texas. It made an appearance in the same area around this time last year as well.

If you’re wondering whether or not flamingos are native to Texas, they most certainly are not. In fact, they’re pretty much never found in the United States except for a few sightings in South Florida. But it seems that No. 492 has managed to find a suitable environment in the Lone Star State.

(Source: travelandleisure.com)

‘MS incidence higher than ever’

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Multiple sclerosis (MS) prevalence in Iran has grown larger than ever, now at almost the same rate as European countries, said the managing director of Iran MS Society in an interview with IRNA.

Abdolkhosin Hushmand made the announcement to mark the occasion of World MS Day 2019 which took place on May 30. The 2019 campaign is called ‘My Invisible MS’ and the theme is Visibility.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a potentially disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord. In MS, the immune system attacks the protective sheath (myelin) that covers nerve fibers and causes communication problems between the brain and the rest of the body.

The disease usually begins between the ages of 20 and 50 and is twice as common in women as in men. MS Discovery Forum estimates that 2.3 million people live with MS globally.

According to Hushmand, in European countries, MS incidence is around 100 in every 100,000 people.

“Unfortunately, our statistics are closing this number as well, which means we have the highest rate of this disease in our region,” he added.



The total number of people admitted by 54 centers all around the country has now reached above 75,000 people, which is an alarming number.

“The total number of people admitted by our 54 centers all around the country has now reached above 75,000 people, which is an alarming number.”

“Averagely, 10 to 12 new MS patients are admitted in one of our centers every day in Tehran.”

“In last year alone, 6,800 new patients joined Iran MS Society.”

“We hope we can give timely and correct information about the disease to all people, so that the society start paying more attention to this disease.”

According to Hushmand, National MS Day Conference will be held on June 14 in Tehran. Raising awareness about MS, facilitating the diagnosis and treatment of the disease including rehabilitation and counseling services, and changes in people lifestyle are the three main topics of the conference.

Hushmand added that all diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitation centers will give free services to MS patients on June 13 and 14.

Also, sport competitions in different fields including chess, darts, Pétanque and archery will be held in the weeks leading to the conference.

WHO declares Iran, Bahrain, Oman rubella and measles free



The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination (RVC) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region has declared that measles and rubella have been eliminated from both Bahrain and Oman, and that Islamic Republic of Iran has eliminated rubella and is about to eliminate measles.

The RVC met in Amman, Jordan, on May 15-16, 2019 to review the reports submitted by Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman, and decide on the status of elimination of measles and rubella in the three countries. The Commission’s decision was based on a review of the reports and discussion with representatives from the three countries during the meeting.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, congratulated Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman on their achievement.

“We acknowledge the great efforts exerted by the health sector in the three countries that have led to the achievement of this goal and the elimination of these serious diseases. This gives us great hope and confidence that all countries in the Region can do the same and that we will be able to announce that the Eastern Mediterranean Region is a measles

and rubella free Region”, he said.

The RVC was nominated by the Regional Director in January 2018 to verify the elimination of the two diseases. Since then, national verification committees in 12 low incidence countries have been briefed on the documentation required for verification of the elimination of measles and rubella.

During the meeting in Amman, the RVC also announced a set of recommendations to the three countries. The Commission recommended that Bahrain and Oman should maintain the high quality of their national immunization programmes and their surveillance systems.

The Commission also recommended that Islamic Republic of Iran update and complete their measles outbreak summary table and implement further training for national laboratory staff on including distinct sequence ID information in their country report to the RVC.

The RVC encouraged all countries in the Region to sustain their efforts for the elimination of measles and rubella. The Commission also expressed its appreciation for the effort taken by countries to prepare their national reports for verification of elimination, and encouraged them to continue in this.

(Source: WHO)

‘World’s smallest’ surviving premature baby released from U.S. hospital



A baby born weighing just 245g (8.6oz), believed to be the tiniest on record to survive premature birth, has been discharged from hospital in the United States.

Baby Saybie weighed the same as a large apple when she was born at 23 weeks and three days in December 2018.

Fighting for life, she was transferred to the intensive care unit at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital in San Diego, California.

Doctors told Saybie’s parents she had just hours to live.

But five months on, she was discharged weighing a healthy 5.6 pounds (2.5kg), confounding all expectations.

■ **‘I didn’t think she would see Christmas’**

A nurse who cared for Saybie as she battled for survival said her recovery and release earlier this month was a “miracle”.

The Tiniest Babies Registry said Saybie is thought to be the world’s smallest surviving premature baby.

The previous record was held by a baby girl from Germany, born weighing 252g (8.9oz) in 2015, according to the registry, operated by the University of Iowa.

A baby, born weighing just 268g (9.45oz) in Japan earlier this year, is thought to be the

smallest boy to have survived premature birth.

Saybie’s mother gave birth to the little girl by emergency C-section three months ahead of schedule after she was diagnosed with pre-eclampsia - a pregnancy complication involving high blood pressure which can prove fatal for mother and baby.

In a video released by the hospital, the mother described the birth as the “scariest day of my life”.

“I kept telling them: ‘She’s not going to survive. She’s - I’m only 23 weeks [pregnant]’,” the mother, who has chosen to remain anonymous, said.

Her birth was so premature, doctors considered her a “micro preemie” - a baby born before 28 weeks’ gestation. Babies are typically born between 37 and 42 weeks into pregnancy, the hospital said.

She was so small she could “fit in the palm of the hands of her care team”, it said.

Her survival, doctors believe, could be attributed to the fact that she suffered no serious complications after birth.

“Saybie experienced virtually none of the medical challenges typically associated with micro preemies, which can include brain bleeds, and lung and heart issues,” the hospital said.

(Source: BBC)

Can a massage technique help treat acid reflux?

According to a preliminary trial, massaging the connective tissue surrounding the diaphragm could significantly reduce acid reflux for people with gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Researchers have tested a type of massage to help reduce symptoms of GERD.

In this era of antibiotic resistance and opioid addiction, finding alternatives to drugs is of growing interest to scientists, doctors, and the public at large.

A group of researchers recently investigated a drug-free way to alleviate gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or acid reflux.

Hailing from the Departments of Physical Therapy, Medicine, and Surgery of the Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera of Valencia in Spain, they recently published their findings in the journal Scientific Reports.

The scientists focused their study on people with GERD, a common condition that affects around 18.1–27.8% of adults in the United States.

Gastroesophageal reflux occurs when the contents of the stomach, including stomach acid, travel up into the esophagus. This can cause the unpleasant burning sensation that many people call heartburn.

For people with GERD, gastroesophageal reflux can be a regular occurrence that significantly impacts their quality of life.

Current treatment options generally involve the long-term use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). Although these drugs are effective, they can cause adverse events in some people and may increase the risk of chronic kidney disease.

The scientists involved in the most recent study investigated whether a type of massage called myofascial release (MFR) might relieve the symptoms of GERD.

■ **What is MFR?**

MFR focuses on the fascia. Prof. Mar?a Dolores Arguisuela, research co-director, explains that “the fascia is a tissue of the body that wraps around all structures — muscles, bones, vessels, organs — and has the function of supporting or sustaining, transmitting tensions, and sliding between planes.”

According to the authors of a review of MFR, the technique is a “manual therapy that involves the application of a low load,



long duration stretch to the myofascial complex, intended to restore optimal length, decrease pain, and improve function.”

The researchers wanted to understand whether MFR could reduce gastroesophageal reflux, improve quality of life, and minimize the number of PPIs that people needed to take.

They explain that the MFR intervention they designed to use in this study aimed to “stretch the diaphragm muscle fibers.”

The diaphragm is a muscular barrier that separates the abdomen from the chest. The scientists focused on massaging the fascia around the diaphragm because it sits just above the stomach and plays an important role in stopping stomach acid from traveling into the esophagus.

■ **Massage vs. reflux**

To investigate, they recruited 30 people, aged 18–80, with GERD. Half of the participants received MFR from a highly experienced physical therapist, and the other half received a sham procedure.

Each participant received four 25-minute sessions at a cadence of twice per week for 2 weeks.

During the MFR sessions, the therapist used six techniques that targeted the fascia of the diaphragm; the sham treatment involved similar techniques, but the practitioner did not apply pressure to the fascia.

The scientists assessed the impact of MFR using three measures:

- severity and frequency of GERD symptoms, measured using a 12-item questionnaire
- quality of life, assessed using a 36-item questionnaire
- PPI usage, measured in milligrams of drugs the participants took

The researchers repeated these measures before the first MFR session, after 1 week of MFR, and at the 4-week mark (2 weeks after the final MFR session).

Compared with those in the sham group, at the 4-week mark, those in the experimental group had a significant improvement in symptoms and self-rated quality of life. Similarly, participants in the MFR group needed to take significantly fewer PPIs. The study authors explain:

“These preliminary findings indicate that the application of the MFR protocol we used in this study decreased the symptoms and PPIs usage and increased the quality of life of patients with nonerosive GERD up to 4 weeks after the end of the treatment.”

■ **Limitations and concerns**

This was only a small preliminary trial, so scientists will need to investigate this effect using many more participants.

The authors also note that their study did not take any physical measurements to assess whether the diaphragm was, indeed, blocking the esophagus more effectively.

They also note the challenges of studying a manual therapy, because as the practitioner responds to the needs of each person’s body, every therapy session is different; on this note, they write, “In this sense, the use of manual therapy is itself a study limitation.”

However, despite the limitations, the results are encouraging. The researchers write:

“[T]reatment with MFR techniques has no side effects and could become a therapeutic alternative or complement in patients requiring long-term PPIs use or who want or need to avoid PPI medications because of their possible side effects.”

(source: medical news today)

Bread, cheese and doogh, main sources of hidden salt in Iranian diet

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Bread, cheese and doogh (a savory yogurt-based drink that is popular in Iran), are the main sources of hidden salt in Iranian diet, Hedayat Hosseini, the head of the National Nutrition and Food Technology Research Institute, said, Mehr reported on Friday.

According to a research conducted by the institute, 53 percent of salt intake is from the salt added to food, 12.5 percent from bread, 5.3 percent from cheese, 4.7 percent is from doogh, and the rest from other sources.

Unfortunately salt consumption in Iran is twice as much as global standards, which should be lowered in order to prevent from hypertension in the country, he said.

In late December 2018, the Iranian Heart Association announced that the average salt intake among Iranians is around 10-12 grams per day, which is far beyond standard levels.

According to recent studies in the country, salt intake among women is three times the men.

World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults consume less than 5 grams (just under a teaspoon) of salt per day; however, based on global statistics, most people consume too much salt—on average 9–12 grams per day that is around twice the recommended maximum level of intake.

WHO has stated that salt intake of less than 5 grams per day for adults helps to reduce blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke and coronary heart attack.

National surveys in Iran has revealed that around 34% of Iranians have high blood pressure, leading to the prevalence of stroke and cardiovascular diseases to the extent that they are the second cause of death among Iranians over the age of 50.



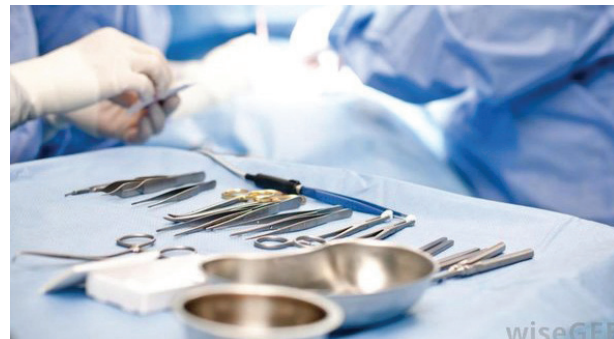
Iran Health 2019 to unveil new Iranian medical products

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Thirty new Iranian medical products will be unveiled at the 22nd Iran Health International Exhibition of Medical, Pharmaceutical and Laboratory Equipment, Iran Health 2019, from June 9 to 12 at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground, Mehr reported on Friday.

The number of foreign participants has decreased in this edition of the exhibition due to difficulties they faced for registration as a result of sanctions, the secretary of the event Edris Mazandarani announced.

This issue provides an opportunity for domestic companies in order to meet the demands of medical centers by manufacturing high quality products, he said.

The [high] exchange rate and [the lack of] government support to provide raw materials are the main challenges for manufacturing medical devices, he lamented.



Now Iranian medical companies meet 60 percent of demands of the domestic market, he said.

Over 480 Iranian and foreign medical equipment companies, including 38 firms from 16 countries, will take part in the Iran Health 2019, he explained.

Iran Health is the main platform for the international medical manufacturers to demonstrate their products and services annually. This event showcases and covers a wide spectrum of products like medical devices, health care services, laboratory equipment, hospital equipment, pharmaceutical products and services associated with this field etc. Several medical workshops and B2B meetings on dental, laboratory and pharmaceuticals will be held on the sidelines of the event.

‘Bad’ cholesterol, rare Alzheimer’s may be linked

Here’s another reason to keep your cholesterol under control: New research suggests that LDL, or “bad,” cholesterol may play a role in the development of early-onset Alzheimer’s.

A rare form of the disease that occurs before the age of 65, early-onset Alzheimer’s has previously been linked to a gene mutation involved in how the body processes fats and cholesterol. But that mutation only accounts for a small percentage of cases, the scientists noted.

Their new research suggests that “LDL cholesterol levels [also] play a causal role in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer’s disease,” said lead researcher Dr. Thomas Wingo. He’s an assistant professor of neurology at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta.

“The big question is whether there is a causal link between cholesterol levels in the blood and Alzheimer’s disease risk,” Wingo said. “The existing data is murky on this point. Our current work is focused on testing whether there is a causal link.”

Most early-onset Alzheimer’s disease is not explained by known gene mutations, Wingo added.

The APOE genetic mutation, called APOE E4, raises levels of LDL cholesterol. High levels of this type of cholesterol can clog arteries, increasing the risk for heart attack and stroke.

Other gene mutations associated with early-onset Alzheimer’s are called APP, PSEN1 and PSEN2.

But all of these genetic variants are only linked to about 10% of all cases of early-onset Alzheimer’s. That leaves 90% of all early-onset Alzheimer’s unexplained, Wingo said.

For the study, he and his colleagues sequenced specific areas of the genes of more than 2,100 people. Of these, more than 650 suffered from early-onset Alzheimer’s. In addition, more than 260 participants had their cholesterol levels checked.

(Source: webmd)

Common water hyacinth venders sell carcinogenic

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Eichhornia crassipes, commonly known as common water hyacinth, which is being sold by vendors on the streets are carcinogenic plant species and their trade must be banned.

Eichhornia crassipes is an aquatic plant native to the Amazon basin, and is often a highly problematic invasive species outside its native range.



Water hyacinth is a free-floating perennial aquatic plant (or hydrophyte) native to tropical and sub-tropical South America. With broad, thick, glossy, ovate leaves, water hyacinth may rise above the surface of the water as much as 1 meter in height.

The roots of eichhornia crassipes naturally absorb pollutants, including lead, mercury, and strontium-90, as well as some organic compounds believed to be carcinogenic, in concentrations 10,000 times that in the surrounding water.

Despite various warnings issued by Iran’s Department of Environment still the plant is being sold at a very low price on the streets especially in the capital, ISNA news agency reported on Friday.

Commander of Tehran province environment protection unit, Mohammad Reza Khishtandar told ISNA that environmental bodies can legally ban purchase of rare plant and animal species but there are no laws on banning the purchase of invasive species.

However, he noted, the invasive plant species which has adverse effects on public health must not be distributed and agriculture ministry should stop eichhornia crassipes trade in no time soon.

Department of Environment strongly recommends not purchasing and introducing eichhornia crassipes to aquatic ecosystems, he highlighted.

He also suggested establishment of a working group comprising representatives from ministries of health and agriculture as well as Department of Environment to practically fight the spread of the invasive species.

■ An invasive species

Water hyacinth has been widely introduced in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and New Zealand. In many areas it has become an important and pernicious invasive species.

In New Zealand it is listed on the National Pest Plant Accord which prevents it from being propagated, distributed or sold. In large water areas such as Louisiana, the Kerala Backwaters in India, Tonlé Sap in Cambodia and Lake Victoria it has become a serious pest. The common water hyacinth has become an invasive plant species on Lake Victoria in Africa after it was introduced into the area in the 1980s.

When not controlled, water hyacinth will cover lakes and ponds entirely; this dramatically affects water flow and blocks sunlight from reaching native aquatic plants which often die. The decay processes depletes dissolved oxygen in the water, often killing fish (or turtles). The plants also create a prime habitat for mosquitos, the classic vectors of disease, and a species of snail known to host a parasitic flatworm which causes schistosomiasis (snail fever).

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Aid to Ethiopia ‘too slow’

(April 6, 2000)

Ethiopia accused the international community of not responding quickly enough to calls for food supplies to head off famine. BBC correspondent Peter Biles reported.

The director of the UN World Food Programme here, Judith Lewis, said it was an **overstatement** to suggest that the **West** was **dragging its feet**, though she admitted that there were difficulties in getting food aid to some of the worst affected areas, such as the Ogaden region in the south-east, which borders Somalia. It’s an area characterized by insecurity. Local aid workers have already reported **famine-related deaths** and cases of **malnutrition**. The UN is now considering the possibility of starting **airlifts** to transport food aid to one of the main centers.

Yesterday the Ethiopian government expressed its **frustration**, saying that the international response to its **appeals** for assistance had been far too slow. **Only now**, four months after Ethiopia **sounded the alarm**, are large **pledges** of aid being made by **donors** and it’ll be several more months at best before much of that aid gets into the country and reaches those in need.

■ WORDS

overstatement: a way of describing something that makes it seem more important or serious than it really is
the West: refers here to the world’s richer countries
dragging its feet: being deliberately slow in doing something or in making a decision. (Judith Lewis feels that the West has not been slow although there are problems.)

famine-related deaths: if two things are related, there is connection between them. Here, people are dying as a result of lack of food

malnutrition: physical weakness caused by not eating enough food of the right kind

airlifts: here, an operation to carry food by airplane

frustration: a feeling of anger or distress because you cannot do what you want to do

appeal: an appeal here is an urgent request for help

only now.....are: putting the verb are after only now stresses the delay

sounded the alarm: warned people of the danger of a famine

pledges: solemn promises to do something

donors: organizations (or individuals) who give money or other help to those who need it

(Source: BBC)

Encouraging large families entails deliberate, sensible policies

1 → Furthermore, according to Ardeshir Garavand and official with Interior Ministry a number of 105,000 girls, mostly residing in Tehran and the central cities of Iran, are confirmed bachelorettes, and there are 36,000 confirmed bachelors in the country. The active age of marriage is 39 and women older than 39 are considered confirmed bachelorettes.

■ What are countries doing about it?

Today, the world’s lowest fertility rates are scattered across Europe and East Asia, in countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Greece, Spain, and Italy.

Possibly adverse economic conditions have left many adults believing they’re unable to afford children. Meanwhile, the drastic transformation in women’s social role and the structure of the family has accelerated the decline. The increase in female educational attainment, the massive entry of women into the labor force, and the rising average age of marriage and child-birth have all played a role in depressing fertility over the past few decades.

According to the *Forbes* many governments have taken various approaches by offering direct financial incentives to families with children, such as tax breaks, housing assistance, or discounts on public services.

South Korea, Singapore, France, Australia, Canada, Russia, and Poland have all offered “baby bonuses” per child. Other market-oriented policies mitigate work-family conflicts in the form of assistance with child care or generous family leave policies. The Czech Republic offers up to 70% of one’s salary during maternity leave. Berlin recently announced that all of its child care centers will be free.

■ Policies to reverse population decline: Chinese style

In China, 30-plus years of a strict one-child policy has resulted in an aging population with too few young people,



therefore, in an attempt to boost fertility, China adopted a two-child policy in 2015. However, this measure failed to achieve immediate results as the government wished. Statistics showed that China’s birth rate dropped despite the two-child policy, from 17.86 million births in 2016 to 17.23 million in 2017.

In an article published in mid-August 2018 in *The Diplomat*, some Chinese specialists proposed that in order to increase china’s declining fertility the government can set up a national fund.

They suggest that the government can stipulate that all citizens under the age of 40, regardless of gender, should transfer a certain percentage of their salary each year to the birth fund. Those families who are to give birth a second time or more can apply for subsidy from the fund, so as to compensate for the short-term income loss caused by the labor. As for other citizens who fail to give birth a second time, they won’t be allowed to withdraw their money

from the fund until retirement.

They also argue that that “the government can not only establish a birth fund to encourage birth, but should tax those DINK (Dual Income, No Kids) families for social support.”

However, the proposals triggered a large wave of criticism and sarcasm online.

■ Japan: Nothing can detract from the power of financial incentives

According to an article published in January 2018 in *World Economic Forum* Japan’s nationwide fertility rate hit its highest level in 21 years. While the country is struggling with a looming demographic crisis the country’s health ministry has announced that the total fertility rate increased to 1.46 in 2015, slightly up from the previous rate of 1.42 in 2014.

The spike in fertility is correlated with cash incentives for new parents.

For one, in a town called Ama on the island of Nakanoshima, which has a “leveraged scheme to incentivize mating”: parents

800 million people at risk as climate breakdown causes Asia’s vast glaciers to shrink

Hundreds of millions of people could be left without access to water as climate breakdown causes Asia’s vast glaciers to shrink, researchers have found.

When the rains fail, glaciers in the high-mountain regions around the Himalayas are a life-saver, releasing 36 cubic kilometers of water – the equivalent of 14 million Olympic swimming pools – to drought-prone areas every summer.

Glacial loss in the region has been going on for a few decades. However, the rate has increased – between 2000 and 2016, glaciers were shrinking 1.6 times faster than the period between 1951 to 2007.

“A lot of the climate projections suggest the melt will continue to accelerate,” lead researcher Dr Hamish Pritchard, a glaciologist from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), told *The Independent*.

Using climate projections, Dr Pritchard believes the glacier melt will start to slow in around 2050. He added: “As we start to get drought stress hitting, there will be crop failures and a loss of livestock. It could cause people to migrate and if you can’t migrate, it might cause conflict as people will need to fight with their neighbors for food.”

This will hit areas such as the fertile Indus Valley, which has been inhabited by human civilizations for many thousands of years and today feeds 237 million people.

The increase in glacier melt is also causing a glut of water to come down, causing

get 100,000 yen (about \$940) for the first baby, but get 1 million yen (about \$9,400) for the fourth kid. The town’s fertility rate bumped up to 1.80 from 1.66 between 2014 and 2015.

■ Russia offers cash incentives to boost birth rate

The Russian government has launched a new set of initiatives designed to boost the country’s birth rate, offering cash rewards and mortgage subsidies to poor families in a bid to reverse a steady population decline, *Global Government Forum* reported in March 2018.

For families having their second or subsequent child, the government has announced the extension of its Maternity Capital programme.

In addition, poor families with more than one child will be eligible for subsidies against their mortgage payments. Second children will entitle their parents to subsidies lasting three years, and third children for five years.

■ So how to spur a baby boom in the country?

National culture plays an important role in deciding the kinds of incentives.

While many young couples in Iran are tenants and face increasing rents every year, proposing generous housing assistance for families with more than one children can be a great persuasion.

Moreover, offering longer maternity leaves, childcare services as wells as job security for women who opt for having more than one child can be another incentive.

Unfortunately paternity leave in Iran is pretty short (three days) and new mums feel so much frustrated left alone with the baby for the first few months. Adopting policies to extend paternity leave would definitely help young couples feel supported.

Now the question is what kinds incentives the government has suggested so far to encourage demographic changes?



an increase in water consumption.

Hydroeconomies such as agriculture and hydropower plants are being built based on this water lasting.

This will cause an added “shock to the system” when the melting slows, said Dr Pritchard.

Populations in the high-mountain Asia region are particularly vulnerable to water shortages and in the past century, drought has caused more than 6 million deaths.

Dr Pritchard said changes to glacier melt “could be profoundly destabilizing for this region”. A total of 800 million could be at risk.

The study, published in the journal *Nature*, used climate datasets and hydrological modelling to calculate the volume of glacier water entering and leaving the region’s major river basins.

The high-mountain region of Asia, known as the Third Pole, encompasses the Himalayas, Karakoram, Pamir, Hindu Kush, Tien Shan, Kunlun Shan and Alai mountains.

(Source: *The Independent*)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ ع

16,000 clunker buses running in transport fleet nationwide

Some 22,000 busses are operating in the country’s public transport fleet, 16,000 of which are clunkers, accounting for 70 percent of the bus transport system, deputy interior minister for urban and rural development has said. “To encourage people using public transportation rather than private cars in order to curb air pollution, it is essential to develop and promote the transport system,” IRNA quoted Mehdi Jamalinejad as saying on Saturday. Given the country’s public transport system being old or aging over 10 years; a plan was proposed by the president to renovate the public transport fleet since the Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), according to which 19,000 new buses, 48,000 new minibuses and 6,000 trucks will replace the clunker ones, he explained.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-fy, -ify”

■ **Meaning**: to make or resemble

■ **For example**: Nothing I did would ever **satisfy** my father.

PHRASAL VERB

Hash something out

■ **Meaning**: to discuss something very thoroughly and carefully, especially until you reach an agreement

■ **For example**: The reorganization plan was hashed out September 16.

IDIOM

The bubble has burst

■ **Explanation**: to say that means that the success of an idea, a product or a situation has suddenly stopped

■ **For example**: The video game was a phenomenal success but the bubble has burst.

۱۶ هزار دستگاه اتوبوس شهری فرسوده هستند

معاون عمران و توسعه امور شهری و روستایی وزارت کشور گفت: در حال حاضر از ۲۲ هزار دستگاه اتوبوس شهری در کشور معادل ۷۰ درصد آنها فرسوده است. به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا، مهدی جمالی نژاد روز شنبه افزود: برای اینکه مردم را به سمت ناوگان حمل و نقل عمومی سوق دهیم، باید به بهبود وضعیت این ناوگان بیشتر توجه کنیم.

ناوگان درون شهری از جمله اتوبوس ها پیر و فرسوده است، بالای ۱۰ سال عمر دارند و نیاز به بازسازی دارد؛ بر این اساس طرحی از سوی رئیس جمهوری برای نوسازی ناوگان حمل و نقل عمومی کشور از سال ۹۶ به اجرا گذاشته شد که طبق آن قرار است ۱۹ هزار دستگاه به ناوگان اتوبوسرانی، ۴۸ هزار دستگاه به مینی بوس ها و ۶ هزار دستگاه به تعداد کامیون ها اضافه شود.

Muslims rally on Quds Day as U.S. ‘deal of century’ looms

TEHRAN — Millions of people in Iran and elsewhere made the International Quds Day to condemn a Middle East plan touted by U.S President Donald Trump as the “deal of the century”.

Iranians took to the streets in massive numbers on Friday after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called this year’s rallies more important than ever.

People in Tehran and other cities flocked to main streets to support Palestinians who are facing the dangerous prospect of a sellout of their rights through the U.S. plan.

Demonstrators carried banners with slogans such as “Al-Quds is the eternal capital of Palestine” and “Death to America” as well as “No to the deal of the century”.

According to Press TV, similar rallies were planned across the world, including in many Muslim countries as well as in Europe and America, to show solidarity



with the Palestinians and condemn Israeli atrocities and U.S. policies.

In Iraq, television networks broadcast live footage from tens of thousands of people who

were rallying in several cities to condemn “the deal of the century” and support the Palestinian people.

The International Quds Day is a legacy of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, who designated the day in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the International Quds Day has been marked worldwide on the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar sent a grave warning to Israel ahead of Quds Day and used the opportunity to reject U.S. President Donald Trump’s plan and a summit in Bahrain next month to promote it.

“Trump wants to sell al-Quds to the Zionists without paying a price,” Sinwar said. “I call him from here and say that I and the Palestinian people will be demonstrating along the [Gaza] fence in light of Quds Day in numbers that have not been seen before.”

Another Saudi ship leaves French port without weapons amid anti-war protests

TEHRAN — Activists have managed to force yet another Saudi cargo ship to leave the southern French port of Fos-sur-Mer without loading weapons that it was supposed to take back home amid Riyadh’s deadly war against the people of Yemen.

ACAT, a Christian organization against torture, confirmed Thursday that for the second time this month rights campaigners were able to block a Saudi vessel in France as the government of President Emmanuel Macron comes under growing pressure to stop its arms sales to the kingdom.

The Saudi freighter, Bahri Tabuk, returned to sea on Wednesday night with its holds empty, the French NGO said.

“Once again, faced with citizen mobilization and our legal action, a Saudi freighter had to give up loading French weapons, this time in Fos-sur-Mer,” Nathalie Seff of ACAT-France said in a statement.

According to shipping data by Refinitiv Eikon, the Saudi-flagged ship left French waters and was sailing towards Alexandria in Egypt. Labeled as a vehicle carrier, Bahri Tabuk had also transported soybean meal in the past.

The first Saudi ship tried to dock at the Le Havre port in France’s northern coast two weeks ago but left without its cargo after dockers threatened to block its arrival in the port.

The confrontation by activists came weeks after an on-line investigative site published leaked French military intelligence that showed Macron’s government was selling a wide range of weapons to Riyadh, including tanks and laser-guided missile systems.

The documents also revealed that the weapons had been used against civilians over the course of the Saudi-led war against Yemen, which has killed thousands of Yemeni people and caused a humanitarian crisis in the impoverished



country since its onset in March 2015.

French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly has claimed that the arms were related to an order dating back several years.

N. Korea executes envoy in a purge after failed U.S. summit

TEHRAN — North Korea executed its nuclear envoy to the United States as part of a purge of officials who steered negotiations for a failed summit between leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump, a South Korean newspaper said on Friday.

According to Reuters, Kim Hyok Chol was executed in March at Mirim Airport in Pyongyang, along with four foreign ministry executives after they were all charged with spying for the United States, the Chosun Ilbo reported, citing an unidentified source with knowledge of the situation.

“He was accused of spying for the United States for poorly reporting on the negotiations without properly grasping U.S. intentions,” the source was quoted as saying.

The February summit in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi, the second between Kim and Trump, failed to reach a deal because of conflicts over U.S. calls for complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and North Korean demands for sanctions relief.

Reuters was unable to independently confirm the report. Previously, some North Korean officials have reportedly been executed

or purged only to reappear with a new title. U.S. State Department officials said they had no information to confirm the report.

A spokeswoman at South Korea’s Unification Ministry declined to comment. An official at the presidential Blue House in Seoul said it was inappropriate to comment on an issue that should first be verified.

A diplomatic source told Reuters there were signs Kim Hyok Chol and other officials were punished for the breakdown of the summit, such as by being sent to a labor camp for reeducation, but there was no ev-

idence they were executed.

Kim Yong Chol, Kim Jong Un’s right-hand man and the counterpart of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo before the Hanoi summit, had also been sent to a labor and reeducation camp in Jagang Province near the Chinese border, the Chosun Ilbo reported.

Key officials who worked with Kim Yong Chol have been out of the public eye since the summit, while seasoned diplomats who previously appeared to have been sidelined, including vice foreign minister Choe Son Hui, were seen returning to the spotlight.

Trump lashes out at Mueller after special counsel denies exoneration

TEHRAN — U.S. President Donald Trump blasted special counsel Robert Mueller Thursday, calling him a “never Trumper” who led a biased investigation on Russia’s interference in the 2016 election and failed to investigate his opponents who didn’t want Trump to be president. Trump’s eruption came a day after Mueller pointedly rejected his repeated claims that he was cleared of obstruction of justice allegations and that the two-year inquiry was merely a “witch hunt.”

The president also offered mixed messages on Russia’s efforts to help him defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton, first tweeting that he had “nothing to do with Russia helping me get elected,” then minutes later, telling reporters: “Russia did not help me get elected.”

Trump said Mueller, who is a Republican, was “conflicted” and should have investigated law enforcement officials who the president claims tried to undermine him, AP reported.

“Robert Mueller should have never been chosen,” Trump said, adding falsely that Mueller wanted the FBI director job, but the president told him no. “I think Mueller is a true



never Trumper. He’s somebody who didn’t get a job that he wanted very badly.”

Mueller, who was appointed special counsel by Trump’s Justice Department, was previously FBI director, appointed by Republican President George W. Bush.

Speaking to reporters on the White House South Lawn, Trump insisted that he’s been tough on Russia and that Moscow would have preferred Hillary Clinton as president. The special counsel’s report said Russian interference in the election helped Trump defeat Clinton.

Asked about impeachment by Congress, he called it a “dirty word” and said he couldn’t imagine the courts allowing him to be impeached. “I don’t think so because there’s no crime,” he said.

Mueller said Wednesday that charging Trump with any crime in court was “not an option” because of federal rules, but he used his first public remarks on the Russia investigation to emphasize that he did not exonerate the president.

“If we had had confidence that the president clearly did not commit a crime, we would have said so,” Mueller declared.

The special counsel’s remarks on indicting Trump marked a counter to criticism, including by Attorney General William Barr, that Mueller should have reached a determination on whether the president illegally tried to obstruct the probe by taking actions such as firing FBI Director James Comey.

1,300 civilians killed in air war on Daesh: U.S.-led coalition

TEHRAN — The U.S.-led coalition said Friday it had unintentionally killed more than 1,300 civilians in airstrikes during its fight against Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group in Iraq and Syria since 2014.

The figure is far lower than the death tolls given by groups which have monitored the conflicts in the two countries, AFP reported.

“The coalition conducted 34,502 strikes between August 2014 and the end of April

2019,” it said in a statement.

During this period, it “assesses at least 1,302 civilians have been unintentionally killed by coalition strikes.”

The coalition said it was still assessing 111 additional claims of civilians deaths, and was ready to receive new allegations or fresh evidence to review.

The coalition has repeatedly said it does all it can to avoid civilian deaths.

Airwars, an NGO which monitors civil-

ian casualties from airstrikes worldwide, estimates more than 7,900 civilians have been killed in coalition raids – well in excess of the total acknowledged by the coalition.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, says coalition strikes have taken the lives of 3,800 civilians in Syria alone.

Daesh militants seized large swathes of Iraq and Syria in 2014, declaring a “caliphate”

in areas they controlled.

But several offensives with coalition backing chipped away at the “caliphate” until it was declared eliminated on March 23.

Ambushes and hit-and-run attacks have continued in both countries.

The coalition is continuing to work “to deny Daesh any physical space and influence in the region as well as deny Daesh the resources they need to re-surge,” it said.

China warns U.S. against ‘playing with fire’ through supporting Taiwan

TEHRAN— China says the United States is “playing with fire” by a series of actions it has taken in the Taiwan Strait in support of the self-ruled island’s secession bid.

Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian made the comment in a monthly news briefing on Thursday, saying Washington has recently been incessantly playing the “Taiwan card” in a futile effort to “use Taiwan to control China.”

“This is deluded,” he said. “The series of actions the

U.S. side has taken is playing with fire, seriously harms the development of military relations between China and the United States, and seriously harms peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait area.”

China issued the warning as Taipei was conducting a live-fire drill on Thursday at a beach in southern Taiwan.

According to Press TV, Beijing has accused Washington of making “a series of moves” on Taiwan and “other issues” that harm China’s sovereignty.

Almost all world countries, including the U.S., recognize Chinese sovereignty over self-ruled Taiwan. Beijing has pursued Taiwan’s reunification ever since the island broke away from the mainland during a civil war in 1949.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has, however, been playing up the prospect of direct relations with Taiwan as an apparent bargain against China.

Houthi leader: Yemen will always remain pro-Palestine

TEHRAN — The leader of Yemen’s Houthi Ansarullah movement has reiterated his country’s support for Palestine in the face of Israeli occupation, calling on Yemeni people to express their solidarity with Palestinians by partaking in International Quds Day rallies.

“The Yemeni people will always be against the United States and Israel. and will remain pro-Palestine and support its cause,” Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi was quoted by Yemen’s al-Masirah network on Thursday.

“I call on the dear Yemeni people to participate tomorrow in Quds Day,” he added, referring to the last Friday of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

This year’s Quds Day rallies come weeks before a high-profile summit in the Bahraini capital Manama, where the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to unveil its so-called “deal of the century” to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The deal, which has been branded as dead on arrival by analysts due to overwhelming opposition from Palestinian groups, reportedly seeks to swap Palestinians’ right to statehood with limited autonomy and basic economic incentives.

According to Press TV, Houthi warned Thursday that elements within the Islamic world were promoting the deal. “Trump’s deal depend on roles played by some inside the Islamic ummah,” he said, referring to reports that some Arab regimes have been pressuring Palestinian authorities to accept the deal.

The Ansarullah leader warned that resistance was the only way forward if Palestinians really sought victory against the U.S. and Israel.

“The resistance proved fruitful and accomplished some victories against the Zionist enemy,” he asserted.

He described the US and Israel as “a common threat to the Islamic world” and noted that America’s role in tensions across the region had become more obvious over the recent weeks.

No delays in delivery of S-400s from Russia: Turkey

TEHRAN — The delivery schedule for Russia’s S-400 missile defense systems to Turkey is continuing as planned, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hami Aksoy said Friday, dismissing reports of delay.

According to Reuters, the U.S. and Turkey have been at odds over Ankara’s decision to purchase the S-400s, which Washington says are not compatible with NATO systems and poses a threat to the F-35 stealth fighter jets. Ankara has proposed to form a working group to assess the U.S. concerns, but has not received a response yet.

On Monday, broadcaster Haberturk quoted Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar as saying that the delivery of the S-400s may not happen in June, when Turkey previously said the missiles were due to arrive, but added the agreement was a done deal.

“Reports in some media outlets about Turkey evaluating delaying the S-400 procurement upon the request of the United States do not reflect the truth,” Aksoy said in a statement, adding that Ankara’s offer for a joint working group with Washington was still valid.

Assange suffering psychological torture, would face “show trial” in U.S.: UN expert

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has suffered psychological torture from a defamation campaign and should not be extradited to the United States where he would face a “politicized show trial”, a UN human rights investigator said on Friday.

Nils Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture who visited Assange in a high-security London prison on May 9 along with two medical experts, said that he found him agitated, under severe stress and unable to cope with his complex legal case.

“Our finding was that Mr. Assange shows all the symptoms of a person who has been exposed to psychological torture for a prolonged period of time. The psychiatrist who accompanied my mission said that his state of health was critical,” Melzer told Reuters in an interview in Geneva.

“But my understanding is that he has now been hospitalized and that he is not able to stand trial,” he said.

According to Reuters, Assange was too ill on Thursday to appear via video link from a British prison in a hearing on an extradition request from the United States, his lawyer Gareth Peirce told Reuters. He is in a health ward.

Pompeo warns Germany on consequences of buying Huawei

The United States aims to educate its international partners on the risks posed by next-generation wireless networks manufactured by China’s Huawei, but allies will make their own sovereign buying decisions, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

Speaking after a meeting with his German counterpart Heiko Maas in Berlin on Friday, Pompeo warned that the U.S. might have to withhold data on citizens or on national security if it didn’t have confidence in the networks Germany was using.

“They will take their own sovereign decisions, (but we) will speak to them openly about the risks ... and in the case of Huawei the concern is it is not possible to mitigate those anywhere inside of a 5G network,” he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Germany coach Loew in hospital, to miss Euro qualifiers

Germany coach Joachim Loew has been hospitalised following a sports accident and will miss their upcoming Euro 2020 qualifiers against Belarus and Estonia, the German Football Association (DFB) said on Friday.

It said Loew needed to be taken to hospital due to “the effects of a sports accident” that had squeezed an artery and required treatment.

Loew will be replaced on the bench by his assistant Marcus Sorg for their June 8 qualifier against Belarus in Borisov and their home match against Estonia three days later.

“I feel well again but I have to take it easy for the next four weeks,” Loew said in the DFB statement. “I am in constant touch with the coaching staff and will remain in tight contact over the phone ahead of the two matches.”

Germany want to play a strong qualifying round as they look to rebuild after last year’s World Cup first round exit that shocked the soccer-mad nation and the surprise Nations League relegation.

The Germans are third in the Euro 2020 qualifying Group C on three points, three behind leaders Northern Ireland, but with a game in hand.

(Source: Reuters)

Injury-hit Rodriguez included in Colombia’s Copa squad

Colombia captain James Rodriguez has been included in their squad for next month’s Copa America in Brazil despite concerns over his form and fitness.

The Bayern Munich player managed a full 90 minutes only three times in the Bundesliga this season and missed four of his club’s last five games with various muscular problems. He was also troubled by a calf injury during last year’s World Cup in Russia when Colombia were knocked out in the last sixteen.

“We have a personal coach for James and we have 15 days to get him ready for the opening match against Argentina,” said coach Carlos Queiroz. “I’d be delighted to have James playing lots of games.”

Other players to make the final 23 included Juventus winger Juan Cuadrado and forward Duvan Zapata, who was second topscorer in Italy’s Serie A this season and helped unfancied Atalanta qualify for the Champions League for the first time.

The surprise callup was 20-year-old defender Jhon Lucumi who helped Racing Genk win the Belgian league this season.

Colombia will face Argentina, Paraguay and guest team Qatar in their group as they play their first competitive matches under Queiroz, who has replaced Jose Pekerman.

“It’s time to work, this is no time to party,” said the Portuguese in announcing the squad. “A triumphalist attitude would not be responsible before the competition. We need to be together and aware, with ambition and humility. That’s the only way we can fulfil our dreams.”

(Source: Goal)

Ramos staying at Real Madrid despite China offer

Captain Sergio Ramos says he wants to end his career at Real Madrid despite receiving an offer to play in China.

Real president Florentino Perez said on Wednesday that Spain defender Ramos had asked to leave on a free transfer and move to the Chinese Super League.

“It is true that I have an offer from China on the table, I will not lie about it,” said 33-year-old Ramos, who has been at Real since 2005 and whose contract expires in 2021.

“My dream is to retire here.”

Perez said Ramos and his agent told him they had received a “very good offer” from an unnamed club but that the club could not pay a fee.

“I told Ramos that it was impossible for Real Madrid to let their captain go for free,” said Perez.

Ramos said: “At no moment did I consider going to China.

“Yesterday I went to see the president to make everything clear.

“I told the president that I would never go to a team that could compete with Real Madrid.

“If one day I go then it is because I think my body does not allow me to give a high level.

“I am the captain of Real Madrid and I feel very loved and supported by my team-mates.

“I’m not looking to renew [my contract]. I am happy with what I have. People always think it’s a strategy to earn more, but it’s the opposite.”

(Source: BBC)

Chelsea eye Coutinho as Hazard replacement

With Eden Hazard looking set to leave Chelsea for Real Madrid, the Blues have identified Barcelona’s Philippe Coutinho as an ideal replacement for the Belgian.

The lengthy saga between Chelsea and Real Madrid over the transfer of Hazard appears to be nearing its conclusion.

At the same time, Barcelona are looking to offload Coutinho after failing to live up to the 160 million euros that the club parted ways to land him from Liverpool in January of 2018.

As a result of his situation, Chelsea are keeping close tabs on the Brazilian due to his proven track record in the Premier League as well as his similar characteristics to Hazard.

The problem for Chelsea is that they are currently banned from making new signings until July 2020 for infringing the regulations on international transfers of players under 18 years and are waiting on the Court of Arbitration for Sport (TAS) for permission to make transfers.

Manchester United and Paris Saint-Germain have also shown their interest in Coutinho, although Barcelona have yet to receive a concrete offer from either club.

(Source: Marca)

Tottenham and Liverpool chase biggest win of all to drop loser tag for good

Among the rewards for the Champions League winners on Saturday will be silverware, status and history but the greatest prize awaiting Liverpool or Tottenham might be an end to the agonising wait.

Combined, it has been 18 years - seven for Liverpool, 11 for Tottenham - since either lifted a trophy, despite huge strides made in recent years under the much-praised Jurgen Klopp and Mauricio Pochettino.

Klopp and Pochettino have been singled-out as two of Europe’s best coaches after crafting teams that reflect their personalities -- Liverpool thrilling and fearless, Spurs brave and unrelenting.

And while scepticism has greeted the perfection of Manchester City’s star-studded squad in England, approval has also followed Liverpool and Tottenham’s nurturing of youngsters.

Trent Alexander-Arnold and Harry Winks came through the clubs’ youth systems while Andrew Robertson, Dele Alli and Kieran Trippier joined aged 24 or younger. All of them could start at the Wanda Metropolitano.

But any admiration still comes with an asterisk. Liverpool’s last trophy was in 2012, a League Cup that remains their only success since they won the FA Cup in 2006.

And Tottenham’s barren spell goes further back to the League Cup in 2008, which was their first trophy since winning the same competition in 1999.



Pochettino has tended to bristle at suggestions his team have a habit for coming close but failing to get over the line.

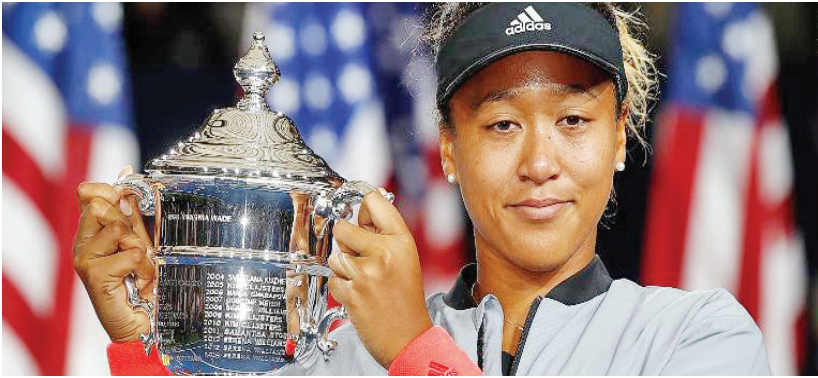
When asked in January if the club needed a trophy, he said: “I don’t agree with that, it’s good for the ego. But in reality the most important thing is to build a team that is always going to be in the top four.”

The expectations are higher at Liverpool, where Klopp’s vow to win something within four years of taking charge reaches its end-point this weekend.

“It didn’t happen yet,” said Klopp in April. “How long it will take I have no clue.”

Klopp’s also denied a personal need for

Naomi Osaka rallies again at French Open, this time against Azarenka



Naomi Osaka and Victoria Azarenka are both two-time grand slam winners but when they crossed paths at the French Open, one was surging while the other sought a return to her finest days.

It was Osaka who held all the momentum having won the last two grand slams and the Japanese world No. 1 indeed ousted the Belarusian. Yet she needed to rally for the second straight outing in Paris to oust Azarenka 4-6 7-5 6-3 in a two-hour, 50 minute contest Thursday that lived up to the understandable pre-match billing.

Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic, meanwhile, spent less time on court combined while Juan Martin del Potro posted a lengthy five-set victory over Osaka’s compatriot Yoshi Nishioka. Osaka recovered from an even more ominous scenario in the first round against 90th-ranked Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, her Slovak foe unable to serve out the encounter twice in the second set against an admittedly nervous 21-year-old.

“I actually played well today,” Osaka told reporters. “Against Vika, she has the ability to hit winners. I don’t think the other girl hit that many winners.

“No matter how hard it is, it’s my path that I’m going to walk with my head held high, and I’m going to do everything I can until the moment where I decide, ‘You know what? I’m not interested in that anymore,’” said 43rd ranked Azarenka. “But until then, I’m going to keep fighting and keep improving.

“I believe that finally my progress is showing from week to week. And as long as it keeps going that way, I have no doubt that I’m going to achieve things that I want to.”

Azarenka -- who toppled 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko in the first round -- led by a set and 4-2 on Suzanne Lenglen court.

The 29-year-old was close to snapping an eight-match losing streak against top-10 opposition at grand slams, before Osaka dug deep. The Japanese sensation exhibited the grit, not to mention shotmaking, onlookers witnessed at the US Open and Australian Open. Putting Osaka away, especially at majors, has become increasingly difficult.

“I have this mindset that I feel like I can win if it gets down to the wire. If I have to break a person, I feel like I have the ability to do that,” said Osaka, who next plays another unseeded but dangerous challenger, Katerina Siniakova.

As the match slipped from Azarenka’s grasp in the third set, she flung her racket in disgust. Trailing 5-1 and swinging freely, a momentum shift arose. Azarenka seemed to relax and all of a sudden clawed back to 5-3, saving a match point in the process. She felt a bad call deprived her of getting to 5-4.

One more match point evaporated for a slightly rattled Osaka but a third did the job when Azarenka’s return sailed long.

(Source: CNN)

Conte lands job of attempting to revive Inter Milan



Inter Milan handed the reins to former Juventus, Chelsea and Italy coach Antonio Conte on Friday, giving him the job of attempting to revive a side who have not won a major trophy for eight years.

The fiery 49-year-old, famous for his dressing-room tirades, will replace Luciano Spalletti who parted company with the Chinese-owned club on Thursday, two years before the end of his contract, despite guiding them into next season’s Champions League.

“A new chapter in my life is beginning, I’m really excited,” Conte said in a statement on Inter’s website. “I have chosen Inter because of the club it is, because of the project’s sound basis and how ambitious it is.” Inter have won 18 Serie A titles and the Coppa Italia seven times but have struggled since winning a Champions League, Serie A and Coppa Italia treble under Jose Mourinho in 2010. Their last major title was the Coppa Italia in 2011 and they missed out on the Champions League for six consecutive seasons before returning to the competition under Spalletti this season.

Conte is their 11th coach in nine years since Mourinho departed and the club has also changed hands twice since then.

China’s electronics retailer Suning Holdings Group bought a majority stake in the club in 2016 which previously changed hands in 2013 when Massimo Moratti, whose family controls Italian oil refiner Saras, sold the club to a consortium led by Indonesian business tycoon Erick Thohir.

For a shot of belief, Pochettino might instead turn to Harry Kane, who has declared himself fit after recovering from an ankle injury. Kane has not played a competitive match since April 9 and Tottenham have survived without their star striker, even if a storming run in the Champions League belied a collapse in form domestically.

If he is fit, Kane’s goal threat means he will start, most likely at the expense of Lucas Moura, despite the Brazilian’s dizzying hat-trick against Ajax in the semi-final.

Liverpool’s own front man, Roberto Firmino, is also expected to play after sitting out the last three matches with a groin strain.

Harder to predict will be Klopp’s selection in midfield, where he must choose three from James Milner, Jordan Henderson, Georginio Wijnaldum and Fabinho.

Considerably more than the 32,000 ticket-holding fans were predicted to descend on Madrid, with police deploying “unprecedented security” around the final, involving drones to monitor behaviour and 4,700 personnel.

When the Spanish capital was picked as host, there was an added lure for Real Madrid, who might have defended the title in their own city, and Atletico, who could have snatched it off them at their own home ground.

Instead, after Barcelona crashed out, Spain were left with no European finalists for the only second time in 10 years.

(Source: AFP)

Bangkok poised to provide Derby with emotional storyline

Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, the popular late owner of Leicester City, also dreamed of success on the race track and on Saturday his horse named Bangkok could realise that dream in English racing’s blue riband of the turf, the Epsom Derby.

Vichai -- whose loss in a helicopter crash last October outside Leicester’s stadium provoked an outpouring of grief in the city -- invested around £30 million (\$37.8 million) in 60 horses in recent years.

He enjoyed some success -- he had two winners on the day of the tragedy -- but Bangkok is the first that has a serious chance of landing a prize in equine terms that would rival the prestige of Leicester’s fairytale Premier League title in 2016.

Fortunately for Bangkok’s trainer Andrew Balding, who has the majority of Vichai’s horses which run under the name of King Power Racing, Vichai’s younger son Khun Aiyawatt, known as Top, took up the reins.

King Power’s colours have been regular visitors to the winners’ enclosure this season and not just in England -- Fox Champion won the German 2000 Guineas.

Bangkok, who Vichai paid £500,000 for Bangkok at the sales two years ago, has impressed in both his victories this season and will face 12 other rivals for the first prize worth just over £900,000. He has already beaten one of the main contenders, Telecaster, who went on to win the key Derby trial the Dante Stakes, which persuaded trainer Hughie Morrison to pay £85,000 to supplement him for the race.



Balding -- whose father Ian trained the great Mill Reef to win the 1971 Derby -- is confident Bangkok can confirm his form with Telecaster and is the ideal sort of horse for the challenging undulating Epsom course.

“He’s a lovely horse to watch,” said Balding. “He’s very well-balanced and looks just the type for the race.”

There will, though, be mixed emotions should he prevail on Saturday for the King Power team. “It’s just so sad the Chairman (Vichai), as we all call him, is not around to see the fruits of his investment,” said Alastair Donald, King Power’s racing manager. “The Chairman gave Bangkok a strong name because he stood out on pedigree.”

■ The crowning jewel

Bangkok will have to contend with an astonishing seven runners from record-breaking Irish handler Aidan O’Brien’s stables. The 49-year-old -- who has often been criticised for flooding big races with several runners -- will have his main hopes on Sir Dragonnet to deliver him a record equalling seventh Derby.

Sir Dragonnet, to be ridden by first-choice stable jockey Ryan Moore, was also supplemented for the race after an impressive eight length victory in the Chester Vase earlier this month.

“We will not know if he was flattered in his trial at Chester, they went fast on soft ground,” Moore told The Daily Telegraph. “He had to come around them all and was very impressive.

“Bookies favourite says a lot,” added the 35-year-old, who has won the Derby twice.

As great an exploit as O’Brien’s would be to welcome home a seventh Derby winner the roars might be louder if the other Irish contender crosses the line in front.

Madhmoon is trained by 86-year-old Kevin Prendergast, who will bid to succeed where his legendary father Paddy just fell short. Prendergast Senior won every other English classic but he never fared better than runner-up, Alcaeus in 1960 and Meadow Court in 1965.

(Source: France 24)

Iran start 2019 Volleyball National League on high

➔ Interestingly, three of the four teams finished the 2018 preliminary round practically “holding hands” in the final standings.

Italy finished eighth with eight wins, followed by Germany and Iran in ninth and tenth, respectively, with seven wins each. All of them missed out on advancing to the finals in Lille, but showed their potential to succeed in an intensive competition.

Iran are certainly keen on performing at a higher level than last year and producing better results than their 10th place in the 2018 VNL and 13th place at the World Championship.

Experienced players like Mir Saeid Marouf, Amir Gha-four, Mohammad Mousavi and Farhad Ghaemi, have been training hard alongside a fresh flow of young athletes at the national team preparation camp, with more star volleyballers expected to join as their club season duties come to an end.

The competition will be held between May and July 2019 and the final round will take place in the Credit Union 1 Arena, Chicago, United States.

This is the first edition of the World League or the Nations League to have the Final Round hosted in North America.

The 16 teams compete in a round-robin format with every core team hosting a pool at least once. The teams are divided into four pools of four teams at each week and compete five weeks long, for 120 matches. The top five teams after the preliminary round join the hosts of the final round to compete in the final round.

The relegation takes into consideration only the four challenger teams. The last ranked challenger team will be excluded from the 2020 Nations League. The winners of the Challenger Cup will qualify for the next edition as a challenger team.



The six qualified teams play in 2 pools of 3 teams in round-robin. The top two teams of each pool qualify for the semifinals. The pool winners play against the run-

ners-up in this round. The semifinals winners advance to compete for the Nations League title. The losers face each other in the third place match.

Marc Wilmots names Iran squad for Syria, S. Korea friendlies



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Newly-appointed Iran coach Marc Wilmots has named a 25-man squad for two friendly matches against Syria and South Korea.

Team Mell will play Syria on June 6 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium and face South Korea five days later at World Cup Stadium in Seoul.

Iran are preparing for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers that begin in the second half of this year.

Iran Squad

● Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Persepolis), Amir Abedzadeh (Maritimo), Payam Niazmand (Sepahan), Rashid Mazaheri (Zob Ahan)

● Defenders: Ramin Rezaeian (Al-Sha-

hanian SC), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Majid Hosseini (Trabzonspor), Milad Mohammadi (Akhmat Grozny), Sadegh Moharrami (Dinamo Zagreb), Vouria Ghafouri (Esteghlal), Mohammadhossein Kananizadegan (Machine Sazi), Ehsan Hai Safi (Tractor Sazi), Pejman Montazeri (Esteghlal), Morteza Pouraliganji (Al-Arabi.)

● Midfielders: Omid Ebrahimi (Al Ahli, Qatar), Masoud Shojaei (Tractorsazi), Ahmad Nouroollahi (Persepolis), Saeid Ezatollahi (Reading)

● Strikers: Vahid Amiri (Trabzonspor), Mehdi Taremi (Al Gharafa), Sardar Azmoun (Zenit), Karim Ansarifard (Nottingham Forest), Mehdi Torabi (Persepolis), Allahyar Sayyadmanesh (Fenerbahce), Alireza Jahanbakhsh (Brighton)

Iran coach Kolakovic sends message to Michal Kubiak



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national volleyball team head coach Igor Kolakovic has sent a message to Poland captain Michal Kubiak.

Kubiak had launched a stinging attack on Iranian nation in #PrawdaSiatki YouTube program.

“They always insult us into the field and don't respect us but play innocent. The Iranians think they are great and the best and we are the worst. But I believe that they are fatal, malicious and damned people. For me, this nation doesn't exist, even though they proudly call themselves Persians, not Arabs. Sometimes we have to play with them, but for me, they don't exist,” Kubiak said.

Now, the Montenegrin coach has

invited Kubiak to come to Iran once again.

“Dear Michal Kubiak, you are the great volleyball player, but you have the right to make a mistake. Come to Iran, please, to see how wonderful people live here,” Kolakovic wrote on his Instagram.

Iran volleyball federation acting president Afshin Davari had said they are going to file a complaint against Kubiak in response to the player's anti-Iranian comments.

“FIVB's Ethics Committee should demand Kubiak explanation for his remarks. He has offended the Iranian people and must accept responsibility for what he has said,” Davari said.

Vahid Hashemian: I do my best to help Team Melli

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team coach Vahid Hashemian says he will do his best to help Team Melli to achieve a successful outcome.

The former Persepolis and Bayern Munich forward has been appointed as Iran assistant coach.

Hashemian is Marc Wilmots's only Iranian assistant in Team Melli.

“I am very happy to be appointed as assistant coach of Team Melli. Mr. Wilmots called me last week and we talked

about our cooperation in the team. I've returned to Team Melli after many years as a coach and I hope to help the team the best I can,” Hashemian said.

“We will talk about the details in the coming days and I hope that I can help him. We have good facilities in PEC (Performance Elite Center) and need to work hard to reach a world standard level. Qatar can be a role model for us as the team were among the weak teams in Asia but they are champions at the moment,” he added.



Son at the edge of glory

As Saturday's UEFA Champions League final against Liverpool draws ever closer, Tottenham Hotspur favorite Son Heung-min stands on the verge of capping what has already been a stellar season in truly sensational fashion.

A win for Spurs in the showpiece event would not only see Son conclude a truly impressive 2018-19 campaign on a distinct high, but also help the Chuncheon native break new ground for Asians plying their trade in Europe.

Not that the global audience sure to be watching on would be too surprised. After all, since coming off the bench to replace Dele Alli at Newcastle United last August – Tottenham's first game of the recently concluded English Premier League season – Son has excelled for club and country in the nine months that followed.

His performances have, quite rightly, earned the Korea Republic international rave reviews and seen the 26-year-old etch himself into the game's record books, both of which are set to be repeated if Son can help guide Tottenham to success at the weekend.

Pushing the UEFA Champions League boundaries

Should he feature for Tottenham in the UEFA Champions League showdown with domestic rivals Liverpool, Son would become only the second-ever Asian player to feature in the competition's final. The first was compatriot Park Ji-sung who appeared in the 2009 and 2011 finals for Manchester United – both of which they lost to Barcelona.

A UEFA Champions League first?

A win for Tottenham would see Son become the first Asian footballer to claim a UEFA Champions League title. While no player from the Continent has achieved the feat before, three exports have won the UEFA Cup – or Europa League – as it is now known: Cha Bum-kun (Eintracht Frankfurt 1980, Bayer Leverkusen 1988), Shinji Ono (Feyenoord 2002) and Kim Dong-jin (Zenit 2008).

Hotshot Son

When Son scored twice in the first 10 minutes of Tottenham's 4-3 loss in the second leg of the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals, he took his overall

competition tally – excluding qualifiers – to 12 to become the tournament's top Asian scorer. The previous holder was Dynamo Kyiv ace Maksim Shatskikh of Uzbekistan. Son has made 53 appearances for Tottenham this season, scoring 21 times.

Awards galore

After famously scoring Korea Republic's second goal in their historic 2-0 win over Germany at last year's FIFA World Cup in Russia, Son's subsequent displays for his club saw him named London's Premier League Player of the Year for 2019 and receive Tottenham's 2018/19 Player of the Season and Goal of the Season awards.

International success

Despite failing to steer Korea Republic beyond the 2019 AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals – the Taeguk Warriors lost to eventual winners Qatar – Son has tasted success on the international stage recently thanks to his country's 2018 Asian Games triumph.

The Koreans beat Japan 2-1 after extra-time to land the Continental title, a win which exempted Son from national service in his homeland.

(Source: the-afc)

Iran's Zob Ahan secure top spot at Group A: ACL

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's Zob Ahan FC secured top spot Group A of the 2019 AFC Champion League after playing out a 0-0 draw with Saudi Arabia's Al Nasr at the Grand Hamad Stadium on Wednesday.

The rescheduled Matchday Six fixture had been supposed to take place a week earlier in Karabar, but due to security concerns, it was postponed and moved to Qatar, the-afc.com reported.



Both teams had already advanced to the next stage, so it was an opportunity for the two managers to experiment with their choices in what was the last fixture of their respective seasons.

Zob Ahan will play Al Ittihad of Saudi Arabia in Round of 16, while Al Nassr will face Group B toppers; Al Wahda of the UAE.

Last-gasp Nourollahi winner sends Persepolis into Hazfi Cup final

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team booked a place in Iran's Hazfi Cup final after edging past Sepahan in Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium.

Persepolis, who have recently won Iran Professional League for the third successive year, defeated Sepahan 1-0.

Ahmad Nourollahi's shot was deflected by Sepahan defender Siavash Yazdani in the dying moments of the extra time.

Sepahan defender Mohammad Iranpourian was shown a second yellow card in the 99th minute and Brazilian striker Kiros Stanley was sent off in the 105th minute following a clash with Persepolis midfielder Soroush Rafiei.

Rafiei was also shown a red card.

Sepahan could have won the match but Mehdi Kiani sent his penalty over the bar in the 114th minute.

Persepolis will play Damash Gilanian in the final match on Sunday in Ahvaz's Foolad Arena.

Torabi, Khalilzadeh's goals nominated for ACL 2019 group stage best goal

With the group stage of the 2019 AFC Champions League now done and dusted, the-AFC.com is looking back at the six Allianz Goal of the Week winners and inviting the fans to pick their overall favorite via a public vote on the official website.

Iranian champion Persepolis was scoreless with Al Ahli on Matchday Three when defender Shoja Khalilzadeh showed superb agility to adjust his body and acrobatically scissor-kick home the opening goal from just inside the area in a 2-0 win.

Persepolis may not have scaled the heights of its 2018 runner-up campaign but Mehdi Torabi's rocket from 30 yards in a 2-0 win against Al Sadd at least helped round off its tournament on a high – on Xavi's final game as a professional footballer, no less.

The Persepolis duo will compete with Kim Dae-won (Daegu FC vs Melbourne Victory), Sebastian Giovinco (Al Hilal vs Esteghlal), Alaa Abbas (Al Zawraa vs Al Wasl) and Islom Tukhtakhodjaev (Lokomotiv vs Al Wahda) for the award.

(Source: the-afc)

Tatsuma Yoshida announced as Singapore head coach

The Football Association of Singapore (FAS) announced Tatsuma Yoshida as the new head coach of the national team on Thursday.

Yoshida was a former professional footballer for J.League club Kashiwa Reysol from 1993 to 1996, before moving to Kyoto Purple Sanga for two years. In 1999, he had a stint with Montedio Yamagata.

The 44-year-old coach is no stranger to Singapore, as he spent a short time playing for Jurong FC in 2002, before suffering an injury-ending career, thus shifting his focus to coaching.

Yoshida returned to Japan to further develop his managerial role with the youths of Kashiwa Reysol, and was eventually promoted to head coach of the club in 2015, leading the club to a quarter-final finish in the 2015 AFC Champions League.

His latest roles at the helm includes Albirex Niigata and Ventforent Kofu in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

Yoshida's first task will be to prepare his team for two friendly matches with Solomon Islands and Myanmar on June 8 and 11 respectively, ahead of their FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023 Joint Preliminary Qualifiers.

In a press conference at the Jalan Besar Stadium, FAS President Lim Kia Tong delivered the opening speech, saying: “Yoshida's experience with youth development was a key factor that the selection committee and I took into consideration.

“We needed someone who has the technical ability to develop the skill-set of our youth footballers, the future national team, and the ability to influence the mentality of our senior players to ignite their desire to fight and win, and to be exemplary models for the younger players.

“In addition to his experience, Yoshida brings with him the exemplary attitude, strict discipline and hardwork that the Japanese are known for.

“We are convinced he is the right person for the job, and we are confident that he will be able to bring about the fast intensity and fast-moving football style that both we and the fans are looking for.”

(Source: the-afc)

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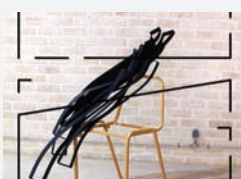
GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Envy is disgraceful; and fear is a sign of defect. Indigence makes an intelligent man dumb in argument, and a needy person a stranger in his hometown. Helplessness is a great calamity; fortitude is courage; abstemiousness is wealthiness, and devoutness is a chainmail which guards the body and soul against sins. *Imam Ali (AS)*

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Sculpture

■ An exhibition of sculptures by Nahid Arian is underway at Etemad Negarestan Gallery. The exhibit named "The Freaks" will continue until June 18 at the gallery located at Negarestan Garden near Baharestan Square.



■ A collection of sculptures by Ali Khatai is on display in an exhibition at Dastan Basement Gallery. The exhibit entitled "The Chair of Calligraphy" will run until June 14 at the gallery, which can be found at 6 Bidar St., off Fereshteh St.

Painting

■ Paintings by Samaneh Talachian are currently on view in an exhibition at Entezami Gallery. The exhibit titled "Bright Shadows" will be running until June 3 at the gallery located at No. 608 Motahhari Ave.



■ A collection of paintings by Ayyub Emdadian is on display in an exhibition at Hoor Gallery. The exhibition will run until June 18 at the gallery that can be found at 12 Naeimi Alley, North Mirza Shirazi St., off Motahhari Ave.



Drawing

■ A group of artists, including Afshin Baqeri, Zartosht Rahimi, Hossein Tamjid, Homa Hosseini and Katayun Valamanesh, is showcasing their latest drawings in an exhibition at Seyhun Gallery. The exhibit named "Drawing Event" runs until June 12 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.



Calligraphy

■ Nahid Tafreshi, Fahimeh Mohammadian, Leila Riahi, Ali Nurai, Mehrnaz Sahebi and eight other artists are displaying their calligraphy works in an exhibition at Shafaq Gallery. The exhibit titled "Love and Peace" will run until June 10 at the gallery located at 21st St. off Jama'eddin Asadabadi St.

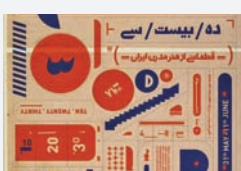


Photo

■ Akhaneh Shahr, Iran's photo museum in Tehran, is showcasing photos of Iran's holy shrines in olden times. The photos, which belong to the museum's archives, will be on view until June 20 at the museum located in Bahare Shiraz Park near Bahare Shiraz Square. Multimedia



■ Tarrahan Azad Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings, sculpture and photos by a group of artists. The exhibit titled "10, 20, 30" will run until June 11 at the gallery located at 5 Salmas Square, off Fatemi St.



■ An exhibition of paintings, sculptures and photos by a large number of artists, including Aidin Aghdashlu, Siva Shahbaz, Ali Piruz, Matisa Kazeruni, Atieh Nuri, Leila Vismeh and Kurosh Shishegaran, is currently underway at Shirin Gallery.



The exhibit named "Neo-Expressionism in Iranian Contemporary Art" runs until June 12 at the gallery located at No. 5, 13th St., Karim Khan Ave.

Theaters in Iran to welcome Eid al-Fitr with new films

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian theaters will add to the funs of Eid al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan, by screening six new films on Wednesday.

Director Narges Abyar's "When the Moon Was Full", a true love story of Jundallah terrorist group member Abdul-Hamid Rigi, is a highlight of the lineup.

The acclaimed movie is about Abdul-Hamid Rigi, the younger brother of Abdul-Malik Rigi, the founder and leader of the Jundallah terrorist group in southeastern Iran, who marries Faezeh Mansuri, a woman from Tehran. He forces Faezeh to leave her homeland along with her brother, Shahab, to live in Pakistan where they find themselves involved in Jundallah terrorist activities.

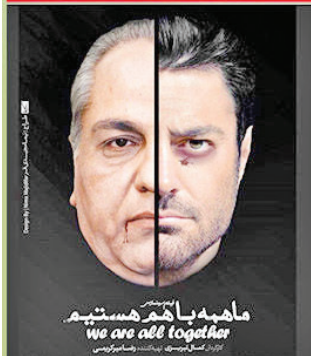
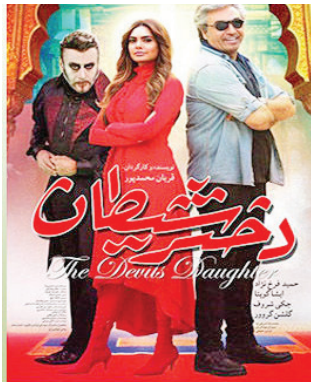
The film won Crystal Simorghs in six categories, including best film and best director, at the 37th Fajr Film Festival in February.

"The Indian" by Nima Javidi about a prison warden who is assigned to transfer prisoners to a new building during the 1960s, and "We Are All Together" by Kamal Tabrizi, a comedy with an all-star cast about passengers who survive a plane crash, are among the films.

The selection also includes Qorban Mohammadpur's "The Devil's Daughter", a movie with a cast of Iranian and Bollywood actors.

The film is about Satan's daughter who intends to repent. She is first asked to find an innocent man to bow down to until her repentance is accepted. Satan's daughter descends to search for the man.

"Snake Venom" by Javad Razavian and "Mr. Censorship" by Ali Jabbarzadeh will also hit the silver screens across the country.



This combination photo shows posters of the movies selected to screen at Iranian theaters on Eid al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan.

Iranian cinema captivates Melbourne Phoenix Film Festival



"The Incomplete" by Erfan Parsapur received the award for best feature with a budget under \$250,000 at the Phoenix Film Festival in Melbourne, Australia.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian films "Mysteries of the Lake", "The Incomplete" and "Accordion" have won awards at the Phoenix Film Festival in Melbourne, Australia, the organizers announced last week.

Directed by Armin Isarian, "Mysteries of the Lake" won the award for best documentary and "The Incomplete" by Erfan Parsapur received the award for best feature with a budget under \$250,000.

"Mysteries of the Lake" introduces Takht-e Soleiman, an ancient site located in northwestern Iran, and its mysterious lake. It is bound with secrets, myths and legends partly left from real historical events and partly made by creative minds of the locals. The depth of water has kept the lake out of reach, making the secrets and mysteries even more enigmatic. The bottom of this mysterious lake is untouched because of its

poisonous water and mountainous location.

The animated movie "The Incomplete" tells the story of a hungry Otter, but a perfectionist and obsessive one who wants everything complete in a perfect world, a world that provides countless favorable chances.

Alireza Amini's movie "Accordion" shared the award for best feature with no-budget under \$25,000 with "Robin" co-directed by Kevin Schmutzler and Tobias Schmutzler from Germany.

"Octav", a Romanian drama directed by Serge Ioan Celebidachi won the award for best feature with a budget over \$250,000.

The award for best short film went to "Boxed" by Wanjiru Njendu, a filmmaker of Kenyan descent based in Los Angeles.

"The Snow Queen: Mirrorlands" co-directed by Robert Lence and Aleksey Tsitsilin from Russia was selected as best animation.

Iranian films praised at Spain's Imagine India



Reza Akbarpur (L) and Amir-Ali Danai won special mentions for their roles in "Appendix" directed by Hossein Namazi.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian cinema was praised at the Festival Imagine India, which took place in the Spanish capital of Madrid from May 17 to 31.

Director/writer Hossein Namazi's drama "Appendix" won the award for best script, while its stars Reza Akbarpur and Amir-Ali Danai won special mentions for their roles.

The film is about Zari, who goes to the hospital with her husband due to severe abdominal pain. Using her friend's health card because hers has expired, Zari undergoes an appendectomy but the staff at the hospital become suspicious of her identity, miring the couple in a struggle with the health care system.

In addition, Hedyeh Tehrani received a special mention for her role

in "Orange Days" by Iranian director Arash Lahuti.

The festival aims to showcase and focus attention on films coming mainly from India, but with some concessions to the other countries of the Indian Subcontinent and rest of Asia, in order to contribute to a better comprehension of Indian Culture, and to the development of more fluid relations among nations of the Indian Subcontinent and Europe.

"Daha" by Turkish director Onur Seylak was picked as best film and Ash Mayfair from Vietnam was named best director for his drama "The Third Wife".

The award for best actor went to Indian star Renji Panicker for his role in "Bhayanakam" while his fellow artist Ritwika Pal won the award for best actress for her role in "Kia and Cosmos".

Moscow company to publish top works by Iranian authors in Russian

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Iranian Poetry and Fiction Foundation director Mehdi Qezeli announced on Thursday that Sadra, a major publishing company in Moscow, plans to publish one book by a contemporary Persian author in Russian every year.

Based on an agreement, which will be signed between the foundation and Sadra, the publisher will select the book from among winners at the Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran's most lucrative literary prize, he said in a press release.

The book will be translated into Russian at Sadra Publications.

The plan was discussed in Qezeli's recent visit to Sadra, which has previously published a number of books from Iranian writers.

He also paid a visit to the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow and held a meeting with the director of the museum, Alexander Shkolnik, the foundation announced earlier last week.

Robert Bernstein, top publishing executive, dead at 96

NEW YORK (AP) — Robert L. Bernstein, a publishing executive and human rights activist who presided over a generation of dynamic growth at Random House and advocated for dissidents around the world, from the Soviet Union to Argentina, has died. He was 96.

Bernstein died in a Manhattan hospital after a brief illness, according to his son, Peter Bernstein.

The tall, sandy-haired Bernstein was president of Random House from 1966 to 1990, when authors included Toni Morrison, James Michener and E.L. Doctorow. He also helped found Helsinki Watch, Human Rights Watch and other organizations. He was among the first recipients of the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights, presented to him in 1998 by President Bill Clinton, who called Bernstein "a pathbreaker for freedom of expression and the protection of rights at home and abroad."

Through his years in the book industry and his travels worldwide, Bernstein came to know a remarkable range of artists, celebrities and historical figures, from Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov to Oscar-winning actress Claudette Colbert to children's author Theodore Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss). He worked in publishing from 1946 to 1990, beginning when companies such as Random House, Alfred A. Knopf and Simon & Schuster still were run by their original owners, and departing during an era of growing consolidation



This 2015 photo released by Peter Bernstein shows Robert L. Bernstein, an eminent publishing executive at Random House and a human rights activist, who died Monday, May 27, 2019 in New York. He was 96. (AP/Elisabeth D. Bernstein)

and corporate control.

In the 1970s, he visited the Soviet Union and became a leading voice in publishing for the rights of Soviet writers, and later for those in South America, China and Czechoslovakia. He helped found Helsinki Watch, a watchdog for the human



Iranian Poetry and Fiction Foundation director Mehdi Qezeli.

rights provisions in the Helsinki Accords signed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1975. A handful of related organizations followed, including Asia Watch and Americas Watch, before all were combined under Bernstein's leadership into Human Rights Watch in 1988.

Meanwhile, Bernstein managed an artful balance at Random House between making enough money to satisfy his bosses and advancing his belief that literature should contribute to the common good. Sakharov; his wife, Yelena Bonner; Natan Sharansky and many other dissidents released works through the publisher.

One of Bernstein's proudest memories was of Argentine author Jacobo Timerman's damning memoir of persecution, "Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number," which came out in 1981, around the time Americas Watch arranged for Timerman to testify against President Reagan's appointment of Ernest Lefever as assistant secretary of state for human rights. (The nomination was eventually withdrawn).

"As I read it ('Prisoner Without a Name'), I had something of an epiphany — I saw what we could do if we brought the advantages of a book publishing house with national and international contracts and hooked it up to the human rights movement," Bernstein wrote in his memoir, "Speaking Freely," published in 2016.

Bernstein married Helen Walter in 1950. They had three sons.