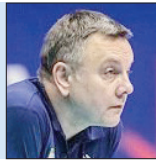




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Iraq seeks participation of Iranian companies in energy projects

TEHRAN — Iran's Energy Industries Engineering and Design Company (EIED) hosted a meeting on Friday in which a delegation comprised of representatives of Iraq's chambers of commerce discussed collaboration of Iranian companies in Iraq's oil and gas projects with the Iranian side. According to EIED office of public relations, the two sides discussed various

projects including some refinery complexes and gas supply to the cities of Nasiriyah and Basra, Shana reported.

As reported, in the meeting, the Iraqi side called for developing co-operation plans in order to benefit from the experience and knowledge of Iranian oil and gas companies in Iraq's energy projects. **→4**

Major gun-smuggling team disbanded in Golestan

TEHRAN — Iranian intelligence forces have dismantled a gun-smuggling team in the northern province of Golestan, the Intelligence Ministry has announced. The operation was carried out after weeks of intelligence and security activities, which eventually dismantled the biggest gun-smuggling team in Golestan, Tasnim reported.

191 illegal weapons were confiscated

and four people were arrested in the operation.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called for tough campaign against gun-smuggling gangs.

In a meeting with police commanders in late April, the Leader said it an important duty of the police to "prohibit arms trade".

MbS offers peace plan to Ansarullah

TEHRAN — Saudi Arabia crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman (MbS) has send some of Yemeni tribal leaders to Yemen Ansarullah and offer peace plan to end Saudi-led war, "Mojtahed" an active member on Twitter said.

According to Mojtahed, MbS said Ansarullah take control of the north of Yemen and do nothing with the southern part and also do not barricade the Saudi Arabian oil pipeline going to the Arabian Sea.

In response to MbS, Ansarullah while rejecting all suggestions, called on Saudi Arabia to leave all parts of Yemen and pay tens of billions of compensate.

MbS offers peace plans to Ansarullah while UAE says it is reducing the number of its troops fighting as part of a Saudi-led military coalition which presses ahead with a years-long atrocious military aggression against the impoverished Yemen. **→13**



ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

The Jeffrey Epstein case could sink U.S. elites and induce real change

If anything can get worse, like the corruption among the powerful and wealthy in the U.S. in recent decades, it just has.

Of late there's been reams attention paid to the arrest last week at Teterboro Airport in New Jersey of Jeffrey Epstein, 66, a super well-connected Jewish billionaire who is a known sexual pervert and convicted sex offender with an obsession for underage females and lots of notable friends formerly or currently in high places. People like Bill Clinton, Donald Trump and Alan Dershowitz, among scores of others, and even codgers like Henry Kissinger. Epstein was returning from Paris on his private jet when the FBI nabbed him and charged him with various grave offenses that could land him in jail for the rest of his sordid life.

The list, in fact, of "friends" of Epstein includes so many politicians and celebrities and wealthy individuals it is stunning. What did this bag of sleaze have to offer? Well, allegedly, young, underage hapless, needy teen girls for one thing for trysts at Epstein properties, but it remains unclear just exactly who, aside from Epstein, also committed sex crimes although it's a pretty good guess that Bill Clinton and perhaps even Trump may have participated back in the 1990s and into this century. Epstein, currently in prison and not yet out on bail, if he ever gets bail which seems unlikely, has offered to name names of those who PAID for his pimping services in exchange for a reduced prison term of no more than five years. But this is a joke of an offer because you can bet the very rich people who know Epstein would not have literally paid for such services as Epstein's "friends" and associates.

At any rate, Epstein's re-arrest after over a decade when he was earlier convicted and received basically a slap on the wrist and the potential revelations ahead and further convictions could be the biggest scandal in the history of the U.S. And as well reveal the utter depth of the corruption of the "elite" and monied in the U.S. **→7**

By Hanif Ghaffari

TEHRAN — It has been four years since the Yemen war started, but the Saud Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other invaders have not been able to succeed even in a small part of their plans in Yemen. The bravery and resistance of Yemenis has now forced UAE to leave the battle field, even though the country has been among the main invaders of Yemen for years.

After this, the fate of Saudi Arabia in Yemen war is completely clear. UAE's withdrawal from Yemen war was the worst news ever to the Saudi Arabia and now Riyadh can only await a bitter failure.

Now, more than ever, Saudis are alone in Yemen. In this situation, Riyadh has no choice other than accepting the defeat. According to a New York Times report, UAE has come to the conclusion that the Saudi-Emirati coalition has no chance of winning in Yemen, and has decided to leave the war-torn country, despite pressures from Saudi Arabia.

The failure of Yemen invaders

Many UAE officials have announced that the country is definitely leaving Yemen. An Emirati official, who did not want to reveal his name, has said that "Abu Dhabi aims to change its strategy in Yemen from war to peace," therefore, UAE forces will soon leave Al Hadida port and other parts of Yemen.

According to a report by New York Times, departure of UAE from Yemen will ruin most of Saudi Arabia's efforts in Yemen, so it has left the Saudis with great frustration and disappointment. Obviously, in near future, Saudis will become even more vulnerable in Yemen.

Over the last four years of war in Yemen, UAE has had a vital role and provided the lion share of financial and military supports. Up to now, UAE has sent thousands of men to Yemen and has led many operations, but now the country has come to the conclusion that it is no longer able to stay in this war. Now, Saudis have lost their main partner in the war. Soon, Mohammad Bin Salman, crown

prince of Saudi Arabia will become the symbol of failure in Yemen and Saudis will accept their defeat.

The burden on the Saudi Arabia is so heavy that they have practically begged the UAE to reduce their forces in Yemen instead of leaving the country all together. In recent weeks, Emiratis who once had more than five thousand forces in Yemen, said they want to evacuate their forces gradually and the retreat will be a step-by-step process, but some western and Arab diplomats have informed the New York Times that UAE has expedited the process and has already removed a large part of its forces from Yemen.

Anyway, it seems that the huge costs of war started putting a great burden on UAE, and the country decided to leave the war, despite the anger of Saudi officials. In near future, more news about the withdrawal of UAE forces from Yemen will come on the air and it will definitely come as a hard blow to the Saudis.

Hacking your way to book a hotel room in Iran

TEHRAN — In spite of U.S. trade and economic sanctions, it still seems easy to get the best hotel deal for your stay in Iran.

No matter you are a first-time traveler or an experienced backpacker, the truth is that, unlike most travel destinations, you may face limited options for booking online.

Through a simple Google search rows of different results will pop up, however, the problem arises out of international credit cards and online payment services like PayPal that don't work with Iran.

In a recent article, Iranian Students' News Agency has offered ways to easily secure your accommodation by prior arrangement. ISNA's recommendations are given in what follows:

■ **Book a hotel in Iran through websites**

During your slightly successful Google re-

search on how to book a hotel in Iran, you might come across some Iranian websites providing accommodation and lodging services. What they actually do is to reserve a room for you anywhere in Iran, instead of booking one like every other website, and take care of everything else until you arrive. As for the payment, everything is just straightforward. You can pay for the reservation after your check-in and see that if the reserved room is up to your standards or not. Pretty easy, right? For even more convenience, hotels accept currencies like Dollar or Euro, so don't change all your money when you enter Iran and keep some of it in your pocket. (Through travel websites like 1stQuest you can pay online with your credit card) But why do hotels don't mind getting paid in other currencies?

Well, right now USD and EUR dominate the domestic currency market in Iran with a soaring steep, automatically converting the current market into a total mess. So, as you can see, taking Rials (Iran's official currency) comes at high risk for business owners dealing with tourists and foreigners.

The thing to remember is that, this kind of reservation can be canceled at any time by any side. It's a verbal agreement and sometimes they can go terribly wrong. For this reason, we recommend checking with the website one last time before you get on a plane to Iran. Having an Iranian friend or reading review tourism websites like TripAdvisor can help you too. There is another way to book your Iran hotels online. Read more about it in the next section. **→10**



©IRNA/ Ahmad Moeinijam

Caspian win Shirin Cup

TEHRAN — Caspian Chogan team claimed the title of the Shirin Cup held at the Qasr-e Firoozeh Complex in Tehran.

Caspian defeated Norooz Abad and lifted the trophy.

In Chogan, two rider teams compete and the aim is to pass a ball through the opposing team's goal post using a wooden stick.

Polo was invented and first played in Iran (or ancient Persia) thousands of years ago. The original name of polo is "Chogan" and in Iran the game is still referred to as "Chogan".



ARTICLE

Yurum Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

The U.S. and the JCPOA: Carrot-and-stick diplomacy without the carrot

"Trump was in violation of the deal well before he withdrew from it."
—Fred Kaplan

Led by an unprincipled president who has shown himself to be an arrogant abrogator of agreements, a duplicitous demolisher of deals, and a tyrannical trasher of treaties, the United States appears well on its way towards setting a new world record in behavior as a rogue state. After first violating the terms of the so-called Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), withdrawing from it, forcing other nations to eschew their obligations under it, and lately resorting to acts of sabotage and piracy on the high seas, the Washington regime remains unrepentant and undeterred in its criminal actions.

The U.S. has long been committing diplomatic injustices. The rate merely intensified after the demise of the Soviet Union, which had acted as a formidable restraining force on the imperialistic imaginations of the predatory politicians on the Potomac, who are addicted to ousting any legitimate government they find not to their liking. In recent times, Albania (1991), Yugoslavia (1999-2000), Ecuador (2000), Afghanistan (2001), Venezuela (2002), Iraq (2003), Haiti (2004), Honduras (2009), Libya (2011) and Ukraine (2014) have all had their sovereignty breached and legitimate governments toppled by the Washington regime, while Iraq (1991), Somalia (1993, 2007 to present) and Syria (2012 - present) have suffered attempted coups d'état. The U.S. was likely behind the attempt in Turkey in 2016, too.

If these nefarious activities were not enough to enrage the community of civilized nations, the U.S. has all but handed the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Al Quds (Jerusalem) to the Zionist entity along with the Syrian Golan Heights, attempted to orchestrate another coup d'état in Venezuela, and re-imposed economic sanctions on Cuba. **→3**

“Open doors of diplomacy” are Iran’s trump card: diplomat

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Ambassador to Paris, Bahram Qassemi, said on Saturday that Iran’s trump card is “open doors of diplomacy”.

“The most important winning card of Iran is using open doors of diplomacy, dialogue, interaction and listening to views of all the sides who are concerned about war mongering and increase of tension,” ISNA quoted him as saying on Saturday in a message on the Twitter account of the Iranian embassy in Paris.



He noted that Iran’s resistance against the U.S. unilateralism should be more supported by other countries.

He noted that Iran’s priority is practicing “self-restraint” and “strategic patience” while being prepared to defend against any war mongering action.

During a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday with Emmanuel Bonne, the special diplomatic advisor to the French President, President Rouhani said, “Iran has kept the door of diplomacy and negotiation fully open, and we hope that the parties to the

JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] take the best advantage of this opportunity until we reach the optimum point, which is the full implementation of the JCPOA.”

Tension between Tehran and Washington has increased since Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced harsh sanctions against Iran.

Jahangiri, Aref, Shariatmadari, Dehqan, and Ghazizadeh Hashemi preparing to contest 2021 presidential election: report

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Hossein Mar’ashi, a senior member of the Servants of Construction Party, has said Es’haq Jahangiri, Mohammad Reza Aref, Mohammad Shariatmadari, Hossein Dehqan, Ghazizadeh Hashemi are preparing themselves to run for the 2021 presidential election, the Sharq newspaper reported on Saturday.

Jahangiri, the current first vice president, is a senior member of the Servants of Construction Party. He served in different posts including industry minister prior to take the role of vice president under the Rouhani administration.

Aref, a pro-reform figure, is currently the head of the Hope faction in the parliament. He withdrew presidential candidacy in the last hours in the 2013, a move which was intended to help Rouhani get elected president.

Shariatmadari is currently labor minister. He also served as trade minister in the Khatami administration. In an interview with the Tasnim news agency more than six years ago, Shariatmadari had expressed willingness to campaign for the 2013 presidential election, however he did not run for the job.

Hossein Dehqan was defense minister in Rouhani’s first administration. He worked at the Expediency Council’s defense committee prior to being named as defense chief in 2013.

Ghazizadeh Hashemi was health minister. However, he resigned his post. During his tenure as minister, Ghazizadeh Hashemi, an eye surgeon, made great reforms in health sector.

Leaked images show MKO social media operations against Iran

(Press TV) — Leaked images have shown social media influence campaigns conducted by the U.S.-backed Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) terror group against Iran.

The images, published by Iran’s Khorasan newspaper earlier this week, revealed for the first time part of the organization’s secretive social media influence campaign targeting Farsi, English and Arabic-speaking users on social media.

Members are “briefed at the start of their workday and start their social media operations at noon. At the end of the day, feedback is reviewed and issues that have to be used to defame the Islamic Republic are examined for the next day,” read the paper.

The MKO is listed as a terrorist organization by much of the international community. Its members fled Iran in 1986 for Iraq, where it enjoyed backing of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The MKO has been banned in Iran and around the world for its role in numerous terrorist activities, especially in the early years after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, taking the lives of thousands of Iranians, along with foreign nationals.

Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attacks since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, about 12,000 have fallen victim to MKO’s acts of terror.

Removing a decade-long ban on the MKO, the United States and its allies, however, have sought to use the group as a tool to pressure Iran over the past years.

Despite U.S. and Saudi attempts to empower the MKO, the cult-like group’s activities have been largely limited to its now aging pool of members who had originally joined the group in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

According to the British daily The Guardian, the MKO is even known to rely on busing refugees and young eastern Europeans to fill up its lavish events in Europe, where most of the group’s members are known to reside.

Top figures known to have taken part in the terror group’s meetings include U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton, US President Donald Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper, and former Saudi Arabian spy chief, Prince Turki al-Faisal.

The group was already well-known for its reliance on fake social media profiles to push for its Washington-backed anti-Iran agenda before the recent leaks.

Last year, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif slammed Twitter for blocking social media accounts of “real Iranians” while overlooking social media influence operations coming from “actual bots in Tirana”, referring to the group’s large complex near the Albanian capital.

Amid the Trump Administration’s heightened rhetoric and campaign of “maximum pressure” against Iran, the MKO has also sought to gain further support from Washington and its allies by expanding its anti-Iran operations.

Last month, an unverified audio tape leaked from the organization suggested the group may have colluded with foreign powers in carrying out mysterious explosions targeting two oil tankers in the Persian Gulf in June.

The terrorist group also recently announced a plan to assassinate top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and the country’s new Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi.

ElBaradei says U.S. exit from nuclear deal lacks rationale, legal basis, and common sense

By staff and agency

Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has described the U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, when it was “working” as “lacking rationale, legal basis and any common sense”.

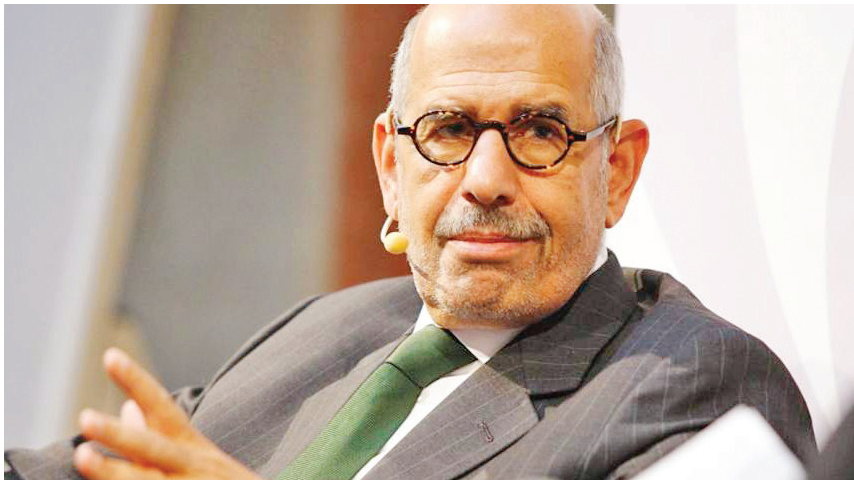
In an interview with BBC Radio 4 published on Friday, he said that the U.S. is applying waterboarding method to Iran by exerting economic pressure on the country.

“They are applying a waterboarding method to Iran, drowning Iran and then looking and then asking them: let’s have a dialogue without any preconditions,” he said.

He added, “No country is going to cooperate under these humiliating conditions.” “If they (the U.S.) want to go to war they are doing a perfect job,” he said.

Pointing to Tehran’s further enriching of uranium up to 4.5 percent, he said, “It’s a symbolic reaction from a country that can’t even import medicines because of sanctions imposed by the U.S.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that Iran will not negotiate under pressure, suggesting that the United States must first stop “economic terrorism” against Iran



if it seeks negotiations.

“Negotiation under pressure has never

been possible. They must stop pressure and economic terrorism against Iran and

“They (Americans) are applying a waterboarding method to Iran, drowning Iran and then looking and then asking them: let’s have a dialogue without any preconditions,” says ElBaradei who was the IAEA chief from 1997 to 2009.

Top judge warns against environmental hazards of nuclear weapons

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Ebrahim Raisi, Iran’s Judiciary chief on Saturday criticized greed by certain countries, including Western states, to build and modernize their nuclear weapons, warning of their hazardous impacts on the environment.

The top judge made the remarks in a meeting with a number of environmentalists in Tehran.

“Today, the arms race between the arrogant American and European powers has endangered the environment,” Far quoted Raisi as saying.

“They have endangered the environment with nuclear weapons for their own individual and group interests,” he added.

According to Fars, scientists have warned that nuclear weapons pose the single biggest threat to the Earth’s environment.

In a study of the potential global impacts of nuclear blasts, an American team found even a small-scale war would quickly devastate the world’s climate and ecosystems, causing damage that would last for more than a decade.

According to the research, tens of millions of people would die, global temperatures would crash and most of the world would be unable to grow crops for more than five

years after a conflict.

In addition, the ozone layer, which protects the surface of the Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation, would be depleted by 40% over many inhabited areas and up to 70% at the poles.

The United States conducted its first nuclear test explosion in July 1945 and dropped two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Just four years later, the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear test explosion. The United Kingdom (1952), France (1960), and China (1964) followed. Seeking to prevent the nuclear weapon ranks from expanding further, the United States and other like-minded states negotiated the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996.

India, Israel, and Pakistan never signed the NPT and possess nuclear arsenals. Iraq initiated a secret nuclear program under Saddam Hussein before the 1991 Persian Gulf War. North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003 and has tested nuclear devices since that time.

Today, the United States and Russia each deploy roughly 1,400 strategic warheads on several hundred bombers and



missiles, and are modernizing their nuclear delivery systems.

China, India, and Pakistan are all pursuing new ballistic missile, cruise missile, and sea-based nuclear delivery systems. In addition, Pakistan has lowered the threshold for nuclear weapons use by developing tactical nuclear weapons capabilities to counter perceived Indian conventional military threats. North Korea continues its nuclear pursuits in violation of its earlier denuclearization pledges.

Detained crew of supertanker released on bail

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The crew member of supertanker who were arrested off the coast of Gibraltar have been conditionally bailed without charge, Sky News reported on Saturday.

The ship was seized on July 4 in an operation involving British Royal Marines. It was captured under the allegation that it was carrying crude oil to Syria in breach of EU sanctions.

Royal Gibraltar Police arrested the captain and his deputy on Thursday, while two second officers of the Grace 1 tanker were held on Friday.

According to Press TV, Spain, which challenges the British ownership of Gibraltar, has, however, said the seizure was prompted by a U.S. request to Britain and appeared to have taken place in Spanish waters.

Iran has condemned the seizure as “maritime piracy,” vowing to employ all its political and legal capacities to secure the release of the vessel.

Iran has demanded the immediate release of the oil tanker, warning Britain: “This is a dangerous game and has consequences.”

In an interview published on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi rejected claims the supertanker was on route to Syria, saying that no Syrian port could receive a vessel of such capacity.

Mousavi added the evidence presented by the British had shown that the allegations were legally insignificant.

The spokesperson warned London from entering “a dangerous game under the influence of the Americans with no end in sight.”

Earlier this week, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also slammed the seizure as “pure piracy” done on behalf of the “B-team”, a term used by the minister to describe a quadruple of leaders widely believed to be influential in shaping Trump’s campaign of “maximum pressure” against Iran.

Zarif further said that London’s allegations about the tanker breaching EU bans on Syria were irrelevant since “Iran is neither a member of the EU nor subject to any European oil embargo”.

“Last I checked, EU was against extra-territoriality,” he tweeted, warning that the measure would set “a dangerous precedent and must end now.”

British officials, including British Foreign Secretary and Tory leadership candidate Jeremy Hunt, have claimed that they do not want tensions with Iran to “escalate”.

However, marking a further escalation with Iran, Britain alleged on Thursday that Iranian speedboats had sought to block the passage of one of its tankers in the Persian Gulf, but backed off after warnings were issued by a British military vessel.

Iranian authorities dismissed the allegations later on Thursday, with the IRGC issuing a statement rejecting any encounter with foreign ships “in the past 24 hours”.

Following the alleged confrontation, the British government announced on Friday the deployment of a second British warship to the Persian Gulf in order to ensure “freedom of navigation” in the vital international shipping route.

The newly deployed ship, HMS Duncan, will operate alongside HMS Montrose for a short period before HMS Montrose docks in Bahrain for maintenance.

The deployment had been planned before tensions escalated with Iran, according to British sources.

Speaking on Friday, Mousavi rejected the presence of any foreign forces in the Persian Gulf, stressing that the region’s security has to be ensured by the cooperation of neighboring states.

“Any presence of foreign forces, which come from tens of thousands of kilometers away and on the false pretext of ensuring regional stability, is unconstructive and should alarm everyone,” he said.

House votes to curb Trump’s ability to start war on Iran



U.S. Representative Ro Khanna is leading efforts aimed at preventing war with Iran (AFP Photo/SAUL LOEB)

Representatives Ro Khanna, a liberal Democrat, called the vote “a clear statement from members of Congress on both sides of the aisle that this country is tired of endless wars, that we do not want another war in the Middle East.”

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Friday to restrict President Donald Trump’s ability to attack Iran, voicing fear that his hawkish policies are pushing toward a needless war, AFP reported.

The Democratic-led House approved an amendment on a broad defense bill that would prohibit funding for military operations against Iran unless they are in self-defense or explicitly approved by Congress.

But a similar measure failed in the Senate, where Trump’s Republican Party holds the majority. The two chambers will have to negotiate over the language as they finalize the defense bill.

Representative Ro Khanna, the Democrat who led the amendment, said the measure showed that the United States was fed up with war.

According to the New York Times, Ro Khanna called the vote “a clear statement from members of Congress on both sides of the aisle that this country is tired of endless wars, that we do not want another war in the Middle East.”

“Frankly, what it will prevent is what this president promised to the American people not to do -- to get into another endless, costly war in the Middle East,” he said on the House floor.

Trump, who walked out of a nuclear accord with Iran and instead slapped sweeping

sanctions, last month authorized a strike on the Islamic republic after it shot down an intruding U.S. spy drone -- but called it off at the last minute.

Trump has said he believes he has the legal right to attack Iran. U.S. administrations have used an authorization of force passed by Congress after the September 11, 2001 attacks to justify a slew of operations around the world.

Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called the amendment “reckless,” saying that the military should not be held up by a potentially lengthy legislative process.

But 27 Republicans plus Republican-turned-independent Justin Amash joined the overwhelming majority of Democrats in backing the amendment.

Representative Matt Gaetz, a Republican who co-sponsored the amendment with Khanna, accused his colleagues of not leveling with U.S. troops on why they could be sent to die.

“My war-hungry colleagues -- some of whom have already suggested that we invade Venezuela, North Korea and probably a few other countries before lunchtime tomorrow -- if they’re so certain of their case against Iran, let them bring their authorization to use military force against Iran to this very floor,” he said.

Interior minister predicts Iran will emerge victorious from sanctions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said on Saturday that Iran is in the best security situation due to the support that it enjoys from its own people.

“Now, the stability of the Islamic Revolution is not comparable to 40 years ago,” the minister said in a reference to the 1979 revolution which ended the monarchical system in Iran.

Speaking at an administrative meeting in the city of Shirvan, North Khorasan Province, the interior minister said it is for four decades that Iran has been holding free elections and let people decide about the destiny of their country.

He also referred to hostile measures against Iran by certain countries, saying, “Enemies are counting down the days for the annihilation of Iran.”

The United States has imposed the toughest ever sanction against Iran with the aim of causing public unrest in the country. The main motivators of sanctions on Iran outside



the United States are Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Rahmani Fazli said the United States' antagonism against the Islamic Republic lies in Iran's progress, its access to modern technologies and also Tehran's influence on regional developments.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister argued the economic problems are mostly rooted in structural problems which have been inherited from the Pahlavi regime which made the country heavily dependent on oil.

Noting that Iran has achieved self-sufficiency in many areas, the minister said today the chief problems that country is facing today are the sale of oil and banking transaction.

“However”, he predicted, “we will pass this stage very quickly.”

By withdrawing from the multi-nation nuclear treaty, the United States has returned sanctions on Iran and added new ones. In April it declared a total ban on Iran's oil exports and threatened to penalize any country that do business with Iran.

Ex-IRGC chief says military threats against Iran won't work

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Former chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran's great advances in producing different military equipment has rendered ineffective the military threats against the Islamic Republic.

“The type of threats in the fifth decade of the Islamic Revolution is different compared with previous decades,” Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said on Saturday, Fars reported.

He added that the threats against the Islamic Republic at its early stages were military and security ones, but today “the enemy knows that it will be a disgrace if it makes such mistake.”

Jafari also referred to the recent downing of a U.S. spy drone in Iranian airspace by homegrown missiles,

reiterating that the enemy is well aware of Iran's military power.

The IRGC Aerospace Force shot down an American spy drone over the territorial waters of Iran near the Strait of Hormuz at dawn on June 20.

Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said his forces could have shot down a U.S. P8 aircraft with 35 on board which was violating Iran's airspace, but decided to only shoot down the drone to send a message to Washington.

“We intended to send a message to American terrorists in the region,” Hajizadeh said.

“Our response to anything trespassing Iranian territory will be like this,” he said. “We don't embrace war but we are ready to fully defend the country.”



Parliamentary committee to hold meeting to counteract sanctions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – The Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee is slated to hold a special meeting in coming days on ways to counter U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic, the committee's spokesman said on Saturday.

Hossein Naqavi Hosseini said the meeting will be held on Tuesday to examine motions that allow Iran to counter hostile moves by the United States, Tasnim reported on Saturday.

Back in April, the committee decided to table 14 motions as part of a plan to counter the hostile measures.

According to the motions, the administration, ministries, and executive organizations are required to carry out policies to deal with, foil, and inform about the U.S. belligerent measures.

The chairman of the committee said at the time that all organizations will have their respective duties under the planned motions, for instance, Communications and



Information Technology Ministry would deal with U.S. cyber-terrorism plots or Health Ministry will cope with

bioterrorism threats.

The upcoming parliamentary meeting will come against the backdrop of increased tensions between Iran and the U.S. with Washington imposing new sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The U.S. has ratcheted up pressure on Iran since last year after withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Since then, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has been trying to reduce Iran's oil exports to “zero,” and has sent an aircraft carrier strike group, a bomber squad, an amphibious assault ship, and a Patriot missile battery to the Middle East to try to stack up pressure on Tehran.

Iranian officials, however, have dismissed such moves as psychological warfare, saying the country has its own ways of circumventing the American bans and selling crude oil.

The U.S. and the JCPOA: Carrot-and-stick diplomacy without the carrot

1 → The current regime in Washington has so many economic sanctions in force that it is incapable of listing what countries specifically are targeted. With some 6,300 persons on the U.S. treasury department's “Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons” (SDN) list and 30 active sanctions programs, it seems clear that Washington is intent upon acting as the financial dictator of the world.

Coercive economic sanctions, however, may not in themselves be against international law provided the unilateral sanction is a countermeasure deployed by a state as a defensive response to an initial wrong committed by another state, and that the sanctioning ends upon the erring party's return to compliance with international law. Unilateral economic sanctions, such as those imposed by the United States on Iran, are clearly in violation of international law, since Iran was in compliance with the JCPOA, which is itself part of the body of international law as an international convention under article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Furthermore, by withdrawing from the JCPOA, the U.S. stands in violation of Article 25 of the United Nations Charter, which states, “The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.” Additionally, the UN Security Council itself must act in accordance with the UN Charter, Article 24(2). In other words, the U.S., as a member of the Security Council is legally bound by Article 25 of the UN Charter to carry out the provisions of the JCPOA under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 without exception.

Among the provisions of the JCPOA was to be “the comprehensive lifting of all UN Security Council sanctions as well as multilateral and national sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme, including steps on access in areas of trade, technology, finance, and energy.” By coercing other countries not to trade with

Iran, the U.S. was in violation of the terms of the JCPOA even before it was shredded by Trump in May of 2018. The coercive sanctions imposed by Washington on Tehran inhibit the sale of the latter's excess 3.67% enriched uranium, thereby not only violating the terms of the JCPOA, which permits the sale of excess quantities “based on international prices,” but also forcing accumulation in excess of the 300 kilogram limit.

The fact that the U.S. has imposed coercive economic sanctions on Iran also contravenes Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits “the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” such as is the case with Iran. Therefore, by withdrawing from the agreement and refusing to carry out its provisions, and continuously holding out the possible use of military force against the Islamic Republic, the current U.S. leader has put his country in blatant and unambiguous contravention of international law. Finally, the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) has suggested that unilateral coercive sanctions, such as those imposed on Iran by the U.S. without UN Security Council authority, violate international law.

Moreover, Iran has been completely transparent about its actions in response to U.S. violations of the JCPOA, in which Iran made clear to the U.S. and other signatories

that it would “treat such a re-introduction or re-imposition of the sanctions specified in Annex II, or such an imposition of new nuclear-related sanctions, as grounds to cease performing its commitments under this JCPOA in whole or in part.” Re-imposing sanctions is precisely what the U.S. has done, allowing Iran to exercise its right under the JCPOA —and hence, under international law—to cease performing its commitments. Washington is the transgressor here, not Tehran.

So how can the U.S. be such a flagrant flouter of international law and not be held accountable? On the surface, the answer seems straightforward. Firstly, America has perhaps the largest and best equipped armed forces in the world, which only a handful of countries have the military capability to confront. Secondly, the U.S. still represents one of the largest economic markets in the world, the access to which few nations are anxious to forego. Hence, it's no surprise that most nations are unwilling to confront this American goliath, with its intimidating armed forces and lucrative economic markets, much less attempting to bring it to justice for its crimes.

At a deeper level, due to the lack of a centralized body for enforcement or a judiciary whose rulings are compulsory upon all state actors, international law can effectively be

bypassed or even ignored by the arrogant powers and their vassal states. This lack of enforceability results in ideal conditions for haughty nations to engage in a theory of international relations that, at best, could be termed a carrot-and-stick approach, or specifically to those states deemed to be “rogue” or “hostile” to its geopolitical interests, a stick-without-carrot approach. In simpler terms, such a state actor would be engaging in what was once called gunboat diplomacy. The latter seems to be the perennial tactic employed by the U.S. with respect to Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The full re-imposition of illegal and coercive U.S. unilateral sanctions, which the economic terrorist arm of the Washington regime proudly boasts are “a campaign of maximum financial pressure...” targeting “more than 700 individuals, entities, aircraft, and vessels,” occurred on November 5, 2018. It is ironic that a U.S. guide on humanitarian assistance and related exports to Iran begins with the statement: “As the Government of Iran continues to ignore its international obligations,” while it is the U.S. that is ignoring its international obligations under the JCPOA. Still, the booklet's authors insist that “these sanctions do not prohibit the delivery of humanitarian assistance and exports of humanitarian goods to Iran.” This was proven to be a lie during the spring floods in Iran, which affected hundreds of thousands of Iranians, when U.S. sanctions impeded relief efforts.

American gunboat diplomacy of old has evolved into a sophisticated set of strategies including threats, tariffs, economic sanctions, cyber warfare, clandestine operations and proxy wars. Nevertheless, the 19th century imperialistic mindset still prevails in the U.S. approach to 21st century international relations. Unless it changes its ways, Washington is on course for a collision with the Islamic Republic of Iran that will undoubtedly make the U.S. war on Iraq look like the cakewalk predicted by Kenneth Adelman in 2002.

Tehran slams foreign interference in China's internal affairs

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has condemned the “harmful meddling” of the U.S. and UK in China's domestic affairs, stressing Iran's strong support for the “One China Policy”.

In a statement on Friday, Mousavi slammed the two Western countries' provocative moves regarding Taiwan and Hong Kong, emphasizing that there is only one sovereign state under the name China, the Foreign Ministry website reported.

It came after U.S. State Department announced a \$2.2 billion arms sale to Taiwan, which includes 108 Abrams tanks and 250 Stinger surface-to-air missiles.

The Chinese government immediately lodged formal complaints through diplomatic channels, expressing “strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition” to the U.S.' move. It also demanded that the U.S. “immediately cancel” the arms sale to the self-ruled Taipei.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has dismissed China's complaints, saying the military equipment would contribute to “peace and stability” in Asia.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Friday warned the United States “not to play with fire” regarding Taiwan.

Earlier this month, Beijing also criticized London for interfering in its internal affairs, telling Britain to keep its hands off Hong Kong.

On July 3, China denounced British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt as “shameless” and said it had made a diplomatic complaint to London after Hunt warned of consequences if China neglected its commitments to guarantee basic freedoms in Hong Kong.

“In the minds of some people, they regard Hong Kong as still under British rule. They forget ... that Hong Kong has now returned to the embrace of the Motherland,” China's ambassador to London, Liu Xiaoming, said.

“I tell them: hands off Hong Kong and show respect. This colonial mindset is still haunting the minds of some officials or politicians,” Liu told reporters.

Zarif departs to New York

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif departed to New York on Saturday to attend the annual meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said Zarif will travel to Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua after concluding his trip to New York.

Nigerian seminary students in Qom show solidarity with Sheikh Zakzaky

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Nigerian seminary students in Qom have expressed their solidarity with the imprisoned leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky.

The students took to the streets of Qom on Friday afternoon to call on the Nigerian government to release Sheikh Zakzaky, according to the Iran Press.

The demonstrators also called on the Nigerian government to provide urgent medical attention for Sheikh Zakzaky who has suffered from poisoning in prison.



Latest reports from Nigeria suggest the cleric's health condition has deteriorated.

The cleric's son, Mohammad, has told various media outlets that his father was in dire need of medical treatment, as “large and dangerous quantities of lead and cadmium have been found in his blood.”

He said the authorities intended to murder his father since they were denying him urgent medication.

In 2016, Nigeria's federal high court ordered Zakzaky's unconditional release from jail following a trial, but the government has so far refused to set him free.

According to human rights groups, Nigerian forces have killed at least 400 members of the IMN over the past four years.

Iranian envoy, Indonesian minister confer on legal and judicial co-op

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Ambassador to Jakarta and Indonesian Minister of Law and Human Rights held talks in Jakarta on expanding cooperation in legal and judicial areas.

Expressing content about the constructive and growing relations between the two countries, Iranian Ambassador Valiollah Nasrabadi said that both sides can share experiences on legal and migration affairs as well as combat against drug trafficking.

Nasrabadi further described the exchange of visits between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Indonesian President Joko Widodo as a turning point in promotion of bilateral cooperation in the recent years.

For his part, the Indonesian minister, Yasonna Laoly, said that Jakarta-Tehran political, cultural and legal cooperation is at an acceptable level and both sides hope for improvement of economic ties as well.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	250605.0
IFX	3256.31

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,395 rials
GBP	52,804 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.72/b
WTI	\$60.21/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.10/b
Gold	\$1,416.30/oz
Silver	\$15.29/oz
Platinum	\$834.25/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iraq seeks participation of Iranian companies in energy projects

➔ Speaking at the event, the Secretary General of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce Hamid Hosseini expressed hope that Iranian companies could form consortium with private and state-run Iraqi companies in order to play a significant role in the country's oil and gas projects.

Iran and Iraq have been taking significant steps for boosting economic relations in the past few years.

The two countries are following up plans for increasing their bilateral economic trade to over \$20 billion.

China's GDP growth slows to 6.2%

China's economy grew at its slowest rate in nearly three decades in the second quarter, according to a survey of analysts, hit by the U.S.-China trade war and weakening global demand.

As per theaseanpost.com, the world's second largest economy expanded 6.2 percent in April-June, the poll of 10 economists predicted ahead of the official release of gross domestic product (GDP) figures Monday.

The reading would mark the worst quarterly growth in almost three decades but stays within the government's target range of 6.0-6.5 percent for the whole year. The economy grew 6.6 percent in 2018.

Beijing has stepped up support for the economy this year but the moves have not been enough to offset a domestic slowdown and softening overseas demand for its toys, gadgets and electronics.

Policymakers are likely to take further action, analysts say, with Premier Li Keqiang presiding over a state council meeting Wednesday that pledged to lower tariffs and step up tax rebates for exporters.

The "existing tariffs on exports to the U.S. are having an impact on China's economy," said Steven Cochrane, chief APAC economist with Moody's Analytics.

"Industrial production and exports are also weak, with shipments to the U.S. declining significantly," he said.

Beijing pushed forward a raft of stimulus measures earlier this year to cushion the impact from its cooling economy, increasing spending on roads, railways and other big-ticket infrastructure projects, and tax cuts worth two trillion yuan (\$297 billion) kicking in from April.

The policies buoyed the economy in March and brought in 6.4 percent growth for the first quarter, but it proved no more than a short-term panacea.

Industrial output surged 8.5 percent in March before tumbling in April and dropping to five percent growth in May, the slowest increase since 2002.

■ The build in infrastructure

The build in infrastructure investment has also retreated from the first quarter, coming in at 4.0 percent in January-May, sharply down from years of near 20 percent expansion.

"Consumption is holding up relatively well, possibly reflecting the effects of income and value-added tax cuts," said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics.

Sales of big-ticket items such as cars have not held up, though, with sales down 12.4 percent in the first half of the year, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Analysts widely expect Beijing will step up with further easing in coming months, with Cochrane tipping new measures heading into 2020.

"This will include lower real interest rates for small firms, further reserve requirement ratio reductions, and ongoing infrastructure spending," he said.

The overall downward trend gives President Xi Jinping little room to fight back forcefully against the U.S., which is using tariffs as leverage to try to force China into opening up its economy.

■ Two-way trade

Washington and Beijing have hit each other with punitive tariffs covering more than \$360 billion in two-way trade and damaging manufacturers on both sides of the Pacific.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Xi agreed to revive negotiations when they met on the side-lines of the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in Japan on 29 June.

Top U.S. and Chinese negotiators held phone talks on Tuesday but it remains unclear if the wide rupture that has formed since talks broke down in May can be patched over.

On Thursday Trump raised eyebrows with a tweet accusing China of not fulfilling a pledge to buy more agricultural goods, adding: "Hopefully they will start soon!"

Björn Giesbergen of RaboResearch said "we are currently in a stable, unstable equilibrium" with the U.S.-China trade war.

"Ultimately we believe it will be impossible to reach a long-lasting deal. As such, the question is not if tensions will flare up again, but rather when," he said.

Over \$452m worth of commodities traded at IME in a week

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — During weekdays ending up to July 11, approximately, 402.145 million tons (MT) of commodities worth over \$452 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

According to the report from IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 73,206 MT of various products worth close to \$97 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 65,314 MT of steel, 1,760 MT of copper, 2,560 MT of aluminum, 120 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 12 MT of precious metal concentrates as well as 40 MT of zinc ingot were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 327,943 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$371 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 106,580 MT of VB feed stock, 108,826 MT of bitumen, 54,881 MT of polymer products, 27,869 MT of chemical products, 1,003 MT of insulation, 21,500 MT of lube cut oil, 5,000 MT of slaps waxes as well as 3,280 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 996 MT of commodities



were traded on the side market of IME.

On June 24, during the meeting of IME shareholders, IME Managing Director Hamed Soltani-Nejad said that this exchange has prepared ten macro plans to improve its performance during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020).

He mentioned development of underlying

assets through existing instruments, development of financial instruments for commodity-backed securities, expansion of market size and depth, increasing cooperation with other organizations, and strengthening IME brand as some of the mentioned macro plans.

Soltani-Nejad has previously announced

that IME accounted for 39 percent of the value of the total trades in the Iranian capital market during the past Iranian calendar year.

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

The value of trades at IME rose 52 percent in the past calendar year from its previous year.

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

Applying new financial instruments in Iranian capital market was one of the achievements of the country's' exchange markets during the past year.

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

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

‘Iran’s foreign trade not determined by INSTEX’

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The acting head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said Europe's Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) is only a channel for trade with Europe and technically it is not determining the country's foreign trade, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

"Technically, INSTEX is not very determinative for us, but it could politically help Europeans show their decisiveness regarding trade with Iran," Mohammadreza Modoudi said in a televised interview.

"This mechanism is by no means a banking system in which money is supposed to be transferred, but rather a mechanism for trade exchanges in the form of bartering, and Europe's goal is not to involve its banks," the official explained.

Modoudi further noted that Iran's foreign trade is mainly conducted with neighboring countries, and almost 85 percent of the country's exports are to those neighbors plus China and India.

"That is why we do not have much dependence on Europeans. Even the share of East Asian countries in the remaining 15 percent of Iranian foreign trade is much more than that of Europe's," he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the TPO head mentioned IN-



STEX potential advantages for EU, saying "Europe's exports to Iran are about 10 times higher than Iran's exports to Europe, and it is clear that this mechanism would be more in favor of the European nations rather than in line with Iran's interests."

"By implementing INSTEX, the Europeans could at least maintain the flow of their own exports to Iran," he said.

He finally pointed to Iran's current trade and noted that the country's current annual trade stands at nearly \$50 billion, and this level of trade has been achieved without INSTEX.

According to the official, Iran is currently using a same

Pakistan eyeing Iran's lucrative market to increase rice exports

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's big market can be a lucrative source of revenues for Pakistani rice exporters, an advisor to the country's prime minister said, referring to Islamabad's plan for rising the country's annual rice exports revenues to \$5 billion.

Pakistan's Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production Abdul Razak Dawood, in a meeting with a delegation of Pakistan's Rice Exporters Association on Thursday, urged his country's rice exporters to benefit from Iran's market, Fars news agency reported.

During the meeting, Dawood vowed to increase rice exports from the current \$2 billion to \$5 billion in upcoming five years.

Last week, Iran's Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Reza Rahmani during his visit to Pakistan expressed keen interest in importing 500,000 tons of rice from Pakistan.

The minister also led the Iranian delegation at 8th Joint Trade Committee (JTC) two-day meeting in Islamabad.

The two countries had also signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to promote bilateral trade and investment between the two countries.

The MOU was signed by Rahmani and Dawood on the sidelines of the Joint Trade Committee meeting.

The Iranian delegation also held talks with the Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Iran proposes special headquarters for



facilitating trade

In an interview with IRNA, Rahmani said that during the meeting with Imran Khan, he had proposed establishing a special headquarters to facilitate trade between the two countries.

According to the official, Imran Khan welcomed the expansion of Iran-Pakistan trade ties and said his country was ready to take all necessary measures in this regard.

The minister said that the proposal has also been approved by the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the members are going to be selected in near future.

Prime Minister Imran Khan also directed all concerned ministers to take appropriate measures under special working group to strengthen Iran-Pakistan trade ties," Rahmani added.

The official pointed to some other issues which were discussed in the meeting including tariffs and barter trade, and noted that the two sides have agreed to take necessary steps for removing the potential bottlenecks.

After his visit to Pakistan, Rahmani said

that Islamabad is enthusiastic about developing economic, bilateral, and commercial ties with Tehran.

"The visit was good and satisfactory, and the Pakistani side, expressing interest in the development of trade and economic exchanges, is set to lift the necessary barriers to trade and economic hurdles," he said.

According to the official, activating common border markets and cross-border trade, promoting involvement of the two sides' private sectors in mutual trade were among the main goals of the Iranian delegation's visit to Pakistani.

Rahmani further noted that Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan has reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthen relations with Iran in diverse fields, including barter trade.

"Facilitating trade, removal of hurdles in economic ties, border issues, and transportation of goods especially foodstuff were among the major issues discussed with the Pakistani side," he said.

Meanwhile, last month Dawood said that his country is willing to enhance trade and economic cooperation with Iran, despite the United States' unilateral sanctions.

Iran and Pakistan have been taking significant steps for boosting economic relations in the past few years.

In late April, Imran Khan paid a landmark visit to Iran at the top of a political and economic delegation.

An Iran-Pakistan business forum was held

in Tehran during the Pakistani prime minister's visit, in which the two sides emphasized the necessity of using all available opportunities to expand bilateral trade relations.

The business forum, which was held by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) in cooperating with the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran, was attended by a number of Iranian and Pakistani officials including Imran Khan, Iranian Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami, TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari, and some businessmen from the both sides.

During Imran Khan's visit, the two countries issued a joint statement highlighting the two side's determination to enhance political and economic relations.

In late June, Rahmani also met with Pakistani Ambassador to Tehran Riffat Masood to discuss his visit to Pakistan and follow up on agreements reached during Imran Khan's visit to Iran.

In the meeting Rahmani offered establishing and activating border markets and identification and resolution of the problems that the two sides' traders are facing, as some ways of increasing trade between the two countries.

"Considering the two sides' willingness for achieving constructive business cooperation, it is expected that this goal is going to be achieved in the near future with the measures taken and the greater involvement of the private sector," he added.



rand, and paper and pulp maker Sappi, which dropped 2.24% to 49.80 rand.

Crisis-hit retailer Steinhoff, however, rose 12.60% to 1.47 rand despite reporting a 356 million euro (\$401 million) half-year loss from continuing operations as the damage from a massive accounting scandal drags on.

South Africa's rand set for weekly gains

manager Public Investment Corporation (PIC) might consider converting the \$6.4 billion debt of struggling state power utility Eskom to equity.

In equities, the benchmark Johannesburg Stock Exchange Top-40 Index fell slightly by 0.06% to 51,157.41 points while the broader All-Share Index dipped by 0.05% to 57,243.86 points.

Bonds retreated, with the yield on the benchmark 2026 issue rising by 6 basis points to 8.09%.

Market focus is now on the South African Reserve Bank's monetary policy committee (MPC) interest rates announcement on Thursday.

■ South African economy

The "MPC is also highly likely to reduce local interest rates during its meeting next

week, but the impact on the rand will probably be overshadowed by the positive effect of the expected Fed rate cut, and the expected benefits to the South African economy," said Bianca Botes, a treasury partner at Peregrine Treasury Solutions.

The "local economy, however, will require more than an interest rate cut to see any significant and sustainable growth."

"We're seeing risk-off trade in emerging markets coming through towards the end of the week based on possible Fed outcomes, the ongoing trade war, and the U.S. and China not coming to the party and saying or commenting on further agreements," said Wilmar Buys, FFO Securities portfolio manager.

The bottom performers were mining company Gold Fields, which slipped 2.97% to 72.20

NIOC to offer 2m barrels of condensate at IRENEX in 8th round

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will offer two million barrels of gas condensate at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) on Tuesday, Shana reported.

As announced by NIOC, the base price will be \$60.4 per barrel in this round of offering gas condensate at IRENEX which is the eighth round.

Buyers can receive their cargo up to three months after the transaction, and the delivery of the cargo in other regions is subject to NIOC approval.

Since the U.S.'s withdrew from Iran's nuclear pact in May 2018, vowing to drive Iran's oil exports down to zero, the Islamic Republic has been taking various measures to counter the U.S. actions and to keep its oil exports levels as high as possible.

One of the main strategies that Iran chose to execute to help its oil exports afloat has been trying new ways to diversify the mechanism of oil sales, one of which is offering oil at the country's stock market.

NIOC offered light crude oil at IRENEX first on October 28, 2018 just few days before new U.S. sanctions on Iran's petroleum sector took effect (November 4). In the first round, NIOC could sell some 280,000 barrels of crude oil at \$74.85 per barrel. With the daily supply



amount of one million barrels, the market wrapped up by selling eight 35,000-barrel cargos of oil on the day.

Offering gas condensate at IRENEX came after the successful offering of crude oil at this market. The first offering was done on February 13, which failed to attract customers.

And then the turn came to heavy crude. Offering heavy crude at IRENEX came after NIOC offered light crude at this stock market in eight round.

Iranian National Oil Company sold 70,000 barrels of heavy crude oil at IRENEX for the first time on April 30. In the first round one million barrels of heavy crude was offered at a base price of \$60.68.

So far 15 rounds of oil (including heavy and light crude) offerings have been held at IRENEX through which 1.1 million barrels of oil was sold, while the seven offerings of gas condensate have been concluded with no sales.

NIOC's representative in Iran Energy Ex-

change (IRENEX) has said that the company will continue offering oil at IRENEX, Mehr news agency reported.

"Offering oil and gas condensate in the international ring of IRENEX has become a legal obligation, and it will definitely be a lasting move," Amir Hossein Tebyanian said in a press conference hosted by Mehr news agency at the place of the agency on last Monday.

Briefing the press about the procedures and processes of NIOC's oil and gas condensate offerings at IRENEX, the official noted that physical sales of oil at IRENEX is just the first step and the main goal is to activate other financial instruments, and offer Iranian crude in the regional stock markets.

"We will continue offering oil at the IRENEX in order to institutionalize the necessary procedures which are a prerequisite for improving IRENEX to the level of world class stock exchanges," he said.

According to the official, IRENEX was initially founded in an attempt to permit the Iranian private sector export crude oil since Washington aims to cut Iran's oil sales.

However now, foreign buyers have also expressed willingness to engage in IRENEX oil offerings and welcoming the idea, NIOC is preparing necessary bases for them to be able to do so.

Third platform of South Pars phase 14 installed on offshore spot

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Platform 14B of Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) was installed on its designated offshore spot on Saturday, Public Relations Department of Pars Oil and Gas Company, which is in charge of developing the gas field, announced.

The 2,450-ton structure, which is the third platform of phase 14 of South Pars development, will add 14.2 million cubic meters of gas per day to the total output of the giant gas field.

Platform 14B had been shipped in Bandar Abbas, the capital city of southern province of Hormozgan, on June 11 to be installed on its designated offshore spot.

The platform was built in a 115-month period and the estimated costs of the project are reported to be \$570 million.

This project is 100 percent implemented by Iranian engineers and experts and more than 60 percent of its equipment is also domestic.

The first platform of phase 14 started operation in summer 2018 and the second platform namely 14C was shipped



in September 2018 and the installation operation of this platform were completed in October 2018.

Construction of platform 14D, the last platform of phase 14, has a 92-percent progress for the moment and it is scheduled to be installed on its designated offshore spot by the end of the seventh Iranian calendar month of Mehr (October 22), according to Mohammad-Mehdi Tavasolipour, the operator of phase 14.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate. The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

In early June, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, in separate decrees, outlined the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-March 19, 2020) priorities of the ministry's four major subsidiaries.

In the decree addressed to Masoud Karbasian, the head of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), completion and inauguration of the phases 13, 14, 22 and 24 of South Pars gas field was one of the main priorities for NIOC.

The importance of reducing our carbon footprint and increasing our renewables workforce

Renewable energy is becoming a priority for governments all around the world in order to reduce our carbon footprint, but the skills shortage is slowing progression down.

As stated by openaccessgovernment.org, from the UK to Nicaragua, almost everyone is trying to reduce emissions and their carbon footprint. Increasing pressure from activists and bodies to meet international climate goals has led to a number of leaders making ambitious promises and taking action on the matter.

For example, Prime Minister Theresa May, recently announced that she will legislate a net zero carbon target for 2050. And although the UK has made impressive progress in becoming more eco-friendly, and achieved many major milestones, such as a record stretch of 18 consecutive coal-free days, this goal still seems a little far-fetched considering the energy sector's dire skills shortage.

Demand for renewable energy is higher than ever across all market segments, and procurement and project investment continue to expand amongst buyers and is spreading to new groups such as smaller companies, oil and gas businesses and asset management firms.

Some of the core fundamentals that drove growth in 2018, according to Deloitte, were the declining costs of wind and solar generation, advances in battery storage technology and grid operators' growing expertise and expanding toolset for integrating intermittent

renewable power into the grid. These factors will surely continue to advance, increasing the demand for eco-friendly energy and a capable workforce too.

■ Expanding the talent pool

With this growth, staff shortages are likely to exacerbate, and the industry will need to find a way to drastically expand its talent pool. There won't only be a need for engineers, but also workers skilled in asset management, leadership, and science.

At the end of 2018, the sector employed 11 million people, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), with approximately 112 thousand of these individuals positioned in the UK, and there's no doubt that this number will shoot up in the coming years.

According to IRENA's Reference Case, employment in the renewable energy sector could reach 12.5 million by 2030 and 14.9 million in 2050. To put this into perspective on a smaller scale, the UK offshore wind industry expects to see job demand in the sector jump to 36,000 from 10,000 over the next 15 years – and this is just one area of renewables.

There are a number of factors contributing to the sector's skills shortage. The Global Energy Talent Index (GETI) report on employment trends in energy, shows that 58% of the hiring managers surveyed see the "lack of planning for knowledge transfer/skills retention" as the main reason for a lack in available talent.

Meanwhile, 21% of renewables employers say the "overall number of professionals entering the industry" is a main contributor.

The lack of people joining the sector is certainly a key problem that needs addressing. Regardless of engineering salaries rising, particularly within the renewables and nuclear fields where remuneration is often higher than in the oil and gas sector, there is still a dearth of professionals entering the industry, but why?

I believe the years of negative portrayal, and lack of insight into the industry is to blame for the scarcity of skilled workers in the sector. Unfortunately, unlike doctors, programmers and scientists, working in the energy field has not been glamorized as a career of choice. Energy has developed the false reputation of being 'boring' or for those lacking qualifications.

However, this clearly isn't true. The energy sector is going through a massive transformation, with renewables leading the way, and exciting opportunities are in abundance.

What should the UK renewable energy sector do to grow its talent pool?

It is clear that more needs to be done to make the sector a career of choice.

■ Renewable sector

According to the Engineer's 2019 salary survey, 32% believe that this can be achieved by the renewable energy sector increasing its focus on young people, followed by 32% who think the focus should be on skills transfer

from other sectors. A further 19% say nothing needs to be done as engineers will go where there's money to be made and 4% opted for recruiting the right skills from overseas.

All of these options will certainly help grow the talent pool, but I believe that there is one significant area that has not been highlighted – increasing diversity.

It's well known that there is a lack of women in STEM and that the energy sector, in particular, is male-dominated. Ignoring this fact and not addressing the problem will unnecessarily limit access to valuable workers.

To increase the long-term visibility of women working in the energy sector, it is vital to approach schools and inform students of the exciting opportunities available to them. It's important to be thoughtful when doing this, and send the right representatives that both genders can relate to.

A male engineer might perpetuate the idea that the industry is just for men. The same approach should be taken at careers fairs when engaging with graduates.

Solving the renewable energy sector's skills shortage won't happen overnight. However, by tackling the issue strategically and putting in place the right initiatives now, talent will be available for important future projects.

The renewable sector is going through a transformative period, with ground-breaking opportunities available in wind, solar, hydroelectric and more, we just need to get in front of people and let them know.

Iran indigenizes monitoring systems in gas transmission

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Head of National Iranian Gas Transmission Company (NIGTC) announced that Iranian experts have achieved the know-how for producing vibration monitoring and protection systems for gas transmission lines.

According to Saeed Tavakoli, the domestically-made systems would be 20 times more cost-efficient than foreign samples, IRNA reported on Saturday.

"So far, such vibration monitoring and protection systems were only manufactured by few renowned companies around the world, such as Bentley Nevada, Vibro Meter, and Metrix," Tavakoli said.

The official noted that with this control panels being manufactured inside the country, the requirements for such systems will be completely met and there would be no need to import them anymore.

According to the official, the Iranian panel has been installed on a NP turbine and has been successfully tested parallel to a similar sample made by Bentley Nevada.

The vibration monitoring and protection systems will constantly monitor critical asset parameters such as vibration, temperature, speed, and numerous other condition indicators in gas facilities in order to anticipate and prevent mechanical failures.

In May 2018, Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from an international deal with Iran, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and in November the sanctions were reimposed on the country's energy sector.

Since then, most of the foreign companies and manufacturers of industry equipment which were collaborating with Iran, cut their ties threatened by the consequences of having economic ties with Tehran.

In this regard, the country has been taking all necessary measures to push through the situation and withstand the pressures imposed by the sanction.

Therefore, moving toward domestic production and constructing all the necessary equipment inside the country has become a top priority for the Iranian government in the past few years.



OPEC: This is where most new oil will come from in 2020

Non-OPEC crude oil supply will rise by 2.4 million bpd next year, OPEC said in its latest Monthly Oil Market Report.

According to menafn.com, the cartel added that the rise would be driven by the addition of new pipeline capacity in North America, most likely meaning the United States as Canada's pipeline woes continue and Mexico struggles to reverse declining production.



In fact, OPEC mentioned the natural decline of production in Mexico would offset the effect of rising non-OPEC supply somewhat.

It's not just the U.S. that will expand production, however. New projects in Norway, Brazil and Australia will also contribute to the increase in non-OPEC supply.

However, OPEC has revised downwards its non-OPEC supply growth projections for this year: it sees growth at 2.05 million bpd, down by 95,000 bpd from its previous monthly forecast. That would bring the total non-OPEC supply to a daily average of 64.43 million bpd.

In demand, OPEC expects the 2020 increase to remain unchanged from this year, at 1.4 million bpd. Non-OECD countries will account for most of this, at 1.05 million bpd while OECD countries will contribute about 900,000 bpd to global demand growth.

Somewhat surprisingly, China will not be the largest driver of new oil demand. That, according to OPEC, will be the rest of Asia, with China's oil demand growing at a weaker pace than during this year.

The growth in demand for OPEC oil specifically is seen slowing down next year: OPEC has forecast that the total would average 29.3 million bpd in 2020, down by 1.3 million bpd from this year.

The daily rate of demand decline is 100,000 bpd more than the cuts OPEC agreed to with its non-OPEC partners in December last year and suggests the deal might have to be extended further than the end of March 2020, which OPEC and its partners agreed on earlier this month.

Power generation: China is now the dominant factor in global energy production

An examination of the role China now plays in the global power generation industry is useful because the vast scale decisions are taken on have impacts that are felt far beyond the country's borders.

As per financialplanning24.com, recently installed as the leading energy consumer, overtaking the United States, and soon to be the globe's largest economy, Chinese policy and investment yields extensive influence over the global power generation industry.

Such is the extent of government spending power and development of power generation capabilities, China is now the dominant factor regarding the use of coal, both at home and abroad, renewable energy and in dealing with soaring power demands made by an increasingly affluent and aspirational population.

A report published by UN Environment, the Frankfurt School-UNEP Collaborating Center, and Bloomberg New Energy Finance found since 2004 global investment into green energy sources totaled \$2.9tn.

Since 2016 investment expanded by 31% according to the report; elsewhere in Europe and the United States spending declined by 36% and 6% respectively.

The growth in spending compared to elsewhere in the world is reflective of the relative economic success of China.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, a U.S.-based non-profit environmental advocacy group, Chinese institutions are the largest investor of overseas coal power-plants.

Rising Vaca Muerta shale output makes Argentina LNG exporter

Growing natural gas production from the Vaca Muerta shale play has recently helped Argentina to export its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo and to resume pipeline natural gas exports to its neighbors Brazil and Chile, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a report on Friday.

Argentina was a net exporter of natural gas between 1990 and 2007, but with declines in natural gas production from mature fields, the country became a net importer of natural gas in 2008.

The shale gas production from the Vaca Muerta formation has been steadily rising in recent years and has been the main contributor to the country's natural gas production.

Thanks to Vaca Muerta's output, which accounts for some 23 percent of Argentina's total gross natural gas production, Argentina shipped in June its first LNG cargo from the offshore Tango floating liquefaction unit



(FLNG).

According to the EIA, Tango FLNG has a production capacity of 500,000 metric tons (0.07 Bcf/d) of LNG and is expected to produce up to eight LNG-export cargoes annually. However, Argentina's LNG export growth will need investments in pipelines

and onshore liquefaction facilities or the use of more FLNG units, the EIA noted.

■ Net natural gas importer

After becoming a net natural gas importer in 2008, Argentina imported both pipeline and LNG throughout the year. But as natural gas production has been growing, in the past

two years Argentina imported LNG only in the cooler months, March through October.

"Argentina will likely continue importing LNG during cooler months until additional pipeline infrastructure is built to deliver growing shale production to major demand centers," the EIA said.

Argentina could become a major LNG supplier to Asian markets because Argentina's peak LNG potential in the southern hemisphere's summer coincides with strong demand in Asia in the northern hemisphere's winter, Wood Mackenzie said last month.

Vaca Muerta has been one of the few bright spots in shale gas production outside the United States, but it hasn't come even close to replicating the U.S. shale revolution.

Now developers are turning their attention to exporting natural gas and to tapping more oil in the Vaca Muerta formation.

(Source: oilprice.com)

The death of Privacy: Government fearmongers to read your mail

By Philip Giraldi

ANTIWAR — It is discouraging to note just how the United States has been taking on the attributes of a police state since 9/11. Stories of police raids on people's homes gone wrong are frequently in the news. In one recent incident, a heavily armed SWAT team was sent to a St. Louis county home. The armed officers entered the building without knocking, shot the family dog and forced the family members to kneel on the floor where they were able to watch their pet struggle and then die. The policemen then informed the family that they were there over failure to pay the gas bill. Animal rights groups report that the shooting of pets by police has become routine in many jurisdictions because the officers claim that they feel threatened.

Indeed, any encounter with any police at any level has now become dangerous. Once upon a time it was possible to argue with an officer over the justification for a traffic ticket, but that is no longer the case. You have to sit with your hands clearly visible on the steering wheel while answering "Yes sir!" to anything the cop says. There have been numerous incidents where the uncooperative driver is ordered to get out of the car and winds up being tasered or shot.

Courts consistently side with police officers and with the government when individual rights are violated while the Constitution of the United States itself has even been publicly described by the president as "archaic" and "a bad thing for the country." The National Security Agency (NSA) routinely and illegally collects emails and phone calls made by citizens who have done nothing wrong and the government even denies to Americans the right to travel to countries that it disapproves of, most recently Cuba.

And traveling itself has become an unpleasant experience even before one sits down in the 17 inches of seat-space offered by major airlines, with the gropers of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) acting as judge, jury and executioner for travelers who have become confused by the constantly changing rules about what they can do and carry with them. The TSA is now routinely "examining" the phones and laptops of travelers and even downloading the information on them, all without a warrant or probable cause. And the TSA even has a "little list" that identifies travelers who are uncooperative and flags them for special harassment.

Congress is considering bills that will make criticism of Israel a crime, establishing a precedent that will end freedom of speech, and the impending prosecution and imprisonment of Julian Assange for espionage will be the death of a truly free press. Americans are no longer guaranteed a trial by jury and can be held indefinitely by military tribunals without charges. Under George W. Bush torture and rendition were institutionalized while Barack Obama initiated the practice of executing US citizens overseas by drone if they were deemed to be a "threat." There was no legal process involved and "kill" lists were updated every Tuesday morning. And perhaps the greatest crimes of all, both Obama and George W. Bush did not hesitate to bomb foreigners, bring about regime change, and start wars illegally in Asia and Africa.

The latest assault on civil liberties relates to what used to be referred to as privacy. Indeed, the United States government does not recognize that citizens have a right to privacy. Officials in the national security and intelligence agencies have reportedly become concerned that some new encryption systems being used for email traffic and telephones have impeded government monitoring of what information is being exchanged. As is often the case, "terrorism" is the principal reason being cited for the need to read and listen to the communications of ordinary citizens, but it should be observed in passing that more people in the US are killed annually by falling furniture than by acts of terror. It should also be noted that the federal, state and local governments as well as private companies spend well in excess of a trillion dollars every year to fight the terrorism threat, most of which is completely unnecessary or even counter-productive.

At the end of June senior Trump Administration officials connected to the National Security Council met to discuss what to do about the increasing use of the effective encryption systems by both the public and by some internet service providers, including Apple, Google and Facebook. Particular concern was expressed regarding systems that cannot be broken by NSA at all even if maximum resources using the Agency's computers are committed to the task. It is a condition referred to by the government agencies as "going dark."

Under discussion was a proposal to go to Congress and to ask for a law either forbidding so-called end-to-end encryption or mandating a technological fix enabling the government to circumvent it. End-to-end encryption, which scrambles a message so that it is only readable by the sender and recipient, was developed originally as a security feature for iPhones in the wake of the whistleblower Edward Snowden's exposure of the extent to which NSA was surveilling US citizens. End-to-end makes most communications impossible to hack. From the law enforcement point of view, the alternative to a new law banning or requiring circumvention of the feature would be a major and sustained effort to enable government agencies to break the encryption, something that may not even be possible.

In the past, government snooping was enabled by some of the communications providers themselves, with companies like AT&T engineering in so-called "backdoor" access to their servers and distribution centers, where messages could be read directly and phone calls recorded. But the end-to-end encryption negates that option by sending a message out on the ethernet that is unreadable.

Phone security was last in the news in the wake of the 2015 San Bernardino, California, terrorist attack that killed 14, where the Department of Justice took Apple to court to access a locked iPhone belonging to one of the gunmen. Apple refused to create software to open the phone but the FBI was able to find a technician who could do so and the case was dropped, resulting in no definitive legal precedent on the government's ability to force a private company to comply with its demands.

There is apparently little desire in Congress to take up the encryption issue, though the National Security Council, headed by John Bolton, clearly would like to empower government law enforcement and intelligence agencies by banning unbreakable encryption completely. It is, however, possibly something that can be achieved through an Executive Order from the president. If it comes about that way, FBI, CIA and NSA will be pleased and will have easy access to all one's emails and phone calls. But the price to be paid is that once the security standards are lowered anyone else with minimal technical resources will be able to do the same, be they hackers or criminals. As usual, a disconnected and tone-deaf government's perceived need "to keep you safe" will result in a loss of fundamental liberty that, once it is gone, will never be recovered.

What do polls and analyzes say?

Is Trump afraid of the future?

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — While some polls in the United States announce the decline in the popularity of Donald Trump, the president is still trying to keep his hope for the future! However, Trump knows well that he will no longer remain in the White House in the case of failure in key and sensitive states such as Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan, and Democrats will be at the head of the political and executive equations of the United States.

■ Trump approval rating slipping in Midwest

As The Hill reported, Trumps approval rating among his supporters in the Midwest appears to be declining, according to a series of Hill-HarrisX polls since July. Of those surveyed, 47 percent of Midwest voters said they approved of Trump's job in office last July, with his highest mark among those voters reaching 54 percent in the months of October and December. In the latest Hill-HarrisX survey in February that number had slipped to only 40 percent of Midwestern voters saying they approved of the president. The polls also show rising disapproval of Trump among Midwest states, with 53 percent saying they disapproved of Trump in July and 60 percent saying the same in February. The trend could end up being a problem for Trump, who scored crucial victories in 2016 in Midwest states like Wisconsin and Michigan, helping to propel him to an electoral college victory.

"When it gets down to it, the president is going to get reelected or defeated on a state-by-state basis," Chris Wilson, chief strategist at WPA Intelligence, told Hill.TV's Krystal Ball on Wednesday. "So the numbers I'm most concerned about are those in states like Michigan, and Pennsylvania, and Iowa, and Wisconsin. States that he won last time that Republicans hadn't won in a longtime," he continued. Trump's approval ratings also saw a decline in the south, another political stronghold for him. Fifty-two percent of southern voters said they approved of him in July and now 46 percent say they approve of him in that region.

There was also a rise in the president's disapproval rating in the south, with 48 percent saying they disapproved of him in July, and 54 percent saying the same in February. Trump's national approval rating currently sits at 45 percent, according to the latest poll, while his disapproval rating is at 55 percent. The states included in the Midwest category were Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Southern states were Delaware, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The polls were conducted among statistically representative samples of about 1,000 registered voters. Each of them has a sampling margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

■ Trump's rising poll numbers raise a question

As Bostonglobe reported, Looking at both the latest polling and the more precise picture of President Trump that has emerged



since he took office, you arrive at a reluctant conclusion and a perplexing question. First, the 2020 presidential race will likely shape up not as a broom-out-a-buffoon sweep but as a tough, competitive election. So what, exactly, would it take for Republicans to abandon this dishonest, divisive, dysfunctional president?

Everyone should know by now that major aspects of Trump's self-spun personal story are fraudulent. We're all familiar with the narrative: An indomitable dynamo who by dint of his coruscating intellect won admission to an elite college and then, with the help of a (later repaid) \$1 million loan from his father, built a billion-dollar business empire.

This week The Washington Post revealed as bogus another bit of that biography with its revelation that Trump's admission to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania was aided by a close friend of his older brother. James Nolan, now 81, told the Post's Michael Kranish that when working in the university's admissions office in 1966, he got a call from his very close friend Fred Trump Jr. seeking help with brother Donald's hoped-for transfer from Fordham to the Wharton School. Nolan was accommodating, meeting with Donald and his father and then giving Trump a rating that apparently aided his application. Further, despite his many assertions about his intellect, Trump wasn't even on the dean's list his senior year, the Post reports. By itself, none of that is big or surprising news, but it does highlight once again the gap between Trump's autobiographical boasts and the actual privileged nature of his advancement.

After graduating, Trump avoided the Vietnam War-era draft with the help of a diagnosis of bone spurs, which earned him a medical deferment. Except that, as The New York Times has reported, the daughters of the physician who diagnosed that supposed condition say he did it as a favor to father Fred Trump, who owned the building where the doctor had his office.

In fairness, that's an anecdotal account, one without real proof. But The New York Times had documentation aplenty for its investigative report that, rather than parlaying his father's \$1 million loan into a

fortune, as he has often claimed, Trump was the beneficiary of some \$413 million (in today's dollars) funneled his way by the family patriarch. Despite that, as a businessman, Trump still resorted to bankruptcy no fewer than six times. Imagine for a moment the derision the GOP would heap on a Democratic president with such a dubious record. And yet, most Republicans don't seem to blink an eye at Trump's history. Or his Potemkin village personal narrative.

Equally puzzling is the backing he receives from the evangelical community and other conservatives who, in different circumstances, claim that morality and character matter to them. After all, even if one doesn't include the various allegations of forced or unwelcome lip kisses, at least 10 women have accused Trump of sexual misconduct over the years, including author and columnist E. Jean Carroll, who recently said that Trump attacked and (though she didn't use the word) raped her in the mid-1990s in a luxury department store dressing room, an incident she told friends about at the time.

Even if assembling an antiabortion majority on the Supreme Court is an important priority for someone, how, exactly, can he or she maintain support for a politician after such a litany of accusations? An amoralist's response might be that, character notwithstanding, Trump at least steers by crucial Republican tenets. Except that he has abandoned as many as he's upheld. Fiscal discipline? Free markets and free trade? A strong US-led Western alliance? All in exile. So, too, are broader American values such as a basic regard for the truth. Or respect for the rule of law. Or a commitment to transparent, ethical, non-nepotistic government. And yet, this president now seems positioned to run a competitive race in 2020. As discouraging as his presidency has been, that's the truly dismaying commentary about our country.

■ Even when accounting for 'Shy Trump Voters,' the President needs his numbers to improve

Nationalreview reported: Is there a shy Trump voter factor the way there used to be "shy Tory factor" in polls? Probably. The final polls in Michigan in 2016 put Hillary Clinton ahead by 4 to 5 percentage points, and Trump won by three-tenths of one percentage point. The final polls in Penn-

sylvania in 2016 put Hillary Clinton tied to leading by 4 points, and Trump won by seven-tenths of one percentage point. The final polls in Wisconsin in 2016 put Hillary Clinton ahead by 6 to 8 points, and Trump won by seven-tenths of one percentage point.

The good news for the Trump reelection campaign is that that they can feel reasonably optimistic that Trump will outperform the final polls conducted before Election Day 2020. The bad news is, we don't know if this "shy Trump voter factor" will be good for one percentage point, 5 percentage points, or 10 percentage points.

Let's say the shy Trump voters are worth a five-point swing in favor of Trump compared to the most recent numbers in key states. In a matchup against Joe Biden, Trump would still lose Michigan, lose Pennsylvania, and lose Wisconsin, as well as losing the national popular vote by a slightly larger margin than in 2016. If Biden won those three states, and kept Hillary Clinton's states, he's at 278 electoral votes and Trump would be a one-term president. If you're wondering about the other likely swing states, with a five-point swing, Trump would still win Ohio. The limited number of polls in Florida range from a tie to nine point lead for Biden, and North Carolina has an even wider range. Iowa would probably be close.

All of this is when the economy is rocking and rolling; there's no guarantee that the economy will be doing as well in 15 months. To feel good about Trump's odds in those states, you must assume his shy supporters are worth a swing of 8 to 10 percentage points from the current numbers. The "shy Trump voter" effect probably varies from state to state. The point is, in most of the big battleground states, Trump doesn't need to do slightly better than his current poll numbers. He needs to do way better than his current poll numbers, even when you give him a generous assessment of hidden support that isn't showing up in opinion surveys but will in show up polling places.

Will Biden, or any other Democratic nominee, be in weaker shape in autumn 2020 compared to now? Probably. Democrats look set to have a long, bruising primary. But that primary fight would have to get awfully nasty to persuade a significant number of self-identified Democrats to stay home and not vote. In a heavily polarized era, the vast majority of Biden supporters will end up supporting Kamala Harris if she's the nominee, and vice versa.

Trump can and probably will tie the Democratic nominee to the current radical policies being embraced during this primary — de facto open borders, elimination of private health insurance, taxpayer-funded health care and education for those who cross the border illegally. He and his team may feel confident about the potency of the message, "Even if you don't like everything I'm doing, electing a Democrat means empowering someone who prioritizes other country's citizens over American citizens." Those positions or other flaws may well drag down Democratic candidates in head-to-head matchups against Trump — but they haven't done so yet. Coaches sometimes tell athletes, "Even if you're ahead by ten points, play as if you're behind by ten points." Considering his current ominous poll numbers, the Trump campaign should indeed work as if they're 10 points behind.

The real Biden apology America deserves: The Iraq war

By Maj. Danny Sjursen

Uncle Joe has never been much for apologies. Whether it was his backing of the '90s crime bill that helped fuel mass incarceration, or his mistreatment of Anita Hill during the Clarence Thomas hearings, Biden has been loathe to admit wrong and make amends. Thus it was a bit of a surprise this weekend when the former vice president apologized for his insensitive remarks about segregationists; the very comments that prompted a fierce debate exchange with fellow candidate Kamala Harris. That's all well and good, but since it's in foreign policy that American emperors (read: presidents) wield near unilateral power, it's time for Biden to plea for the electorate's forgiveness on perhaps the worst mistake of his career: his support and vote for the Iraq War back in 2002.

Biden bills himself as an experienced foreign policy guru, as ready on day one to "handle the world." His record on the 2003 invasion of Iraq — the most critical (and disastrous) global decision of the 21st century — suggests otherwise. Back in October 2002, when Congress essentially rubber-stamped President George W. Bush's preordained rush to war, Biden, along with fellow establishmentarians Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer, was one of 28 Democrats to vote with the majority. It was a colossal error, a foreign policy own goal that forever destabilized the Middle East and fueled the rise of ever more numerous and radicalized Islamist terror groups. The blood of some 5,000 U.S. troops, to say nothing of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, is, in part, on Biden's hands.

Though perhaps half of this country got Iraq wrong, Biden — as a long time member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee — should've known better and be held to a higher standard. Whether his vote was



about politics, poor judgment, or both, it should give pause to Democratic primary voters. Consider all that might not have unfolded without the Iraq invasion that Biden blessed off on. It's not only the lives and treasure that'd have been preserved, but America's overall (now tarnished) reputation on the Arab and Muslim "street." Without the embarrassingly euphemistically titled Operation Iraqi Freedom, there'd have been no ISIS (formed and germinated in US military prisons in Iraq), probably no Islamist takeover of Eastern Syria and Northern and Western Iraq, and no need for an American troop presence in Syria, Jordan, and various other Arab World locales. It's hard to overestimate how much better would have been a world without the US regime change war of choice in Iraq. Now that's a Biden, and mainstream Dem, liability.

Which is why running to the right — in other words, more establishment interventionist — of President Donald Trump on foreign affairs is a recipe for disaster and perhaps defeat. Though the Donald has rarely

followed through since entering the Oval Office, in 2016 he ran on the rather popular promise of no more "dumb" new wars in the Mideast. That sensible position resonated with a sizable portion of the war-weary electorate, including many conservatives and Republicans. And why should that be a surprise? After all, her early support for the Iraq War almost certainly cost Hillary the 2008 primary with Barack Obama (who, as a little known state senator, criticized the impending invasion) and certainly didn't help her any in the epic 2016 contest with Trump. If Biden gets the primary nod from Democratic voters, expect his Iraq War vote to come back and haunt Uncle Joe as much or more than his busing gaffes or decades of handsy encounters with the opposite sex.

What's needed is a truly progressive, alternative foreign policy vision based on restraint, redeployment, and military de-escalation. Such a global platform should unite progressives' with their natural allies on these matters: libertarian Republicans. No Dem candidate can hope to strip some of the Rand Paul wing's vote from Trump without placing ending the forever wars at the forefront of campaign promises. That alone should probably rule out Biden as a viable candidate. Joe's time has passed. He's a relic of a (hopefully) bygone era of segregationist alliances, the Dems' '80s-'90s tack to the right, and debunked "liberal" militarist interventionism. Trump, a truly seasoned political street fighter, would hammer away at Biden's questionable judgment on the key foreign policy decision of this century: the absurd Iraq debacle. Count on it.

And, if matters do unfold as I predict, and Trump ride's his anti-mainstream, populist outsider foreign policy pronouncements to another four years in the White House, Biden, and the Democratic base will have gotten exactly what they deserve.

Drowning in militarism

By William J. Astore and Tom Engelhardt

ANTIWAR — It's no small thing to lodge a word or phrase of your own in our language. So give Dwight D. Eisenhower credit. In his presidential farewell address to the American people in 1961, the former five-star general of World War II warned – and who would have known better – of the growth of what he called “the military-industrial complex.” (“Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry... We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions... Added to this, 3½ million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment... Now this conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience... In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”)

As it turned out, Ike couldn't have been more on target and the phrase stuck (as, of course, did the military-industrial complex). Almost six decades after he introduced the term, the national security apparatus, according to William Hartung and Mandy Smithberger, now gulps down a staggering \$1.25 trillion of our tax money annually, while fighting endless wars, and could hardly be more powerful. In a world in which the U.S. national security state is still expanding, however, Eisenhower's phrase may actually be too modest for our militaristic moment. As political scientist Daniel Wirls wrote recently, “That Cold War term no longer fits. ‘Industrial’ does not capture the breadth of the activities involved. And ‘military’ fails to describe the range of government policies and interests implicated... If anything, Eisenhower's complex has become more complex and potentially influential.” Wirls suggests instead “National Security Corporate Complex,” which may prove a bit of a mouthful, but he does catch the spirit of the new world of corporations like Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics in calling them, aptly indeed, “Walmarts of war.”

As retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, historian, blogger, and TomDispatch regular William Astore suggests today, we Americans, just as Ike feared so long ago, are now caught in a riptide of war and preparations for more of the same. And just as Ike also feared, in a Washington where little the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security, or our many intelligence services ask for is ever denied them by Congress or the president, American democracy is increasingly up for grabs. ~ Tom

The Riptide of American Militarism

Put up with me for just a moment while I wax literary. It turns out that, if French novelist Marcel Proust lived today, he might have had to retitling his Remembrance of Things Past as Remembrance of Things Present, or even more sadly, Things Future. As an ex-military man who lived through part of the Cold War in uniform, let me make my point, in terms of the Pentagon and an ever-growing atmosphere of American militarism, this way: I love used bookstores. I've been browsing in them since my teens. I was, then, an early fan of Stephen King, the famed horror-story writer. Admittedly, today I'm more likely to browse the history section, which has horrors enough for us all, many of which eclipse even the most fevered imaginings of King, though Pennywise the Clown in It still gives me the creeps.

A while back, speaking of things not past, I stumbled across Senator J. William Fulbright's 1970 book The Pentagon Propaganda Machine and, out of curiosity, bought it for the princely sum of five dollars. Now, talk about creepy. Fulbright, who left the Senate in 1974 and died in 1995, noted a phenomenon then that should ring a distinct bell today. Americans, he wrote, “have grown distressingly used to war.” He then added a line that still couldn't be more up to date: “Violence is our most important product.” Congress, he complained (and this, too, should ring a distinct bell in 2019), was shoveling money at the Pentagon “with virtually no questions asked,” while costly weapons systems were seen mainly “as a means of prosperity,” especially for the weapons makers of the military-industrial complex. “Militarism has been creeping up on us,” he warned, and the American public, conditioned by endless crises and warnings of war, had grown numb, leaving “few, other than the young, [to] protest against what is happening.”

Back then, of course, the bogeyman that kept the process going was Communism. America's exaggerated fear of Communism then (and terrorism now) strengthened militarism at home in a myriad of ways while, as Fulbright put it, “undermining democratic procedure and values.” And doesn't that ring a few bells, too? Complicit in all this was the Pentagon's own propaganda machine, which worked hard “to persuade the American people that the military is good for you.”

Perhaps my favorite passage from that book was a message the senator received from a citizen who had attended a Pentagon rah-rah “informational seminar.” Writing to Fulbright, he suggested that “the greatest threat to American national security is the American Military Establishment and the no-holds-barred type of logic it uses to justify its zillion-dollar existence.”

In a rousing conclusion on the “dangers of the military sell” that seems no less apt nearly a half-century later, Fulbright warned that America's “chronic state of war” was generating a “monster [military] bureaucracy.” Citing the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, he noted how “the mindless violence of war” was eroding America's moral values and ended by emphasizing that dealing with the growth of immoral militarism was vitally important to the country's future.

“The best defense against militarism is peace; the next best thing is the vigorous practice of democracy,” he noted, citing the dissenters of his day who opposed America's murderous war in Southeast Asia. And he added a warning no less applicable today: Americans shouldn't put their faith in senior military men whose



“parochial talents” were too narrow “to equip them with the balance of judgment needed to play the political role they now hold in our society.”

Reading Fulbright today, I couldn't help but recall one of my dad's favorite sayings, translated from the French: the more things change, the more they stay the same. Sure, the weaponry may be upgraded (drones with Hellfire missiles rather than bombers dropping napalm); the names of the countries may be different (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia rather than Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia); even the stated purpose of the wars of the moment may have altered (fighting terrorism rather than defeating Communism); but over the last 50 years, the most fundamental things have remained remarkably consistent: militarism, violence, the endless feeding of the military-industrial complex, the growth of the national security state, and wars, ever more wars, always purportedly waged in the name of peace.

Sometimes when you buy a used book, it comes with a bonus. This one held between its pages a yellowed clipping of a contemporary New York Times review with the telling title, “O What a Lovely Pentagon.” In agreeing with Fulbright, the reviewer, Herbert Mitgang, himself a veteran of World War II, wrote:

“To keep up the [Pentagon] budgets, all three services compete for bigger and better armaments in coordination with the publicity salesmen from the major corporations – for whom retired generals and admirals serve as front men. Thousands of uniformed men and millions of dollars are involved in hard-selling the Pentagon way of life.”

Change “millions” to “billions” and Mitgang's point remains as on target as ever.

Citing another book under review, which critiqued U.S. military procurement practices, Mitgang concluded: “What emerges here is a permanent floating crap game with the taxpayer as loser and Congress as banker, shelling out for Pentagon and peace profiteers with an ineptitude that would bankrupt any other business.”

Spot on, Herb Mitgang, who perhaps played his share of craps during his Army service!

As I read Fulbright's almost 50-year-old polemic and Mitgang's hard-hitting review, I asked myself, how did the American people come to forget, or perhaps never truly absorb, such lessons? How did we stop worrying about war and come to love the all-volunteer military quite so much? (Thank you for your service!) So much so that, today, we enorge the Pentagon and the rest of the national security state with well more than a trillion taxpayer dollars annually – and the power to match.

The Pentagon as a Parasitic Cowbird

In 2019, most Americans see the Pentagon and the U.S. military as this country's protectors – a force for good, perhaps the equivalent of an eagle, that national symbol, soaring over an endangered land. What if, however, we saw the Pentagon not as a noble bird, a symbol of freedom and strength, but as a parasitic one? What if the avian image that came to mind was the opportunistic cowbird?

I thought of this due to a recent little drama in my own backyard. There, I spied a nest built by a pair of yellow warblers. It had five eggs in it, and I was able to get a photo of them. I didn't notice at the time – because I was taking care not to linger – that one egg was significantly larger than the others with different markings on it. When they hatched, one chick was also bigger, pushier, louder, more insistent, and hungrier than the others. It turned out to be a cowbird! Like the more famous cuckoo, cowbirds lay their eggs in other birds' nests and trick them into raising their chicks. In the end, those two adult yellow warblers tirelessly and obliviously fed that alien chick, as their own tiny babes were crowded out and died. The cowbird managed to consume everything, its cavernous mouth eternally clamoring for more.

I assume by now that you get where I'm going with this. Think of that greedy cowbird as the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex in which it's enmeshed. And we American taxpayers, through our bought-and-paid-for representatives in Congress, are those misguided yellow warblers, continually feeding the equivalent of our very own cowbird chick, now grown to tremendous size and still crying out for more. What we're feeding it, of course, is the very promise of America, as it starves our real chicks, precious funding for education, infrastructure, the environment, and health care.

Of course, my analogy is imperfect. After all, that cowbird chick fledged quickly and flew away, releasing the warbler parents from their sad and misbegotten duty. The Pentagon and the rest of the national security

state never fledge. They never leave the nest. They're always crying for more money.

Here's the truth of it, as I see it these days: if Americans are ever to gain control over that national security state, they will first have to recognize its parasitic nature, and the way it continues to stuff its greedy mouth with our cash, which is killing the best hopes for the future of our country.

Another Lesson from Nature – This Time from the Sea

A friend of mine was recently doing research in the papers of Matthew Ridgway, the celebrated general of both World War II and the Korean War. There, he came across a 1940 statement from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Created by scholars as World War I was ending, originally to advise the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, the CFR typically offers presidents a somewhat broader range of opinions than they usually get from senior military officers and other Washington insiders.

As Americans wrestled with the possibility of finding themselves in a second looming world war, what advice did the CFR have for then-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1940?

“For Germany and Italy, especially, and for Russia and Japan, to a somewhat lesser extent, military power has come to be the ultimate raison d'être of the state, while war itself is regarded as a natural and ennobling process in the international struggle for existence. The non-totalitarian world, on the contrary, still clings to a philosophy in which military power is regarded as a necessary attribute, but not a primary goal, of the national sovereignty – a philosophy which considers war as an aberration from what should be the peaceful norm of human development... If we fail to produce an alternative to the use of force in the totalitarian philosophy, if we fail to demonstrate that our international society holds more hope for a peaceful and profitable future than theirs, then the United States (and other like-minded nations) will be forced into a defensive type of attitude which makes no converts and holds no friends.”

Such statements make me nostalgic. Remember when America was part of the “non-totalitarian world”? Remember when our presidents didn't boast of having the greatest military in all of history? Remember when our generals didn't speak proudly of engaging in unending “generational” wars as if they were the ultimate test of our mettle? Remember when we truly saw war as an “aberration,” something both undesirable and antithetical to democracy? Remember when our most basic urge was, if humanly possible, to swim vigorously away from war's storm clouds toward the shores of “a peaceful and profitable future”?

Yes, in December 1941, the American people did finally begin to mobilize in a big way and march off to war, however reluctantly, and, in the end, they did decisively defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. But also remember how quickly, in the wake of that war, Americans expected that their vast wartime military would be demobilized (and indeed it would, however briefly).

Yet here's the sad thing: for Americans, World War II, like its prequel, proved to be anything but a war to end all wars. In its aftermath, new rumors of war emerged. Far too quickly, the U.S. found itself in a riptide of never-ending war (whether “hot” or “cold”) and preparations for yet more of the same, all of which pushed us ever deeper into the colder waters of militarism.

Such an oceanic current is a tricky thing. Caught up in war's version of the same, from the Cold War to today, Washington has embraced the challenge with ever more weaponry, ever more troops and bases across the planet, ever more military spending, violence, and war.

Nineteen years into a new century, with its forever wars on terror still ongoing across startlingly large stretches of the planet, the U.S. military is now turning as well to preparations for future wars with its so-called peer competitors (China and Russia). No surprise, then, that the country seems to be drowning in militarism and exhausting what's left of our democratic spirit. It has, in almost any imaginable sense, been swept up in a riptide of militarism.

As in the actual ocean, so in the ocean of militarism, such currents are escapable, but only by using the strokes of a functioning democracy that, in this Trumpian age, seem increasingly less available to us. Collectively, we would have to swim calmly on a course parallel to that rip current, evading its undertow of relentless violence, until we finally escaped its pull. Only then could we turn and swim vigorously toward something generationally meaningful: a shared commitment to averting and ending the all-too-real horrors of today's forever wars.

The Jeffrey Epstein case could sink U.S. elites and induce real change

1 → But there is another angle to this worth exploring, and that may eventually be explored. The possibility that Epstein was working for a foreign “intelligence” agency and may have filmed or recorded various people in compromising situations for the purpose of blackmail by some non-U.S. government entity. In fact, the federal attorney who managed to get Epstein off with minor punishment a decade ago is Trump's current Secretary of Labor, one Alex Acosta, who claimed he had been notified that Epstein was part of the “intelligence” community and thus went easy on him just over a decade ago. To make matters even more bizarre, Epstein's former lover, friend and co-conspirator was one Ghislaine Maxwell whose father, Robert Maxwell, a former newspaper tycoon in the U.K., was once linked to Mossad.

Another fact is that Epstein, a man who never even earned a college degree but who worked on Wall Street for a while and then went on his own with some kind of alleged hedge fund, lived like a billionaire, but no one as yet has accounted for HOW exactly he became so wealthy, and no one has apparently come forth to claim they invested money with Epstein's firm or even worked for the organization. Was Epstein connected with Mossad in some nefarious way? Did Mossad make him rich? That's the biggest speculation flying around right now.

It's hard to say but this is a case that remains murky indeed and the public may never know exactly who and what Epstein was all about and who he answered to ultimately. Some other pundits have also opined that Epstein had (to have had) a “state” sponsor and was running a blackmail operation targeting the most powerful people in the U.S. The evolution of this story at the moment has the most public attention of any.

One observation when one spies the breadth and scope of this story, and the many powerful people involved and who may be caught up in this scandal and who could wind up in prison, too, suggests that Epstein could NOT have managed this alone, nor his rather vast holdings of multiple homes on both sides of the Atlantic and in the Caribbean. Where was all the lucre coming from? How could he have managed to operate such a scheme for so long? These and many other questions may or may not be answered fully as Epstein eventually goes to trial once again. Bill Clinton for one is alleged, based on flight logs, to have gone on 24 trips aboard Epstein's jet, aptly named the “Lolita Express”, but Clinton is claiming he only took four trips abroad courtesy of Epstein. People who have reason to condemn Epstein's operations are coming forth to spill the beans like never before, and it's anyone's guess how this tale is going to play out and whom it's going to finger for criminality. But the potential here is that the full scope of the corruption in the U.S. may for once be exposed.

Obviously, the question here is what this bizarre and lambent mess of crime has to do with Iran?

It may not be very probable, but it is still remotely possible, that at least part of this tale involves the grip the Zionists have had on U.S. foreign policy because many of the people who have MADE U.S. policies in the past two decades at least have been involved with or at least knowledgeable about Epstein. And if bribery has been a factor in warping U.S. policies in the Mideast, which admittedly is not a sure thing with respect to Jeffrey Epstein, it may well impact, at last, the public's perception of the role of the Zionists in their control of U.S. “elites” and thus policy. It's the sort of tale that could mark a sea change in the U.S. and abroad, because the public's eyes may at last be opened. One really can't speculate further about this now because so much more needs to be exposed and proven, but the case of Jeffrey Epstein is worth watching from afar. Nothing like it has ever surfaced before.

Iran Faces US Aggression And European Hypocrisy, But This Time It's Ready

BY Seyed Mohammad Marandi

TEHRAN (FNA) — Western cultural arrogance rears its Medusa-like head each time US President Donald Trump rails about obliterating Iran.

Leaders and politicians of the self-proclaimed free and civilised world - along with some human rights organisations, major media outlets, and state-affiliated public figures - express their unique form of collective inhumanity through absolute silence. After all, repeated threats of a nuclear holocaust and genocide by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump are deeply imbedded in western civilization's centuries-old tradition of colonisation, mass slaughter and moral absence.

The global net of starvation sanctions, bullying, and military interventionism led by the US, is glossed over with mammoth globs of humanitarian jargon and moral righteousness.

Lagging behind

Nevertheless, despite endless provocations and collaborations, the US still finds itself lagging behind its allies in the realm of hypocrisy, where the European Union and other western regimes continue to reign supreme.

While the US frequently and erratically turns to crude aggressiveness, Europeans passionately engage in endless dialogue, unofficial so-called Track II endeavours, and rebuke their “unsophisticated and reckless” American allies in private and semi-private conversations with Iranian scholars and officials. However, when push comes to shove, they faithfully stand by the US.

As soon as Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal, European Union leaders pleaded for Iran not to retaliate, promising an acceptable solution within weeks. For well over a year, despite mounting internal opposition, Iran demonstrated strategic patience in the face of a constant escalation in the US economic war on the Iranian people. Facing mounting costs, many cancer patients, among others facing life-threatening diseases, went without medication in order to spare their loved ones from financial destitution. This is economic terrorism and a war crime.

A tribal integrity

Although the European Union formally remained committed to the nuclear deal, they demonstrated nonchalance towards their obligations by permitting each and every unilateral sanction imposed by Washington to be fully implemented across Europe. Meanwhile, they repeatedly warned Iran to fully adhere to its nuclear commitments. Even as they made a mockery of the deal, they audaciously mimicked US demands for more nuclear and non-nuclear related concessions; thus, exposing their tribalistic conceptualisation of integrity. →13

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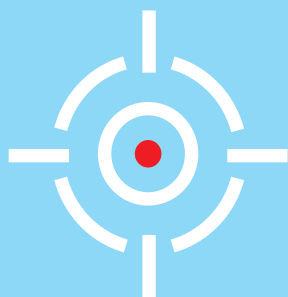
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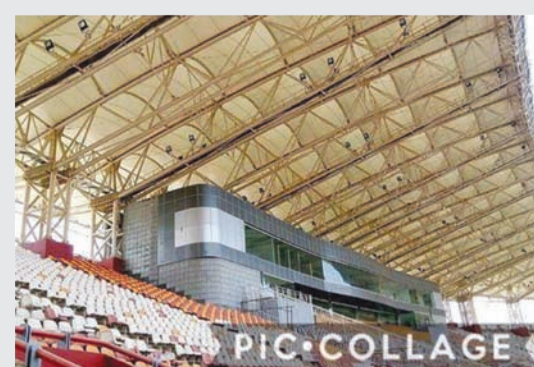
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NASA shake-up in new race to the moon

As NASA scrambles to meet U.S. President Donald Trump's mandate to return humans to the moon by 2024, two longtime heads of NASA's human exploration wing were demoted Wednesday in a slew of administrative shakeups, officials said in an internal memo.

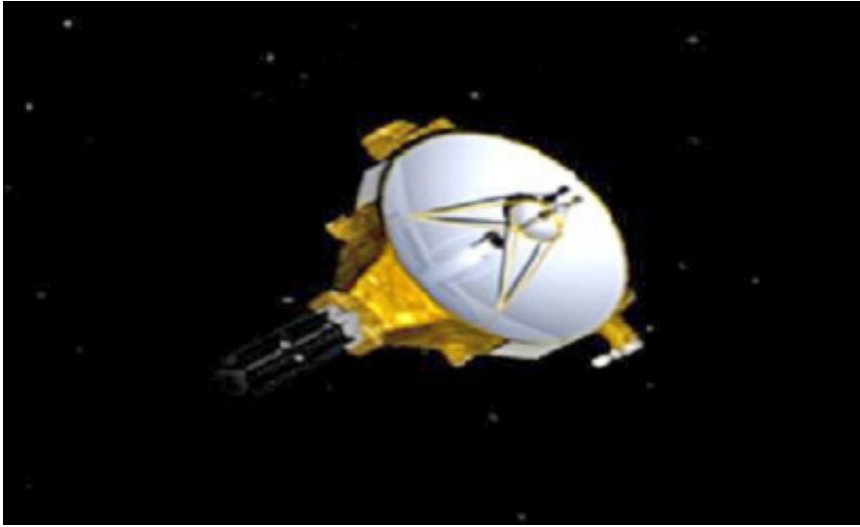
The biggest change to rock the agency is the demotion of Bill Gerstenmaier, who was leading the efforts to return humans to the lunar surface.

He has been with the agency since 1977, led some of its most high profile programs and was the head of the human exploration office in a 14-year tenure.

The agency's chief Jim Bridenstine announced the changes in an internal memo to employees, signaling the latest leadership changes.

"As you know, NASA has been given a bold challenge to put the first woman and the next man on the Moon by 2024, with a focus on the ultimate goal of sending humans to Mars," Bridenstine said in the memo.

"In an effort to meet this challenge, I have decided to make leadership changes to the Human Exploration and Operations (HEO)



Mission Directorate."

Bridenstine placed Ken Bowersox, a former astronaut and vice president of Astronaut Safety and Mission Assurance for Elon Musk's SpaceX, as acting associate administrator for the human exploration wing.

Gerstenmaier was reassigned as a special assistant to Bridenstine's deputy, Jim Morhard.

Bill Hill, a deputy associate administrator under Gerstenmaier, was also moved to a special assistant position under NASA's

associate administrator Steve Jurczyk.

The White House has shown frustration with the pace of NASA's efforts, especially with its premier workhorse rocket known as the Space Launch System, which is years behind schedule and plagued with cost overruns.

Vice President Mike Pence commanded the agency in March to get the job done in five years, and reorganize its structure in an effort to return humans to the moon

He said "if NASA's not currently capable of landing American astronauts on the moon in five years, we need to change the organization, not the mission."

In another sign of internal shakeups in the space agency, Mark Sirangelo, a special assistant to Bridenstine, resigned in May, amid dwindling congressional support for the lunar initiative. He was hired after Pence's remarks to lead the agency's structure changes.

Wednesday's shakeups are the latest as NASA aims to transform itself into "a leaner, more accountable and more agile organization," as Pence said in the March speech to the National Space Council.

(Source: Reuters)

The skull that proves moderns humans arrived in Europe 150,000 years earlier than thought

Modern humans arrived in Eurasia more than 150,000 years earlier than thought, scientists have concluded after the discovery of a fossilized skull in a cave in southern Greece.

One modern human and the other Neanderthal, a pair of partial skulls were discovered by the University of Athens in the Apidima Caves in the late 1970s.

They were so fragmented that they could not be accurately described at the time.

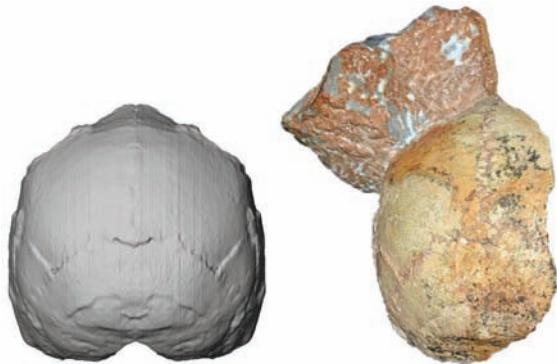
But using modern dating and imaging techniques, a team of researchers led by the University of Tübingen in Germany, conducted a new study on the samples.

The results rewrite our understanding of human evolution and show that Homo sapiens reached Europe at least 210,000 years ago.

All humans alive today outside of Africa can trace their ancestry to the main dispersal out of the continent around 50,000 to 70,000 years ago. However, there were several migrations before this that left no DNA trace on the modern population.

The population of modern humans living in southern Greece 210,000 years ago were probably replaced by Neanderthals - as shown by the younger skull found in the cave.

Initially, scientists assumed that because the skulls were found close together they would date to the same period.



"But the more we studied Apidima 1 [the modern human], the less it looked like Apidima 2 and Neanderthal fossils - although only part of the back of the cranium was preserved, it looked like Homo sapiens fossils from the last 100,000 years," said Professor Chris Stringer from the Natural History Museum.

"Now, we know from further dating that this modern human fossil is actually older than the Neanderthal one from the same site."

Lead researcher, Professor Katerina Harvati, from the University of Tübingen said: "Our results

suggest that at least two groups of people lived in the Middle Pleistocene, in what is now southern Greece: an early population of Homo sapiens and, later, a group of Neanderthals. It's a complicated scenario. The early modern humans in Greece were replaced by Neanderthals. It was not one exodus out of Africa but lots of small ones."

The research, published in the journal Nature, supports the hypothesis that early modern humans spread out of Africa, where they evolved multiple times.

This group was probably wiped out by environmental factors - which could have included climatic events and pressure from Neanderthals.

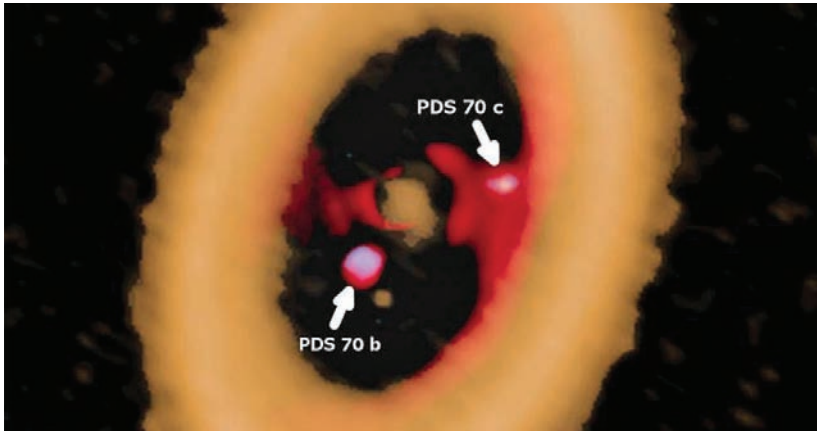
Reconstructions of the Apidima 1 cranium revealed a high and rounded shape - a unique feature of modern humans which contrasts sharply with Neanderthals.

Researchers conducted numerous comparisons with different human fossils, using a highly accurate radiometric dating method to determine their age. They also used virtual reconstructions of the damaged parts of the skulls to discover more about the origins of the fossils.

This discovery is the latest piece in the jigsaw of human evolution which is continually changing in light of new research.

(Source: The Independent)

Astronomers spot a circumplanetary disk for the first time



With the help of the ALMA observatory, scientists have identified a circumplanetary disk in a distant star system -- a first.

Astronomers found the moon-forming disk of dust and debris circling an exoplanet in orbit around PDS 70, a low-mass T Tauri star located 370 light-years from Earth. T Tauri stars are a class of young stars characterized by their optical variability.

During an earlier survey, scientists discovered two new Jupiter-like planets orbiting PDS 70 using the observational abilities of European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope.

For the new study, astronomers used Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array, a collection of high-precision dish antennas in northern Chile, to measure the faint radio waves emitted by the tiny gas particles surrounding the outermost body in the PDS 70 system. The observations -- described this week in the Astrophysical Journal Letters -- revealed the presence of a circumplanetary disk capable of producing multiple moons.

"For the first time, we can conclusively see the telltale signs of a circumplanetary disk, which helps to support many of the current theories of planet formation," Andrea Isella, an astronomer at Rice University, said in a news release. «By comparing our observations to the high-resolution infrared and optical images, we

can clearly see that an otherwise enigmatic concentration of tiny dust particles is actually a planet-girding disk of dust, the first such feature ever conclusively observed.»

Researchers were also able to spot a tail of dust trailing one of the two Jupiter-like planets. The tail is located far enough away to be considered a distinct body.

The outermost planet, the one with the circumplanetary disk, is located 3.2 billion miles from PDS 70. Analysis suggests the planet boast a mass between one and ten times that of Jupiter.

«If the planet is on the larger end of that estimate, it's quite possible there might be planet-size moons in formation around it,» said Isella.

At optical wave lengths, spotting the dust surrounding exoplanets is difficult. The bright glare of the sun overwhelms the glow of the planets and their surroundings. But stars emit relatively little radiation at millimeter and submillimeter wavelengths, allowing ALMA to observe the distant solar system's more subtle details.

«This means we'll be able to come back to this system at different time periods and more easily map the orbit of the planets and the concentration of dust in the system,» said Isella. «This will give us unique insights into the orbital properties of solar systems in their very earliest stages of development.»

(Source: UPI)

Snow algae found in 'ice spires' could suggest there is alien life on Pluto



Snow algae has been discovered in high-altitude ice spires in the remote Andes Mountains in a possible sign that alien life could thrive on Pluto.

The microbes were found in Chile near Llullaillaco, the world's second-highest volcano. It is one of the harshest environments on Earth, home to extreme winds, temperature fluctuations and high ultraviolet radiation exposure.

The dramatic ice spires, or penitentes, are pinnacle-shaped structures that can grow up to 15ft in height and are only found at high elevations in the dry Andes. They have been discovered on Pluto and are speculated to also exist on Europa, one of Jupiter's moons.

New research published in Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research details the first signs of life found in this type of extreme environment.

Biologist at the University of Colorado Boulder noted red coloration - a telltale sign of microbial activity - in penitente fields 16,000ft above sea level. Upon bringing back samples for analysis, the researchers confirmed the presence of two algal species in the ice, the first documentation of any life forms in such an environment.

Steve Schmidt, a professor of microbial and co-author of the study, said: "We're generally interested in the adaptations of organisms to extreme environments. This could be a good place to look for upper limits of life."

According to researchers, these spires provide shelter for microbes by providing a source of water in an otherwise arid and nutrient-poor environment.

Dr Schmidt said: "This is a very remote area that's difficult to access. The entire back of one of our pickup trucks had to be filled with barrels of drinking water. It's no trivial thing to go out there, and that's one of the reasons these formations haven't been studied much."

Lara Vimercati, lead author of the study and a doctoral researcher at the University of Colorado Boulder, added: "Snow algae have been commonly found throughout the cryosphere on both ice and snow patches, but our finding demonstrated their presence for the first time at the extreme elevation of a hyper-arid site."

"Interestingly, most of the snow algae found at this site are closely related to other known snow algae from alpine and polar environments."

The name "penitente" comes from the Spanish word meaning "penitent one" and comes from their resemblance to a procession of monks in white robes doing penance.

They form in snowfields subject to a unique combination of high radiation, low humidity, and dry winds.

Ms Vimercati said: "Our study shows how no matter how challenging the environmental conditions, life finds a way when there is availability of liquid water."

(Source: The Independent)

If humans were wiped out, which species would dominate our planet?

In a post-apocalyptic future, what might happen to life if humans left the scene? After all, humans are very likely to disappear long before the sun expands into a red giant and exterminates all living things from the Earth.

Assuming that we don't extinguish all other life as we disappear (an unlikely feat in spite of our unique propensity for driving extinction), history tells us to expect some pretty fundamental changes when humans are no longer the planet's dominant animal species.

So if we were given the chance to peek forward in time at the Earth some 50 million years after our disappearance, what would we find? Which animal or group of animals would "take over" as the dominant species? Would we have a Planet of the Apes, as imagined in popular fiction? Or would the Earth come to be dominated by dolphins, or rats, or water bears, or cockroaches or pigs, or ants?

The question has inspired a lot of popular speculation and many writers have offered lists of candidate species. Before offering any guesses, however, we need to carefully explain what we mean by a dominant species.

One could argue that the current era is an age of flowering plants. But most people aren't imagining Audrey Two in Little Shop of Horrors when they envision life in the future (even the fictional triffids had characteristically animal features - predatory behavior and the ability to move).

So let's keep the discussion to animals. This is for practical rather than philosophical reasons: by some standards the world is now and always has been dominated by bacteria despite the nominal end of the "age of microbes" some 1.2 billion years ago.

This was not because bacteria ceased to be, or declined in prevalence, but rather because in myopia we tend to place more importance on the large multi-cellular organisms that came after.

By some accounts four out of five animals is a nematode (a roundworm), so from all these examples it's clear that neither prevalence, abundance nor diversity is the prime requisite for being a "dominant" form of life. Instead our imaginations are captured by large and charismatic organisms.

There's an undeniable degree of narcissism in the human designation of dominant species and a strong tendency to award the title to close relatives.

The Planet of the Apes imagines that our closest primate relatives could develop speech and adopt our technology if we gave them the time and space to do so.

But non-human primate societies are unlikely to inherit our dominance of the earth, because the apes are likely to precede us to extinction.

We are already the only living hominid that's conservation status is not endangered or critically endangered and the kind of global crisis that would extinguish our species is unlikely to spare the fragile remaining populations of the other great apes.

In fact, any extinction event that affects humans will probably be most dangerous to organisms that share our basic physiological requirements.

Even if humans succumb to a global pandemic that affects relatively few other mammals, the great apes are precisely the species that are most at risk of contracting any new diseases that drive us from the Earth.

Will another, more distant, relative (primate, mammal, or otherwise) develop intelligence and human-like society? That too seems unlikely.

Of all the species that were arguably dominant animals at some stage in the history of the Earth, humans are alone in their remarkable intelligence and manual dexterity. It follows that such traits are neither requirements for being dominant among animals, nor particularly likely traits to evolve.

Evolution does not favor intelligence for its own sake, but only if it leads to higher survival and reproductive success.

Consequently it's a profound mistake to imagine that our successors are likely to be especially intelligent or social creatures, or that they will be capable of speech, or adept with human technology.

So what can we safely speculate about the dominant species, some 50 million years after humanity? The answer is both dissatisfying and thrilling all at once: while we can be reasonably confident that it won't be a talking chimpanzee, we otherwise have no idea what it will look like.

The world has seen a number of mass extinction events in the course of its history.

The diversification of life following each event was relatively rapid - and the "adaptive radiation" of new species produced new forms including many unlike the ancestral lineages that spawned them after surviving the prior extinction.

In Wonderful Life: the Burgess Shale and the Nature of History, the late Stephen J. Gould argued that chance, or contingency, as he called it, played a great role during the major transitions of animal life. There is room to argue about the relative importance of contingency in the history of life, which remains a controversial subject today.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Vega rocket crashes into the ocean off French Guiana

A European Vega launcher failed just minutes after launch, crashing into the Atlantic Ocean Thursday off the coast of French Guiana and destroying a surveillance satellite.

French launch service provider Arianespace said the 98-foot Vega rocket failed when the solid-fuel engines ignited. The satellite cargo was manufactured by Airbus and was being launched into space on behalf of the United Arab Emirates.

The rocket took off at 9:53 p.m. EDT from the spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana on the northern coast of South America.

"As you have seen, about two minutes after liftoff, around the Z23 (second stage) ignition, a major anomaly occurred, resulting in the loss of the mission," Arianespace executive vice president of missions Luce Fabreguettes said. "On behalf of Arianespace, I wish to express our deepest apologies to our customers for the loss of their payload."

The second stage engine was supposed to fire for 77 seconds and make way for the liquid-fueled third and fourth stage rockets. An independent commission will be established to investigate the failure. The data downloaded from the rocket will be analyzed to find the exact cause of the crash.

"From the first flight data analysis, we will get in the coming hours more precise information, and we will communicate to everybody at the soonest," Fabreguettes said.

This is the first time a Vega rocket has failed. They have been in service since 2012 and carry a 1,500 kilogram payload. For this flight, the cargo was a Falcon Eye 1 satellite that would have provided imagery for the UAE military and commercial uses.

(Source: UPI)

Persepolis Museum to close for two weeks for repair work

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Persepolis Museum, which is located in UNESCO-tagged Persepolis, is to close for two weeks for restoration work.



During the closure, which is scheduled from July 15 to 29, protective measures will be carried out to enhance security of the museum's displays and its wooden columns, CHTN reported.

The museum houses objects from Persepolis, which in its heyday was one of four key cities at the heart of an empire that spread from the Indus River to Ethiopia.

Once a ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), Persepolis lies just only an hour's drive from north-east of Shiraz. Its original name was Parsa and it only acquired its Greek name of Persepolis – meaning both City of Parsa (City of Persia).

Persepolis boasts extensive structures, including monumental staircases, exquisite reliefs and imposing gateways as one of the great wonders of the ancient world.

Exhibit to bring together crafters from six provinces

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Tens of crafters and artisans from six provinces will come together to promote skills in a sales exhibit which is to be held in Mahabad, West Azarbaijan province.

Some 50 stalls will be set up for the four-day event, which will start on July 19, CHTN reported.



The exhibitors have been selected from northwestern provinces and they are scheduled to offer a wide variety of handicrafts, souvenirs and nomadic products.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of high-quality Iranian handicrafts have been honored with UNESCO seals of excellence.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Mana Pools National Park

On the banks of the Zambezi, Zimbabwe, great cliffs overhang the river and the floodplains. The area is home to a remarkable concentration of wild animals, including elephants, buffalo, leopards and cheetahs. An important concentration of Nile crocodiles is also be found in the area.

A World Heritage, “the Mana Pools National Park, Sapi and Chewore Safari Areas” is home to a remarkable concentration of wild animals, including elephants, buffalo, leopards and cheetahs. An important concentration of Nile crocodiles is also be found in the area.



Physically protected by the Zambezi River to the north and the steep escarpment (which rises to over 1,000 m from the valley floor) to the south, this substantial property of 676,600 ha provides shelter for immense congregations of Africa's large mammal populations which concentrate in its flood plains.

The Mana Pools are former channels of the Zambezi River, and ongoing geological processes present a good example of erosion and deposition by a large seasonal river including a clear pattern of plant succession on its alluvial deposits.

While black rhino has disappeared since the property's inscription, huge herds of elephant and buffalo, followed by zebra, waterbuck and many other antelope species and their associated predators including lion and hyena migrate to the area each year during the dry winter months.

The river is also famous for its sizeable numbers of hippopotamus and Nile crocodile. Resident and migratory birdlife, with over 450 species recorded, is also abundant. Controlled hunting on quota is permitted in the safari areas.

(Source: UNESCO)

Hacking your way to book a hotel room in Iran

1 → Book a hotel in Iran through travel agencies

If you find it hard to do everything on your own, then you should dump it all on Iranian tourism agencies. The way they help you book Iran hotels which is pretty simple and straightforward. For example, you go onto the website like 1stquest.com, put the city you want (for example if you want to search for Abbasi hotel type Isfahan in the city section) to travel to and the duration of your stay in the assigned search boxed and with no sweat you're presented with a long list of hotels and hostels. 1stQuest sets different filters and price ranges for different types of travel styles.

This way you don't need to worry about your reservation getting canceled by the website, you can get a clear image of a hotel, and read users comments and reviews.

■ Book a hotel in Iran through calls or emails

Talk about nostalgia, right? It's probably a decade from the last time you sent an email to a hotel for a room. As fun as it sounds, sending an email takes a lot of time which in today's world nobody wants to spare, especially if the receiver is a hotel in Iran. Let's just put it this way, Iranian hotels don't do well with emails. Based on the reviews given by TripAdvisor users, it takes hotels at least two days to respond to an email, luxury amount of time a tourist on the clock can't spare. We suggest that for a quick answer, you pick up the phone and just call the hotel.

Usually, accommodation centers in Iran work around the clock and even in the night hours, they have somebody



A view of Espinass Palace Hotel with a Tehran's skyline in the background

ready to answer calls.

However, to be on the safe side and successfully book a hotel in Iran via phone, try calling during morning or evening hours which are the busiest time of day. FYI, Iran's time zone is +3:30 GMT.

■ Booking counter at Iran's international airports

Most of the gigantic international airports in Iran have booking counters straight outside the gates ready to help you book a hotel in Iran. It is really a relief seeing one these boards at the airport for you no longer need to worry about a lodging spot. This is a viable option for tourists who didn't have time to plan their trip

Parthian, Safavid-era coins seized in northeast Iran

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have recently confiscated four historical coins from two smugglers in Bojnourd, the capital of North Khorasan province.

Two of the objects, made of copper, have been estimated to date from the Parthian era (247 BC–224 CE) and the two other date back to the time of Safavid dynasty (1501–1736), CHTN quoted Hossein Asghar Qanbarzadeh, a senior police official in charge of protecting cultural heritage.

An unknown object was also recovered from the suspects, who were detained in this regard and surrendered

to judicial system for further investigation, he added.

The two were arrested while making a deal in an antique market in Bojnourd.

The Parthian Empire, also known as the Arsacid Empire, was a major Iranian political and cultural power which at its height stretched from the northern reaches of the Euphrates, in what is now central-eastern Turkey, to eastern Iran.

The Safavid dynasty was one of the most significant ruling dynasties of the country, often considered the beginning of modern Iranian history.



Are you changing your travel plans to save the planet?



In the open letter, the company's CEO and President Pieter Elbers asks both passengers and the industry to 'work together

to truly create a sustainable future for aviation'. He goes on to say that 'Flying – after all these years the feeling is still

magical. For many of us, it changed our world forever.

'Sustainability is a journey, not a destination' says Scandinavian airlines SAS president Richard Gustafson on the company's Twitter feed. In Sweden, the word 'flygskam' literally translates as 'flight shame', and it has been used online as a hashtag campaign to raise awareness of the issue.

Euronews' The Cube team spoke to a traveler who is currently on holiday in Europe. Felipe Pissardo is on his way from Holland to the south of France by train. He says he chose a train trip because of his 'concerns about the environment and the amount of pollution that planes create.'

Do you have to go to that face-to-face meeting? Do you really have to carry all that luggage? Can you reach your holiday destination by train? These are some of the questions being asked in the fight to a more eco-friendly way of travelling.

(Source: Euronews)

What a heat wave means for your European vacation

Parts of Europe that are not known for extremely high temperatures, even in the summer, have been breaking into a sweat over the last month.

According to Accuweather, the heat wave is caused by a storm system over the Atlantic Ocean, causing high pressure in central and eastern Europe, and winds from Africa.

Germany, France, Spain, and even generally cooler countries like Switzerland have been feeling the heat, amongst some others, The Points Guy reported.

The last week in June brought temperatures nearing 114 degrees Fahrenheit in France. For context, the highest temperature in Arizona during the month of June this year was 111 degrees Fahrenheit. Only 5 percent of homes are air-conditioned in the country.

France 24 reported that over 1,000 drinking fountains were installed in Paris to aid people during the heat wave. Public "cooling stations" were set up throughout the city as well.

Some areas have been so hot that popular tourist attractions had to be closed during the busiest – and usually the hottest – times of the day. That includes the Acropolis in

Athens, Greece, according to CNN, where temperatures have hit above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (when they are usually around 90 degrees during this time of year).

While summer in Europe is typically warm, temperatures in recent years have been breaking records. This past June was the hottest June ever recorded globally.

"The global climate just keeps getting hotter, as greenhouse gases continue to build up, as scientists have predicted for decades," Professor Hannah Cloke of the University of Reading told The Independent.

A massive heat wave also hit Europe, as well as Japan, parts of Africa, and the United States last year. There were wildfires, public transit closures, and several deaths reported.

Some of the best ways to stay cool during a heat wave are to take preventative measures like drinking plenty of water and limiting outdoor activity, recognizing the signs of heat stroke and exhaustion, and keeping an eye on those who are most vulnerable like children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with medical conditions. (Source: travelandleisure.com)

Singapore Airlines once again ranked best international airline

Travel + Leisure has published the results of its annual World's Best Awards survey, revealing readers' picks for the best international airlines of 2019. Readers ranked carriers based on factors such as on cabin comfort, service, food, customer service, and overall value.

One thing that this year's list makes clear is that readers' picks for the best international airlines haven't changed much over the past few years, proving that dedication to providing excellent service consistently puts many of the same 10 winners at the forefront of air travel.

Unsurprisingly, Singapore Airlines was once again ranked No. 1, further setting the standard for exceedingly comfortable (and actually enjoyable) long-haul flights. Singapore Airlines operates one of the world's longest flights – an almost 19-hour journey between Singapore Changi Airport and Newark Airport in New Jersey – and staffers are known to overlook no detail. One loyal passenger wrote after

flying from the American West to Tokyo many times over the years: "Even flying coach makes you feel like you're having a luxury experience. The service is excellent, they just keep feeding you (lots!), the entertainment options are endless and all-included, and the plane is beautiful and comfortable. I'm always surprised when it's actually the most budget-friendly option as well."

Emirates once again secured the No. 2 spot, thanks to its outstanding service and small luxuries in economy class, according to readers. "Didn't want to get off the plane after a 15-hour flight," one fan said. In-flight meals are described as top-notch. "Food is taken seriously on Emirates," another fan wrote. "Love the printed menus and amenity kits, even in economy."

Airlines based in the Middle East and Asia dominated the list. Qatar Airways and Japan Airlines (JAL) won the No 3. and No. 4 spots, respectively, for the second year in a row. (Source: travelmarketreport.com)

Technology sales shine in a \$52.96 billion back-to-school season

It's another sign of the competitive retail turf: Sales for this year's back-to-school shopping—the second-largest consumer-spending season next to Christmas—are expected to be essentially flat against 2018.

For both school-age and college students, an estimated \$52.96 billion is forecast to be spent on tech, clothing, backpacks, and sundry school supplies from now through August. That's a .26% decline against 2018's sales of \$53.1 billion, according to a Deloitte survey released this week.

But there are notable shifts this year in back-to-school shopping: Spending on technology is increasing and e-commerce continues to make inroads in shopping decisions, for both school-age and college students.

Buying provisions for school-age children in the next couple months is estimated to reach \$27.8 billion, up .72% from 2018's \$27.6 billion, according to the survey. That number breaks down to roughly \$519 per child, a slight increase from last year's back-to-school projections of \$510.

For college students, spending is expected to reach \$25.1 billion, or roughly \$1,362 per student. In 2018, projected spending was \$25.5 billion, or about \$1,330 per household.

“The fact that the year-over-year [spending] was fairly flat was not all that surprising,” said Rod Sides, vice chairman of retail and distribution at Deloitte, and lead author on the report. “We think that especially, given the nature of what's being purchased from a back-to-school commodity perspective, that it makes a fair amount of sense.”

■ Brick-and-mortar still on top

This year, most shoppers for school-age students will spend more money in stores, or 56%, compared to 29% online. In 2018, 57% of back-to-school buying was in actual stores and 23% occurred online.

But for college students, this year the



percentage of shopping in stores is expected to drop to 46% from 54% against 2018, with projected online shopping climbing to 28% from 24%.

As is common, most spending for college students this year will be on school-specific supplies—roughly \$7.9 billion—for such items as textbooks and lab equipment. This is a 3.6% decline from 2018's \$8.2 billion.

Computers and hardware, making up the second-largest category for college student back-to-school spending, is forecast to be \$6.1 billion—a 38.6% gain from 2018's \$4.4 billion.

A smaller slice of college-student spending—for things like dorm and apartment furniture—are projected to be \$3.1 billion, up slightly from 2018's \$3.5 billion.

■ Buying gadgets online

Sides said growth in technology spending for school-age students was the most surprising aspect of the survey.

While the elementary-to-high-school set is forecast to see an overall 3% increase in

total tech spending to \$6.7 billion from \$6.5 billion in 2018, there is a projected decline in computer and hardware purchases, and an increase in tech gadgets. An estimated 16.2% less will be spent on computers and hardware, or \$3.1 billion in contrast to last year's \$3.7 billion. Gadget spending is estimated to increase 28.57% to \$3.6 billion, compared to 2018's \$2.8 billion.

“The question is, why are we seeing a shift?” away from computer and hardware back-to-school sales, asks Sides. “I think a lot of it is because a lot of schools use the cloud and cloud computing to save documents and those kinds of things, so I think the need for the hard drive may have started to diminish.”

For technology, the report focused on two categories: computers and hardware, and electronic gadgets. Online-only retailers made the biggest gains, claiming 25% of consumers and 23% said they planned to shop for a new gadget on the web.

“We asked a question about digital substitution: ‘Are you buying less school supplies

because the impact of digital and the fact that so much is going toward computers, etcetera,” Sides said. “About one in three said yes.”

■ A shift to mini-seasons

The Deloitte report shows that 90% of shoppers start their back-to-school hauls during late July and early August, and two-thirds of the season's revenue is made during that period. Shoppers for school-age kids are expected to spend an average of \$467 per child, reporting roughly \$50 in savings per child.

That high-spending period starts around July 15 and July 16, which coincides with Amazon Prime Day. This year, 250 retailers will compete against Amazon by offering deals of their own, making the day into a bona fide shopping holiday. However, Sides said these weeks have historically been the biggest for summer shopping, so not much has actually changed.

There are also geographic variations in back-to-school shopping. “In the Northeast, for example, a lot of the school systems don't start until after Labor Day and so many of the purchases start in August there,” Sides said. And because “most retailers don't have a regional advertising strategy,” he said some businesses miss promotional opportunities.

A 2017 NPQ Group report supports the idea of back-to-school shopping being broken into several “mini-seasons” throughout the summer. The second week of July saw a sales spike online, likely because of Prime Day, while the first week of August showed a bump in brick-and-mortar sales, likely because of some state-and-local tax-free holidays. According to the report, the third mini-season happened after school started, when students likely wanted to update their closets based on what their classmates were wearing.

(Source: fortune.com)

France passes controversial tax on tech companies

France has passed a controversial tax on “digital services” that will hit American tech giants, as the United States says it will investigate the plan.

Under the bill, just passed by the French Senate, tech companies with more than €750 million in global revenue and €25 million in French revenue will be required to pay a 3 percent tax on total annual revenue generated by providing services to French users. The move will affect major players like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, and was made as plans for EU-wide tax changes seemed to stall.

“Tech companies would pay a 3 percent tax on annual revenue”

Even before the bill was passed, the United States said it was launching an investigation into the legislation. In a statement on Wednesday, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) said the tax and statements from French officials “suggest that France is

unfairly targeting the tax at certain US-based technology companies.”

“The United States is very concerned that the digital services tax which is expected to pass the French Senate tomorrow unfairly targets American companies,” USTR Robert Lighthizer said in the statement, adding that President Trump had ordered the investigation. Once the investigation is complete, according to the statement, the US will decide on a response.

American business groups jumped to slam the French proposal. The US Chamber of Commerce said in a statement that the plan “would harm American businesses and workers.” The Information Technology Industry Council, which counts companies like Google and Facebook among its members, said in a statement that France's move was “a significant and concerning departure” from international efforts.



The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a policy think tank, was also critical of the proposal, calling it “an ill-disguised effort to target companies that are thought to be too powerful, too profitable, and too American.”

(Source: The Verge)

Should you trust smart machines?

Should you be asking a voice-activated speaker intimate questions about your health? And is it important that the scientists behind AI systems actually understand how they work?

If you are a UK user putting that question to Amazon's voice-controlled speakers, the answer will probably now come from the NHS, thanks to a new partnership between the tech giant and the UK's National Health Service.

In effect, what is happening is a simple web search that prioritizes useful and accurate information.

That may not sound controversial but immediately many people did raise concerns about the NHS working with a tech giant such as Amazon.

“What I'm concerned about is that the NHS has sought a partnership with Amazon that seems to encourage people to give private health details to a company that profits from people's private data,” Silkie Carlo from the campaign group Big Brother Watch tells the programme.

Amazon insists it will not be sharing health data with third parties or using any health questions asked to target advertising at customers. But Carlo is not convinced.

“How would they be able to differentiate between people searching for books and music and people searching for information about health concerns?” she asks.

If this means Amazon intends to create a separate dataset of people's health concerns, that is even more worrying, she says.

But William Tunstall-Pedoe, whose company developed the software that became Alexa, takes a different view.

He no longer has a connection with Amazon, but says people have been asking Alexa health questions for years and it is important that they get good answers.

“This partnership means that the information is high-quality, clinician-led information from the NHS, where previously it might not have been,” he says.

He says it is legitimate to have concerns about how health data will be used, but the



same worries apply to every search engine that we use to ask similar questions.

As artificial intelligence and autonomous systems make rapid advances, two other problems are emerging.

Sometimes the scientists behind AI are not really clear what is happening inside their black box systems. Sometimes technology users are not even aware that machines are making decisions without human intervention.

Researchers at the Centre for Assuring Autonomy at the UK's York University call this phenomenon “accidental autonomy”.

The centre's director Prof. John McDermid gives an example: the software that is being blamed for the two crashes involving Boeing's 737 Max aircraft.

“To avoid having to retrain pilots, Boeing decided not to tell them about the system thinking it would operate automatically in the background. In essence, they didn't need to know,” he says.

He says that with vital software, it is essential that the operators - the pilots in this case - understand what is happening and are able to take over control from the autonomous system if necessary.

His colleague Ana MacIntosh says there is a wider issue with understanding what is going on inside all sorts of complex AI systems.

“The ‘explainability’ of the decisions which are being taken by systems is very different to having a conversation with a human who previously might have made those decisions,” she says.

“We don't understand in many cases how those decisions are being made.”

(Source: bbc.com)

The new tech driving traffic on Singapore's roads

Ever find yourself cruising through multiple green lights down an empty stretch of road? It's not just luck - technology is also at play.

As part of Singapore's Smart Mobility 2030 vision, new devices and systems have been introduced to meet the needs of the population on the roads.

Whether you're a motorist or pedestrian, here are some of the technologies on trial and those that have been around for a while, to help manage traffic and keep the roads safe.

The new speed camera system introduced in December last year, won't let such motorists off the hook so easily.

It calculates a vehicle's average speed and was installed along a 4km stretch of Tanah Merah Coast Road.

The road, which has a speed limit of 70kmh, was chosen to roll out the system “because it is susceptible to speeding and illegal racing”, according to the police.

When a vehicle enters and exits the enforcement zone, the two-point camera system will detect and compute its average speed.

This is the first time such a system is being used on Singapore roads.

The familiar sight of Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) gantries on Singapore's roads may be no more in future.

A new ERP system based on Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) technology is expected to roll out progressively from 2020 to replace the gantry system which is almost two decades old.

Currently, motorists pay a flat fee once they enter an ERP zone. Under this system, motorists will be charged according to the distance they travel.

Using this system, LTA is also considering the possibility of off-peak car users only needing to pay for using their vehicles for short periods rather than the whole day.

The existing In-Vehicle Unit (IU) will also be swapped out for a new On-Board



Unit (OBU), which can be used to pay for parking, checkpoint tolls and usage of off-peak cars electronically.

Since March last year, the LTA has been testing the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera systems.

The ANPR system is meant to aid authorities in enforcement - as part of its future traffic management systems - by capturing vehicle number plates with greater accuracy.

The equipment was existing roadside infrastructure such as bridges and lamp posts, along several expressways during the trial.

In addition, new Dedicated Short Range Communications (DSRC) beacons will also be installed to further enhance positioning accuracy for navigation systems.

Equipment will also be mounted onto vehicles and deployed at areas including Tuas South from April this year, before being expanded islandwide for testing.

On off-peak periods, it can be frustrating for motorists waiting at the red light, especially when there are no pedestrians or cars around.

A new smart traffic light control system, which has been on a two-year trial since last September, could reduce the waiting time by detecting the presence of vehicles and pedestrians.

By using artificial intelligence and predictive capabilities, the Cooperative and Unified Smart Traffic System (CRUISE) helps develop traffic light algorithms for smoother traffic and pedestrian flow.

(Source: cna.com)

Is Artificial Intelligence still relevant for startups?

If artificial intelligence confuses you, think about what happens when it's not leveraged properly. For context, consider the London-based VC firm MMC who found that about 40% of European AI startups don't use AI in any tangible way. MMC (and TheVerge) are saying that companies just want to take advantage of the AI hype. Meaning that the company or startup “talks” about AI, but they are unwilling or unable to put in the resources to deploy the process, store the data, or make any meaningful use of the information. So begs the question, is artificial intelligence still relevant for startups?

AI's promise may be further ahead than its practical reality for young companies and startups that face an uphill grind against their larger peers. Larger entities and new startups have the same needs.

To gather and organize vast amounts of training data needed to build effective AI solutions is cost prohibitive for a startup. Expectations always outpace reality, but that isn't still a bad thing. There are plenty of entrepreneurs diligently working toward a better future. But in high-tech businesses, it's crucial that the AI you build, promote, or invest in — is authentic.



■ The substantive role of AI

The ability to automate responsibilities and streamline efficiency makes AI and machine learning an attractive productivity option for businesses. It shouldn't be a surprise that the buzz surrounding AI/machine learning and early stage startups peaked in 2018. So much so, that there was a half-joking consensus that adding either to your pitch deck meant an immediate 10% valuation bump with investors.

But the standard for “AI-powered” varies wildly — and not only in startups. From a technical perspective, “machine learning” means introducing data into a neural network, so the mathematical model learns to recognize patterns.

Once that AI foundation is in place, the network learns to recognize categorization, transformation, and even prediction.

These capabilities create four startup types, each bringing something different to the AI table:

- Aspirational: Most startups fit into this category, and their founders claim AI/ML deep in the pitch deck. But what those companies mean is that once they've found product-market fit and have 500,000 users creating millions of data points, they'll be able to leverage AI to generate useful insights. None of these startups do any meaningful machine learning work before a Series B funding round.
- Specialized: These startups apply AI solutions to specific industry problems. Examples include Wise Systems, which improves delivery fleets; Standard Cognition, which creates cashier-less stores; and LuminDx, which trains neural nets to identify skin disease better than primary care physicians.
- Foundational: These AI startups build the tools that the AI industry will someday use. Information that will “someday” be used typically means more nuanced API designs or math-heavy algorithmic research. These companies are laying the foundation that the next generation of specialized AI startups will be built upon.
- Opportunistic: AI startups use out-of-the-box machine learning APIs from established tech companies to add a little extra oomph to their products. Identifying whether a cat is in a photo or basic language skills aren't core to these businesses, but those qualities can distinguish products from the competition. These startups use AI as a standard part of their tool kits, and they represent the future of how most businesses ultimately will use AI.

Understanding which ecosystem a startup fits into is the key to building an authentic AI enterprise.

This pragmatic approach means recognizing when you're the market leader introducing AI to a new segment and when you're simply building something that eventually will be AI-ready.

You're not just adding “AI/ML” to your business to take advantage of a trend. You're leveraging technology to solve a real problem, which is what makes a business viable.

■ When is AI relevant to startups?

When assessing a company's AI-readiness, it's important to determine the purpose it will serve. If it's a support beam for a business, large amounts of data and an understanding of that data's value to an existing industry are needed.

AI is not a secret sauce — data is the sauce. To that end, it's crucial to understand how much data good ML and AI requires. The data source is what ultimately drives the ecosystem, and it must be well-structured and optimized. This data also has to be stored securely.

For example, a startup could leverage AI/ML to analyze the entire Twitter firehose to measure influence, conduct sentiment analysis, or even surface brand recognition to tie back to a Super Bowl ad campaign. There are all sorts of companies doing these things, and it's only made possible by a platform like Twitter, which has troves of data.

Wherever there's data that isn't being thoughtfully examined, there's a massive opportunity for AI disruption.

The larger the data set you can gain access to, the more interesting work your platform can do. Look at CentralSquare Technologies, an AI startup that connects emergency call centers around the country. Emergency dispatch centers ran independently for a long time before startups like CentralSquare came along. The company connects about 5,000 public safety agencies across major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta, and Dallas. This decreases 911 response times in a world where your phone, car, or smartwatch will likely be calling far from your home area code.

Hazus, along with Esri and Geospiza, is doing something similar with FEMA data. These organizations are creating AI dashboards using predictive analytics around disaster and emergency response. That team could tell you the best bet when responding to a tornado, hurricane, or earthquake plaguing a city using predictive analysis. Data-driven AI can guide emergency management services through tough situations.

Just remember that not all AI companies are created equal, and it's very possible you'll encounter an AI company with no real AI.

The company is probably not a scam — they may be “bragging.” Many companies are just using the term “artificial intelligence” because they plan to use this technology at some point. They just can't afford actually to do the work AI entails — now. Due diligence can uncover what's genuinely artificial in that company. As long as you understand what you're seeing — and seeking — then you will be less likely to have a problem.

(Source: readwrite.com)

Explanation: When there is a great lack of something which is urgently needed, there is a crying need for it

For example: Hospitals claim that there is a crying need for nurses.

Assad, Russian diplomats discuss Syria constitutional committee

TEHRAN — Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has discussed with two Russian diplomats the formation of a constitutional committee as the war against the foreign-backed terrorists is winding down in the Arab country.

Assad held talks with Russian presidential special envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin in Damascus on Friday.

Syria's official SANA news agency reported that the meeting focused on "the continuous efforts to make progress on the political track, especially in forming a committee for discussing the Constitution and the mechanisms and procedures of its work."

President Assad, Lavrentiev and Vershinin also agreed "to continue working extensively and coordinating on the next steps" and stressed the importance of not allowing certain countries to hinder the process, the report said.

The discussions, it added, also dealt with the latest developments in the war on foreign-backed terrorism and strategic relations



between Moscow and Damascus.

The Russian delegation reaffirmed its support for the Syrian army in retaliating against Takfiri terrorist attacks in north-

western Idlib Province, according to the SANA report.

The delegation further backed Syria's right to defend its citizens, preserve the

country's territorial integrity and cleanse it from terrorism, it noted.

Meanwhile, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Friday's meeting in Damascus "focused on efforts towards the soonest completion of the formation of the Constitutional Committee" in Syria as well as the situation in Idlib.

According to Press TV, Russia has been targeting positions held by Western-sponsored terrorist groups inside Syria at the government's request since September 2015.

The airstrikes have helped Syrian forces advance against anti-Damascus terrorists, who have been wreaking havoc in the Arab country since 2011.

■ 100 killed in northwest Syria clashes

In another development on Friday, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that more than 100 people have been killed in fierce clashes between Syrian government troops and anti-Damascus terrorists in northwestern Syria since Wednesday evening.

The clashes centered on Idlib, the militants' last remaining bastion in Syria, the UK-based observatory added.

France's 'black vest' protesters storm Paris landmark

Yellow Vests demonstrators take to Paris streets for 35th weekend

TEHRAN— Hundreds of undocumented migrants surged into the Pantheon in central Paris on Friday, briefly occupying the vaulted memorial complex to demand talks with the prime minister on regularizing their status.

Around 700 migrants and their supporters joined the demonstration, with some pushing into the historic complex at around midday (1100 GMT) on Friday, a member of the Chapelle Debout collective said.

Footage posted on Twitter from inside the building's main dome showed hundreds of people waving papers in the air shouting, "Black vests, black vests!" and "What do we want? Papers!"

The so-called "black vest" is a Paris-based migrant association that takes its name from the "yellow vest" anti-government protest movement.

As they went inside, tourists were evacuated from the Pantheon, which is the final resting place of France's greatest non-military luminaries including the writers Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Emile Zola. Outside, hundreds more were gathered under the watchful eyes of a heavy police presence.

In a statement, the black vest protesters said they wanted "papers and housing for everyone", describing themselves as "the undocumented, the voiceless and the faceless of the French Republic". "We don't want to negotiate with

the interior minister and his officials any more, we want to talk to Prime Minister Edouard Philippe now!" they wrote.

They stayed there for several hours until they were calmly evacuated through a back entrance mid-afternoon, AFP correspondents said.

"All of the people who gained entry to the Pantheon have been evacuated," Philippe tweeted early evening as a police source said 37 arrests had been made.

Some leftist lawmakers came to the site to offer moral support to the migrants but Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Rally, tweeted her indignation.

"It is UNACCEPTABLE to see protesting illegal aliens occupy, with wholesale impunity, this is the center of the Republic," Le Pen said.

"Expulsion should be the immigrants' future -- that is the LAW," she said.

The "black vests" are known for staging headline-grabbing protests in support of the undocumented. In June, they briefly occupied the headquarters of the Paris-based Elior Group which works in contract catering and property. And a month earlier, its activists occupied terminal 2F at the city's Charles De Gaulle airport against "Air France's collaboration" in the deportation of undocumented migrants.

Meanwhile, Yellow Vests protesters are hitting the streets



of Paris for the 35th weekend in a row on Saturday to rally against the French government's policies.

According to official numbers, over 6,000 protesters took to the streets last weekend across France.

The Yellow Vests demonstrations that have been taking place in France since November last year have seen 550 gendarmerie officers injured, according to the General Director of the French Gendarmerie, General Richard Lisyure, speaking to the Er-te-el radio station.

The Yellow Vests movement started as a protest against planned fuel tax hikes in France, but has since evolved into a broader anti-government movement which even spread to other parts of the continent.

Thousands across U.S. protest against Trump's treatment of migrants

TEHRAN — Thousands of protesters have staged rallies across the United States to protest the immigration policies of President Donald Trump's administration and its plan for mass arrests of undocumented migrants around the country.

Hundreds of protesters marched in Washington near the White House, protesting the inhumane conditions in migrant detention centers and separation of families at the U.S.-Mexico border.

People chanted "Close those camps" and held

banners reading: "Uncage kids" and "Immoral," as they took part in the protest and vigil.

The Trump administration "has committed many crimes against humanity," said Norma Torres, a Congresswoman from California's 35th district, who attended the rally.

"Because when you strip away the humanity from a two-year-old, from a two-year-old that hasn't even been potty trained yet, you're a criminal," she said.

Activists also staged a vigil in New York City, holding up placards and candles as they

called for the closure of the detention camps.

The treatment of migrants in the detention centers, particularly child migrants, has come under fire in recent months, with reports emerging of filthy conditions and cruelty from staff.

American Muslim activist Linda Sarsour called the practice of imprisoning those seeking asylum as "modern day slavery" and segregation.

"It's not enough, it's not enough to end family separation. It's not enough to reunite the children with their parents. It's not

enough even to say to close the camps. We have to abolish the oppressive systems that even thought they can put children camps on our watch," Sarsour told a cheering crowd.

according to Press TV, the nationwide rallies, dubbed "Lights for Liberty: A Vigil to End Human Concentration Camps," took place in hundreds of U.S. cities to protest the unsafe and unsanitary conditions of migrant detention centers and the Trump administration's crackdown on asylum seekers and refugees.

U.S. soldier killed in Afghanistan amid Washington's 'peace talks' with Taliban

TEHRAN — A U.S. military officer has been killed in Afghanistan, the NATO military alliance's so-called Resolute Support (RS) mission in the country has announced without spilling more details. The unnamed soldier's death on Saturday brings the number of U.S. service members killed so far this year in Afghanistan to 10, local press reports said.

Nearly 20,000 foreign troops — most of them Americans — remain in the war-torn nation as part of a U.S.-led

NATO mission to purportedly "train, assist and advise" Afghan military forces.

The U.S. and its allies invaded Afghanistan under the guise of the war on terror to topple the very Taliban militants they're now negotiating with. Some 18 years on, terrorism rages on across the country chiefly by the Taliban, which now control more Afghan territory than at any time since being ousted in 2001. According to Press TV, some U.S.

troops in Afghanistan are engaged in what Washington has described as "counter-terrorism operations" against radical militant groups. At least 2,300 American forces have also been killed and more than 20,400 wounded in the country during the 18-year war there.

In June, the Pentagon announced the deaths of two Army officers in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province during combat operations.

UK police warn publishers not to use leaked documents

TEHRAN — A British investigation into the leaking of confidential diplomatic memos is raising press freedom issues with a police warning that UK media might face a criminal inquiry if leaked documents are published.

The Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command is investigating the leak of private memos written by Britain's ambassador to the United States as a possible breach of the Official Secrets Act.

Announcing the police inquiry, Counterterrorism police unit leader Neil Basu warned against any further publication of leaked documents. He said that could be a criminal matter.

He also urged the leakers: "Turn yourself in at the earliest opportunity, explain yourself and face the consequences."

The leak led to the resignation of British Ambassador Kim Darroch after President

Donald Trump said his administration would no longer work with Darroch, who had criticized Trump in the leaked cables. Darroch said he could no longer properly do his job.

British officials say they believe the leak was not a result of computer hacking and seems to have been carried out by an insider.

The Official Secrets Act prohibits public servants from making "damaging" disclosures of classified material. It is aimed at

civil servants and others in the government with access to sensitive information and is not designed to target journalists.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who is jousting with Boris Johnson to become the next prime minister, tweeted Saturday that the person responsible for the leak must be found and held responsible, but he differed with police over whether the publication of leaks is a possible crime, AP reported.

'Saudi forces replace UAE troops in southern Yemen'

TEHRAN — Saudi military forces have reportedly moved in to be deployed in two strategic Red Sea ports and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait after the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a key part of the Saudi-led military coalition, said it was going ahead with plans to reduce the number of troops in Yemen.

Yemeni military officials and officials from Saudi-backed former regime, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Saudi

officers have taken command of military bases at the ports of al-Mokha, situated 346 kilometers south of the capital Sana'a, and al-Khokha, which Emirati forces used to support their operations in the strategic coastal city of Hudaydah.

According to Press TV, Saudi troops have also been dispatched to the southern Yemeni port city of Aden as well as the volcanic island of Perim in the Strait of Mandeb.

An unnamed senior Emirati official told reporters on Monday that the Persian Gulf country was planning troop drawdown in Yemen in what was claimed to be a shift from a military strategy to a "peace" plan instead.

He added, "We do have troop levels that are down for reasons that are strategic in (the Red Sea city of) Hudaydah and reasons that are tactical" in other parts of the country.

MbS offers peace plan to Ansarullah

➔ A senior Emirati official during a press briefing in Dubai on Monday claimed that the withdrawal took place because Abu Dhabi was shifting from a military strategy to a peace plan in Yemen.

"We do have troop levels that are down for reasons that are strategic in (the Red Sea city of) Hudaydah and reasons that are tactical" in other parts of the country, he said.

"It is very much to do with moving from what I would call a military-first strategy to a peace-first strategy, and this is I think what we are doing," the official added.

Meanwhile, an official from Yemen's for-

mer Saudi-backed government told AFP that UAE troops had "totally vacated" the military base in Khokha, located about 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the Yemeni city Hudaydah.

The story of Hezbollah anti-aircraft missile

TEHRAN (MNA) — Secretary-General of Hezbollah Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah revealed two strategic surprises for the military and intelligence services of the West, especially the Zionists in the anniversary of 33-day Israeli war.

July 12 marked the 13th anniversary of the beginning of the 33-day Israeli regime's war on Lebanon that resistance group, Hezbollah, managed to defeat the Zionist enemy by preventing it from achieving any of its targets. Secretary-General of Hezbollah Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah delivered a speech on the latest developments in Lebanon and the region. There are notable points in his speech which are extremely impressive in terms of achieving a military transformation in Hezbollah as follow:

-The resistance today is more powerful than before. Capabilities of Radwan Force and Al-Abbass Brigades will be shown more in future wars.

-It is not comparable to 13 years ago in the field of advanced weapons as well as missiles with pinpoint accuracy in both quality and quantity.

-Increasing intelligence superiority not only on the land but also in sea and air fields over the regime.

-The most strategic area of Israel; the 'Israeli' coast is under the resistance's fire, including the 70-km long 'Israeli' coast starting from Netanya and ending by Ashdod which includes the most strategic Israeli sites (Ben Gurion airport, arms depots, petrochemical plants, Tel Aviv and Ashdod ports). Any possible war will result in vast destruction of occupied lands which are considered as heart of the regime.

-The ability to seize and recapture areas of occupied Palestine, including the important area of Galilee.

-Possibility of having an anti-aircraft missile is the most important issues of Hezbollah which is the strategic surprise for the military and intelligence services of the Zionists.

The main mission of the Zionist intelligence and military services during the Syrian war was to prevent transfer of missiles or, more importantly, advanced missile technology to Hezbollah. The Zionist has targeted any places or caravan which were likely to transfer missiles to Hezbollah during these years. Therefore, the first question for world's intelligence and military services is now how advanced anti-aircraft missiles have been transmitted to Hezbollah?!

In recent years, Israel has been struggling to compensate for its military defeats by air strikes of its advanced aircrafts. In this regards, Nasrallah believes that the air force will not determine the war's conclusion. In other words, Hezbollah has now been able to probably undermine the latest strategic military superiority of the Zionist regime.

But perhaps one of the most sophisticated messages from Nasrallah's speeches is the response to Netanyahu's recent threat of using advanced military aircraft such as the F35 to attack some of Iran's nuclear facilities. Over the past years, the Zionist regime has repeatedly emphasized that it is able to target Iran's nuclear facilities by using its own aircraft without U.S. support, like attacking some of the nuclear facilities of Syria in the past. It means that Nasrallah has transmitted this strategic message to the threat of Netanyahu's air strike to Iran that Hezbollah would down the Israel's aircraft if necessary. Israel's aircraft cannot target any parts of Iran as Iran's air force has downed the U.S. advanced drone last weeks.

Iran Faces U.S. Aggression And European Hypocrisy, But This Time It's Ready

➔ While Iran's patience (combined with Trump's brazen behaviour) significantly dented many anti-Iranian western narratives, this was simultaneously misinterpreted by the Empire as a mark of weakness. Hence, the upsurge in US aggressive posturing, ultimately leading to the humiliating downing of a \$200m US drone in Iranian territorial waters, with a \$20,000 Iranian-designed surface-to-air missile. Ironically, just days before the RQ-4A Global Hawk came crashing down, the US special representative to Iran, Brian Hook, in typical orientalist fashion, claimed that Iranians photoshopped images of their defence capabilities.

Racist disposition

The Iranians and their resourceful allies have repeatedly demonstrated that they are sophisticated enough to outwit and outmanoeuvre their imperial tormentors across the region. However, this particular technological achievement was not even envisaged in the Eurocentric world of western intelligence services.

It is imperative that European and American policymakers confront their racist dispositions and carefully reflect upon the future before forging ahead with plans and provocations to undermine Iran. In Virgil's Aeneid, Anchises says to Aeneas: "Remember, Roman, it is for you to rule the nations with your power, (that will be your skill) to crown peace with law, to spare the conquered, and subdue the proud."

Cultural chauvinism aside, during the height of empire, western powers have left behind no legacy where subjugated peoples were spared and nowhere have they shown respect towards native populations. Thus, there is no reason to expect that a declining and desperate empire will conduct itself in a civilised manner today. In their incurable ignorance, western-affiliated "Iran experts" paradoxically claim that the Iranian "regime" is both fanatical and apocalyptic as well as corrupt and self-preserving. While this analysis is far more self-revelatory than enlightening, it is the foundation of a potentially fateful miscalculation.

Asymmetrical capabilities

Iran has been constructing a vast network of underground military facilities alongside its southern shores from Iraq to Pakistan in anticipation of possible western aggression since the illegal US occupation of Iraq. As the downing of the drone has demonstrated, it is also empowered with very sophisticated military capabilities and has both the will and means to confidently engage forcefully with a belligerent power.

Iran has said that it will confront any aggression. Be confident that it will respond to any military strike with a massive and disproportionate counterstrike targeting both the aggressor and its enablers. All-out war would mean the obliteration of all oil and gas installations as well as all oil tankers and cargo ships on both sides of the Strait of Hormuz. Under such circumstances, the closure of the Strait would be a sideshow.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said last month that Iran does not welcome confrontation nor does it desire war. It has, nonetheless, worked hard to establish military deterrence specifically to prevent such circumstances, as history has shown western inclination towards violence can only be constrained through strength.

Western establishment politicians and pundits seem to thrill at threatening to send nations back to the stone age. But be sure that if there is war, this time around Iran and its allies will make sure they come along for the ride.

Sources: Koscielny on strike due to contract row

Laurent Koscielny refused to go on Arsenal's preseason tour because of doubts about the club's desire to keep him, sources have told ESPN FC.

Arsenal captain Koscielny, 33, has one year left on his contract and wanted to commit to two more seasons but received no offer from the Gunners despite being open to an option based on appearances and bonuses.



Contrary to reports, the former France international does not have any firm offers to return to his home country, although ESPN FC understands Bordeaux, Lyon and Rennes are among the interested parties.

Sources have told ESPN FC that Arsenal want £10 million to sell Koscielny, a figure that led the defender to strike and refuse to participate in the tour of the United States.

ESPN FC was told Koscielny told Arsenal boss Unai Emery on Wednesday that he is happy to train with the reserves until a solution is found.

Koscielny, who joined Arsenal from French side Lorient in 2010, has made over 350 appearances for the club. He last signed a contract extension in 2017, with that deal expiring at the end of the 2019-20 campaign.

The centre-back suffered a serious knee injury against Atletico Madrid in May 2018, ruling him out of France's victorious World Cup winning campaign that summer, before he returned to action last December.

Arsenal will face Colorado Rapids in a friendly on July 16 before taking on Bayern Munich, Fiorentina and Real Madrid in the International Champions Cup. They kick off their Premier League campaign at Newcastle on Aug. 11.

(Source: Soccernet)

Belgian champions Genk sign son of Hagi

Belgian champions Racing Genk have strengthened their squad for the new season with Romania international Ianis Hagi, the son of the player known as the Maradona of the Carpathians.

The 20-year-old son of Gheorghe Hagi, one of the outstanding players of his generation, has signed a five year deal until 2024, the club said.

He moves from his father's club Viitorul Constanța, although this is his second foray out of Romania, having spent 18 months at Fiorentina, where Hagi went aged 17 but played only twice.

Hagi helped Romania reach the semi-final of last month's European under-21 Championship, emerging as one of the stars of the tournament in Italy.

He has also been capped at senior level.

Genk will compete in the Champions League this season with automatic entry into the group stage.

(Source: Reuters)

LeBron's No. 6 to wait due to Nike issue

LeBron James won't be giving up his No. 23 to new teammate Anthony Davis after all.

The planned jersey swap for the 2019-20 season has been postponed due to potential production and financial issues with manufacturer Nike, a source told ESPN's Dave McMenamin, confirming a Yahoo Sports report.

James wore No. 23 during both of his stints with the Cleveland Cavaliers and last season with the Los Angeles Lakers. It's also the number Davis wore during his seven seasons with the New Orleans Pelicans.

After the Lakers agreed to a blockbuster trade for Davis last month, James appeared to confirm on social media that he would switch back to No. 6 -- which he wore with Team USA in the Olympics and with the Miami Heat -- and give No. 23 to Davis.

That swap hit some roadblocks in recent weeks.

A league source confirmed to ESPN that the NBA notified the Lakers that a March 15 deadline for jersey changes had passed, but it would waive it if Nike, the league's official outfitter, complied. The company did not, as the unused inventory of No. 23 James jerseys already produced would have led to a financial hit "well into the tens of millions of dollars," a source told ESPN.

James, per the Yahoo report, thus decided to postpone the jersey change out of what the website called consideration for fans who already purchased his No. 23 and a desire to keep the situation from becoming a distraction.

As of Friday, James had yet to file an official request to change from No. 23 to No. 6 for the 2020-21 season, a league source told McMenamin. James has until March 15, 2020, to do so.

Davis on Friday night posted to Instagram that he would be wearing his elementary school No. 3.

(Source: ESPN)

Police: Father of Celtics pick Waters found dead

The father of Boston Celtics rookie Tremont Waters was found dead in a West Haven, Connecticut, hotel on Thursday, according to police.

The medical examiner's office on Friday ruled that Ed Waters' death was a suicide.

Waters, 49, was found dead by police around noon Thursday after they responded to a report of an injured or ill person.

Tremont Waters, a point guard at LSU, was drafted in the second round (No. 51 overall) by the Celtics in last month's draft. He was averaging 10 points and 5.3 assists in four games during the Las Vegas Summer League. The Celtics do not have a summer league game scheduled for Friday.

(Source: Eurosport)

‘Stars align’ as Federer seeks to break Djokovic spell in Wimbledon final

Eight-time Wimbledon champion Roger Federer believes the "stars have aligned" as he attempts to become the oldest Grand Slam winner of modern times in Sunday's final against Novak Djokovic.

The 37-year-old Swiss can clinch a record-extending 21st major if he manages to break free of the world number one's stranglehold.

Four-time Wimbledon winner and defending champion Djokovic enjoys a 25-22 edge in career meetings, stretching back 13 years.

The Serb has won 14 of their last 20 meetings and eight of the last 10.

Federer has lost all four of their most recent meetings at the Slams and it's now seven years since he triumphed over the 32-year-old at the majors.

That was 2012 in four sets in a Wimbledon semi-final.

However, Federer, who will be 38 next month, insists such statistics are meaningless as he attempts to succeed Ken Rosewall, at the 1972 Australian Open, as the oldest Slam champion of the Open era.

"It's been a rock solid year for me. I won in Halle (on grass on the eve of Wimbledon). The stars are aligned right now," said Federer.

"From that standpoint I can go into the match very confident."

Federer, who passed the 100-win mark at Wimbledon in his quarter-final victory over Kei Nishikori, is feeling especially confident after seeing off Rafael Nadal in four sets in the semi-final.



That win was crucial coming as it did just a month after his old rival had condemned him to his worst Slam loss in 11 years in the semi-finals at Roland Garros.

Appearing in his 12th final at the All England Club, and 16 years after his maiden Wimbledon title triumph, Federer believes there is little new that either he or Djokovic can do to prepare for Sunday's showdown.

"This is like at school -- on the day of the test you're not going to read, I don't know, how many books that day.

"It's quite clear the work was done way before."

There is no doubt whatsoever as to who



the crowd will support.

Djokovic, a 15-time Grand Slam champion, is respected by British fans but certainly not revered in the same saintly fashion reserved for Federer.

Too intense and too new age for modest British tastes, Djokovic did little to endear himself in his semi-final win over Roberto Bautista Agut.

After a punishing 45-shot rally ended in his favour, the Serb roared out his frustration, cupped his ear and placed an admonishing finger to his lips as most of Centre Court willed the ball to fall in the Spaniard's favour. "Look, I focus on what I need to do,"

Hassan breaks women's mile world record on emotional night



Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands broke the 23-year-old women's mile world record on Friday when she clocked four minutes 12.33 seconds in a race dedicated to former American runner Gabe Grunewald, who died from cancer last month at the age of 32.

Hassan, 26, initially looked to be off the record pace in the rarely-run event but finished strongly to edge the 4:12.56 set by Russia's Svetlana Masterkova in Zurich in 1996.

It was a fitting performance in an event named the "Brave like Gabe" Mile. There was a tribute to Grunewald on the big screens at the stadium before the race and once it was underway, Hassan, who moved to the Netherlands after leaving Ethiopia as a refugee when she was 15, was always in control.

"I knew I could run fast, but the first 800 was a bit slow, so after that I wasn't thinking it would be a world record," said Hassan, who took more than two seconds off her previous best for the distance.

"When I crossed the line I was so surprised," she added after clocking a 62 seconds final lap.

"After you run the last 400 like that, and set a world record, it gives you so

much confidence over 5,000m.

"I want to double over 1500 and 5,000 in Doha (at the world championships in September) and the way I finished the last 400, it's amazing."

Hassan's was not the only classy middle-distance performance of the night as Nijel Amos ran the fastest 800 metres seen since the 2012 Olympics as he posted one minute 41.89 seconds. Nobody has gone under 1:42 since the memorable final in London seven years ago when Kenya's David Rudisha set the current world record of 1:40.91 and Botswana's Amos ran his own best of 1:41.73 to take the silver medal.

Amos followed the pacemaker through halfway in 49 seconds on Friday and held on strongly on a perfect night for the distance, with warm, wind-free conditions.

Cheruiyot Rotich of Kenya chased him all the way and posted his own personal best time of 1:42.54 as the first nine finishers clocked their fastest times of the season.

"I did an impossible session on Tuesday and after that, I knew I could run 1:41," said Amos. "The world record is not in my mind but if I'm patient, it will come."

(Source: Reuters)

Atletico threaten legal action as Barca announce Griezmann signing



Spanish champions Barcelona announced the signing of striker Antoine Griezmann on Friday for 120 million euros (£107 million) from a fuming Atletico Madrid, who said the Catalan club had not paid enough to trigger the player's release clause.

France forward Griezmann, 28, rejected a move to Barcelona last year but announced in May that he was leaving Atletico, where he has spent the last five seasons since signing from Real Sociedad in 2014.

Barca have been trying to lure Griezmann to the Nou Camp since November 2017, but the forward signed a new five-year deal with Atletico in June 2018 that had a 200 million euros buy-out clause, which dropped to 120 million euros on July 1 this year.

Atletico said that Griezmann's May 14 announcement that he was leaving the club is proof a deal had already been struck between the player and Barcelona before his buy-out clause dropped.

"Atletico Madrid considers that the deposited amount is insufficient to cover (Griezmann's) buyout clause, since it is obvious that the agreement between the player and FC Barcelona was closed before the clause was reduced from 200 million euros to 120 million euros," the club said in a statement.

"It was also prior to the date on which

said Djokovic.

"At times they wanted him to come back into the match, maybe take a lead because he was an underdog.

"I understand that. But I had enough support here over the years, so I don't complain."

Djokovic has yet to be truly tested at this Wimbledon.

The highest-ranked player he has faced was 21st-seeded David Goffin of Belgium who was dismissed for the loss of just six games in the quarter-finals.

The 'NextGen' hopefuls in his half of the draw all failed to fire.

Highly-regarded Stefanos Tsitsipas never made it past the first day while Canadian teenager Felix Auger-Aliassime fell in the third round.

"With Federer, we all know how good he is anywhere, but especially here. This surface complements his game very well," said Djokovic ahead of the pair's 16th meeting at the Slams and 20th meeting in a tour-level final.

"He loves to play very fast. Takes away the time from his opponent. Just doesn't give you any of the same looks."

Djokovic is playing in his 25th Grand Slam final while Federer has played six more.

Whoever emerges as champion on Sunday, it will yet again confirm the dominance of the 'Big Three' of Federer, Djokovic and Nadal.

Between them, they will have won the last 11 majors, 15 of the last 17 and 54 of the last 65.

(Source: AFP)

‘How aren’t we dead?’ What it’s really like to ride the Tour de France



than to ask those who've ridden elbow to hip together for three weeks, who've climbed through raucous crowds into the Alpine clouds and back down the other side, who've kept riding through aching lungs and screaming limbs. What is it really like to ride the Tour de France?

■ **Mark Cavendish**

Cavendish, 34, made his Tour debut in 2008 where he won the first four of his 30 stage victories, the second most in history. He is considered one of the greatest sprinters of all time.

The Tour de France is not cycling. It's a different sport. It's the only race of the year where you've got 180 of the best bike riders in the world all at their peak condition, and with

the consequence of winning and losing so much bigger than cycling. The Tour de France transcends cycling, with the sponsors, the riders, the fans. It's bigger than a bike race.

■ **George Bennett**

The 29-year-old Kiwi made his debut in 2016 and was chasing a top-10 finish in 2017 before retiring with illness. This year will be his third Tour.

It's the magnitude of it. You don't realise until you do it, and then you realise 'holy shit, this is insane'. People used to ask 'What do you do?' and I'd say: 'Cyclist', and they'd say: 'How do you get paid for that? Do you ride the Tour de France?' And I could never say I did. Then, when you ride the Tour de France you realise that's all they ever watch. In New Zealand, they only watch the Tour. I realised the amount of Kiwis who were staying up all night, it's 10 hours difference and you realise this reaches everybody. The Tour of Catalunya, for example, is a great race, and if you win that you're an amazing cyclist, but no one's stayed up all night to watch the Tour of Catalunya. When you do the Tour you realise there can be a 200km road and you won't see anything but people, lined up dead for 200km. So the magnitude of it heightens all the emotions. When you're doing well you're really buzzing, and when I had to step off the bike [through illness in 2017 while in the top 10] it was one of the worst moments of my career. Commercials always hype up cycling, but actually a lot of the time it's just a bike race.

(Source: Independent)

Vahid Amiri returns to Persepolis

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian international midfielder Vahid Amiri returned to Persepolis football team on Saturday.

The 31-year-old player has penned a two-year contract with Persepolis.

Amiri's performance in the 2018 World Cup caught the eye of Turkish football club Trabzonspor but he failed to hold down a regular starting place in the team.

He left Trabzonspor last week and returned to the Iranian giants, where he had claimed two Iran Professional League titles and two Super Cups with the team.

"I am very happy to return to Persepolis once again. I had several offers from the other Iranian teams but I opted to return to my home," Amiri said.

"I'm excited for a new opportunity in Persepolis. I know some of Persepolis fans are not happy with my decision last season and I understand them. But I've returned to the team and I will do my best to make them happy," he added.

Amiri, who has been in Iran squad in two AFC Asian Cups (2015 and 2019), will leave Tehran on Sunday to join Persepolis team in Istanbul training camp.

Amiri was one of Iran's best players in the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

in the match against Spain, Amiri managed to put the ball right between Gerrard Pique's legs, which opened up a lot of space for Amiri.

He made a great pass to his teammate, who's shot gazed the crossbar.



Igor Kolakovic satisfied with Iran's performance against Brazil



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national volleyball team head coach Igor Kolakovic is satisfied with his team's performance despite suffering a loss against them.

Iran lost to the South American giants 3-2 (25-20, 25-23, 24-26, 20-25, 15-10) in Pool B in Chicago and failed to book a place in the 2019 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) semifinals.

"It was one of the best matches I've ever coached in my coaching career. The Bra-

zilian team defended well and they were great in serves. We came from two sets down but failed to continue our good run in the fifth set. I am very happy for our performance and showed all how strong we are," Kolakovic said.

"From now on, we will focus on the 2019 FIVB Men's Volleyball Intercontinental Olympic Qualification Tournament. We have a difficult task against Russia and Cuba in the competition which will be held in August," he added.

VNL Final Round: Plucky Iran fail to qualify for semis



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran d e s k came back from two sets down against Brazil in the Volleyball Nations League (VNL) Final Six but failed to win the match.

On Saturday, the Persians lost to Brazil in five-set thriller 3-2 (25-20, 25-23, 24-26, 20-25, 15-10) in Chicago.

Milad Ebadipour led Iran with 22 points and Ricardo Lucarelli was Brazil's top scorer with 16 points.

Igor Kolakovic's team, who had lost to

Poland 3-1 in their first match, failed to advance to the semifinals.

Iran finished in fifth place, one place above France.

After three momentous days of action at the Credit Union 1 Arena in Chicago, the four semifinalists were confirmed as Brazil joined hosts the U.S., Russia and Poland in the penultimate stage of the competition.

In the second match of the day the hosts defeated Russia to claim leadership of Pool A ahead of the semifinals.

Australia still Asia's top ranked side, DPR Korea into Top 10

Australia remains Asia's highest ranked national team despite falling two places, while DPR Korea returned to the global top 10 in the July update of FIFA's Women's World Ranking.

A penalty shootout elimination at the hands of Norway in the recent FIFA Women's World Cup saw the Matildas leappfrogged by the Netherlands and Sweden, as Ante Milicic's side dropped from sixth to eighth following two wins from four matched at France 2019.

While Australia suffered a slight dip, DPR Korea — who failed to qualify for the World Cup — returned to the top 10 for the first time since 2016, moving up two places to ninth despite not playing an official match since the previous rankings update in March.

DPR Korea's arrival to the top 10 coincides with the departure of Asian champions Japan, who slipped four places to 11th after their Round of 16 elimination in France, while



China PR remain 16th after being eliminated at the same stage. Three group stage losses each for Korea Republic and

Thailand saw both nations suffer rankings slumps, with the Koreans falling six places to 20th, while Thailand fell five places to 39th, now four places behind Southeast Asian rivals Vietnam.

While most of Asia's big guns slipped in the July update, the Philippines and India both enjoyed significant growth after competitive but ultimately unsuccessful Tokyo 2020 Olympic qualifying campaigns.

India's six-position jump following wins over Nepal and Indonesia took them to 57th in the world, while the Philippines were Asia's biggest mover, climbing seven places to a highest ever world ranking of 67th.

FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019 champions the USA retained their status as the world's number one ranked side, with Germany and the Netherlands rounding out the top three.

(Source: the-afc)

Australia's Mitch Creek has World Cup medal dreams

One of Australia's rising stars, Mitch Creek, gets more excited by the day as the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 gets closer and closer.

The last time Creek received a medal as part of the national team was in the FIBA Asia Cup 2017 when the Boomers swept their games and brought home the gold.

This time around, however, the 6ft 6in (1.97m) wingman wants more prestigious hardware as Australia gun for a podium finish at the World Cup in China. Creek, who led the Green & Gold in scoring at the Asia Cup two years ago, has been named as part of the 17-man squad, and he can't wait for training camp to begin.

"I've had the World Cup on my mind for so long now, and having the possibility to fight for a spot on the final roster is such a great opportunity," he said. "My confidence has grown so much in the last year, and I'd like to help the Boomers have a great campaign this summer. It's so great to play in an international competition like the FIBA World Cup, and I'd like to experience this at the end of the summer in China."

Creek will have his work cut out for him when camp begins just to make the final 12. Basketball Australia have included Ben Simmons, Andrew Bogut, Jonah Bolden, Matthew Dellavedova, Aron Baynes, Joe Ingles and Patty Mills in the preliminary squad.

Australia are expected to parade one of the deepest teams in the entire field, and

Creek believes they'll be among the best teams at the World Cup.

"We have so many talented guys, so many experienced players, and it's probably one of the best pools in the history of Australia's basketball," he explained. "We have guys playing in the best teams and in the best leagues in the world and who are so motivated to help the national team shine at international level, which is very important. I'm so excited because that shows also that basketball is growing fast in our country and that many kids can be inspired by seeing Ben Simmons, Andrew Bogut and Patty Mills, so I think everyone is excited about how competitive and deep the pool of players is currently for the men's national team."

Creek was Australia's most efficient player in the Asian Qualifiers after averaging 14.0 points, 7.7 rebounds and 2.7 assists per game. He's excited about meeting up with the other Australians, including couple of players that, like him, figure to be in the Boomers program for a long time in Philadelphia 76ers duo Simmons and Bolden..

"Ben is such a fantastic player, a unique kind of player as he is a point guard that is so tall and feels the game so well," he shared. "He is going to be one of the best players of the tournament for sure. Jonah is a very solid player, and he is the kind of guy that everyone wants in his team: he can shoot, he can defend, he can grab rebounds, and he is a player that has impact on both ends of the floor. We can build a



very, very good team. Those are exciting times for Australian basketball."

Australia won 10 of their 12 Asian Qualifiers games, clinching qualification even before the final competition window began. Creek played in half of their games.

"I really enjoyed and learned a lot during the games of the qualifiers," he said. "I did get out of my 'comfort zone' like I always do, as I always do and as it's very important in order to keep improving and learning about the game. I like to challenge myself and to establish high goals. I know the pool is very competitive and that some guys couldn't make it to the qualifiers, but my goal is to be in the last 12 that is going to compete in China."

No matter who makes the final roster, it's going to be extremely tough for Australia from the start. In Group H, they will compete against Lithuania, Canada and Senegal.

"Lithuania are a very good team, that has a lot of experience and that showed in

previous international competitions that they are a team that can fight for medals," Creek said. "Senegal are very good, too, and they won't come to China just to play three games. Canada have been improving a lot in the last couple of years. Now with the addition of coach Nick Nurse, it's going to be very interesting. They have a huge pool of players like we do, and it's going to be very intense to get to the top two spots of the group."

Australia have never clinched a top-three spot at a World Cup or an Olympic Games..

"It would be absolutely fantastic to win a medal this summer, and bring that back home," Creek said. "I'm dreaming about this and all the guys, my teammates, the staff and the basketball federation, are working hard in order to reach that goal as soon as possible. We'd all like this to happen this summer, and that would be great to win a medal and keep the same dynamic going for the next competitions coming."

Creek says the first World Cup to be staged in China is sure to be special.

"I'm also looking forward to the whole experience in China, as I am sure that the environment and the vibe surrounding the tournament is going to be great," he said. "It's a country of basketball, and people are excited to see the best guys on the planet come to China to compete. All the ingredients are going to be there to make one of the best basketball tournaments ever."

(Source: FIBA)

Iran into 2019 IFCPF World Cup quarters

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran booked a place in quarterfinals round of the 2019 International Federation of Cerebral Palsy Football (IFCPF) World Cup in Sevilla, Spain on Friday.

The Iranian team defeated Finland 12-0 at the Ciudad Deportiva Sevilla FC Cisneros Palacios in Group B.

Iran started the campaign with a 3-2 loss against the U.S., then defeated Republic of Ireland 4-1.

Iran will meet Brazil on Sunday in quarterfinal while the group winners the U.S. face England.

The 2019 IFCPF World Cup features 16 of the world's top Para 7-a-side teams that qualified through IFCPF Regional Championships and the IFCPF rankings.

Ukraine enter the tournament as reigning world champions after winning the 2017 IFCPF World Championships.

Sardar Azmoun unaware of Liverpool's interest

PLDC — Iran international striker Sardar Azmoun says that he is not aware of Liverpool's interest.

Liverpool has been scouting the Zenit Saint Petersburg striker and the Iranian's excellent form has impressed the onlookers.

The 24-year-old moved to Zenit from Rubin Kazan on 1 February this year and has been finding the back of the net on a regular basis ever since.



Azmoun has scored 14 goals in 17 matches across all competitions since his arrival, including two in the Russian Super Cup on Saturday, which Liverpool scouts were in attendance for.

Zenit went on to lose 3-2 to Lokomotiv Moscow, but the brace from the Iranian appeared to confirm to the visitors from Merseyside that he is the bright talent they thought he was.

"I have been accustomed to playing in Zenit and the team's great players help me to know the club's situation. I became familiar with the Russian culture and I have to say RPL is a difficult league. We got good results with Rostov in the UEFA Champions League. The new season will kick off on Saturday and we have strengthened with three new signings," Azmoun said in an interview with sports show Varzesho Mardom.

"There were talks of Liverpool having expressed an interest in me during the past winter transfer window. But I don't know about that in the recent days. If there is any offer, I will weigh up the move and I hope everything goes well," Azmoun said.

Azmoun also praised Iran new coach Marc Wilmotes.

"I am very happy to see Wilmotes as Iran coach. Carlos Queiroz has been replaced with a good coach. As a striker, I like his attacking style. In the 2018 World Cup, I was forced to play ahead of our defenders. The forward needs to attacking football to be seen. Now, Iran is playing an attacking football but we have to wait to see if the supporters will support Team Melli in case of failure or not," Azmoun said.

Asked him about equaling Ali Daei's goalscoring record in Team Melli, Azmoun said, "I am not trying to break record. Daei is a great player and will remain as a great player even though a player like Cristiano Ronaldo breaks his record."

Persepolis coach Bagheri pens contract extension

TASNIM — Persepolis coach Karim Bagheri has agreed on a further cooperation with the Iranian team through 2020.

Bagheri has played a key role in Persepolis's success in the past three years, helping the Reds win three Iran Professional League (IPL) titles.

Bagheri, who was a member of Persepolis football team from 2002 to 2011, won two IPL titles and two Hazfi Cup with the team.

Bagheri will join Persepolis's training camp in Istanbul.

Jiménez and Vecchio join Al Ittihad

Midfielders Luis Jiménez and Emiliano Vecchio have signed for Saudi Pro League side Al Ittihad ahead of their 2019 AFC Champions League Round of 16 tie.

The 35-year-old Jiménez makes a return to West Asia after transferring from his boyhood club Palestino, where he scored a vital goal to secure the 2019 Copa Chile in the final against Audax Italiano.

The former Chilean international played for Inter Milan in 2007, before being loaned to West Ham United two years later.

Jiménez first came to Asia in 2011, signing for UAE's Shabab Al Ahli in 2011 before joining Al Nasr in 2015 respectively. He then moved to Qatar's Al Arabi, Gharafa and Qatar SC (on loan).

He will be playing alongside Vecchio, who was previously on loan to Shabab Al Ahli.

Vecchio is also no stranger to West Asia, having previously played for Qatar SC in 2016.

The 30-year-old started his career with Rosario Central of Argentina, and went on to play with clubs in Spain and Brazil.

Al Ittihad, who are currently in Manchester for a training camp, will play the first leg match against Zob Ahan FC of Islamic Republic of Iran on August 5.

(Source: the-afc)

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Beware of losing your blessing, for what is gone does not return and is not regained.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian movies line up for Insomnia animation festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Three movies by Iranian filmmakers will be competing in the 7th edition of the Insomnia International Animation Film Festival, an open-air festival that takes place in the Russian city of Kaluga every year. The animated films are “Son of the Sea”, “Starvation” and “Am I a Wolf?”.

Directed by Abbas Jalali-Yekta, “Son of the Sea” is about a man living in a house with his wife and the illusion of their son on the wall. This hallucination gradually creates complications in their lives.

Zahra Rostampur is the director of “Starvation”, which is about a hungry wolf that gets stuck in the stereotypes of being the big bad wolf of the story. She has to flee when everybody accuses her of violence and murder, and she faces getting killed.

“Am I a Wolf?” by Amir-Hushang Moein tells the story of children who perform the familiar story of the wolf and the yearlings in school as a puppet show. The nanny goat grieving for its yearlings and the angry wolf in its solitude face each other.

About 250 animated movies will go on screen during the festival, which will be held from July 18 to 22.

Malaysia film festival picks Iranian films

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian films “Axing” by Behruz Shoeibi and “Hat-Trick” by Ramtin Lavafi have been selected to screen in the official competition of the Malaysia International Film Festival, which will open in Shah Alam tonight.

“Axing” is about Mahsa, an addicted woman, who thinks that her girl is dead while she is alive and lives with her father. She decides to take her daughter back but she needs to face her ex-husband and his new wife.

“Hat-Trick” is about Farzad, a young man who hits something with his car while returning from a party with his wife and two friends. After a long discussion, they leave the scene all confused and frightened, and go to the house of one of their friends to think it over and do the right thing. But their initial talk about the accident is soon replaced by discussions of hidden secrets.

Iranian director Mohsen Qarai’s drama “Blockage” received nominations in six categories, including best film, best director and best screenplay at the previous edition of the festival. The film’s star Hamed Behdad won the award for best actor.

Malaysia International Film Festival will be running until July 19.

New “Lion King” movie lands with a critical whimper

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The much-anticipated new version of animated movie classic “The Lion King” landed with a whimper rather than a roar on Thursday with critics hailing it as visually impressive but tame in terms of character and storytelling. “The Lion King,” Walt Disney Co’s latest remake of its own beloved animated films, shows off advanced techniques that blend virtual reality, live action and digital imagery to bring a hyper-real feel to the animals and African settings.

But early reviews said the overall result was a letdown, although most critics conceded the movie will perform well at the box office where some analysts are predicting an opening weekend of around \$150 million when it arrives in North American theaters on July 19.

“Everything here is so safe and tame and carefully calculated as to seem predigested. There’s nary a surprise in the whole two hours,” wrote Todd McCarthy for The Hollywood Reporter.

McCarthy predicted, however, that the film “will be duly gobbled up by audiences everywhere like the perfectly prepared corporate meal it is.”

Walt Disney parks architect Ahmad Jafari to be honored in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) plans to honor Ahmad Jafari, the U.S.-based Iranian architect who has collaborated with Walt Disney Imagineering in designs of several parks and resorts.

Jafari has returned home 50 years after living abroad to share his experiences with Iranian youth, the IIDCYA announced in a press release on Saturday.

IIDCYA director Fazel Nazari, architect Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti and several other scholars will deliver speeches during the honoring ceremony that will be held at the IIDCY office in Hejab Street today at 11 am.

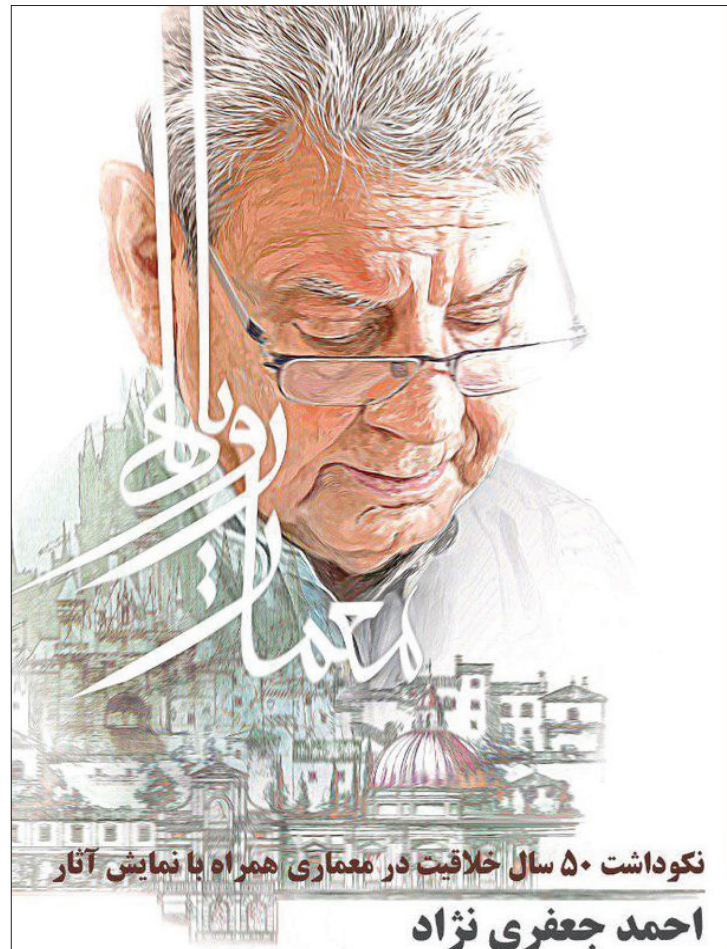
A book titled “The Architect of Dreams” about Jafari will also be unveiled during the ceremony.

Jafari is also the designer of Hezaro Yek Shahr, a theme park in Tehran.

Born in 1938 in Arak, Jafari graduated from University of Tehran with M.A. in architecture in 1962. In 1963, he moved to the United States and studied architecture at the University of Utah.

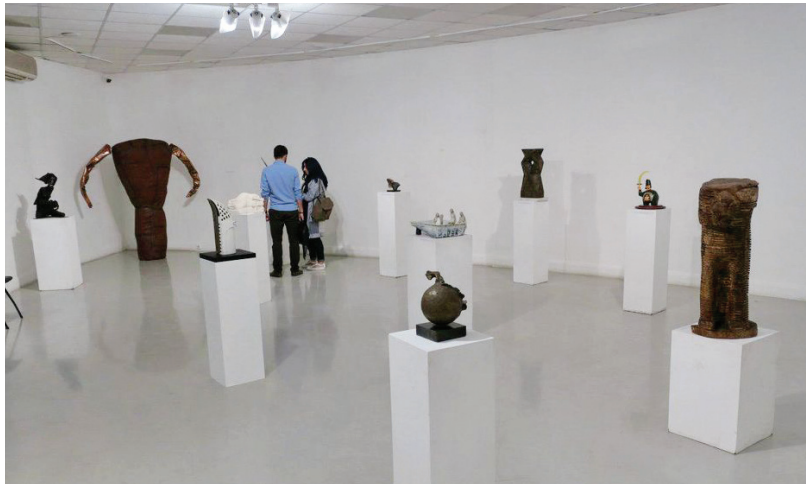
He then joined the Disneyland engineering department as an architect in 1966. He served as an architect and art director at the Walt Disney Company from 1966 to 2004.

“All of us still see your ‘design’ fingerprints scattered in the parks throughout the world... your creativity has helped define the environment that Disney built. It is indeed a very small club of people who can claim to have had such involvement and influence,” Disney official Val Usle once said about Jafari.



A poster for the honoring ceremony of architect Ahmad Jafari.

Association of Iranian Sculptors’ exhibition underway at IAF



Art aficionados visit the 5th Chahar Suye Khial Exhibition at the Iranian Artists Forum on July 16, 2016. (Honaronline/Saeid Fallahfar)

A R T **TEHRAN** — An exhibition organized by the Association of Iranian Sculptors is currently underway at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF).

A selection of 182 sculptures by 140 artists are on display at the 6th edition of the exhibit named “Chahar Suye Khial”, the forum announced on Saturday.

“This is the exhibition of the association’s members, in which each sculptor could display a maximum of 3 works, and the works have been selected by the sculptors themselves,” sculptor

Alireza Khaqani has said.

The topic of the exhibit is open, giving the sculptors a better opportunity to choose works for the exhibit, he said.

“Top works have been selected to be put on view at the exhibit and there are hopes to see further progress in the coming editions,” he added.

Sculptor Hooman Salimi also said that selecting works by the artists themselves helps to have better and different works to be displayed.

The exhibit will be running until July 26.

Anonymous Iranian street artist says graffiti gives him feeling of being

A R T **TEHRAN** — T2, a young, anonymous Iranian street artist, says that his graffiti across the capital Tehran gives him the feeling of being, more than anything else.

“Graffiti is exactly what gives meaning to me among all the everyday activities, it is what I struggle for and make the strongest efforts,” he told the Persian service of ISNA in an interview published on Saturday.

“It is actually a self-reformation for me, but I do not mean to say that I am here to make changes, that is, do we really intend to make changes or what changes can we really make?” he added.

He said that when he begins to draw, he has no idea what sentences he will choose to write.

The artist also talked about the reactions of the people and said, “The reactions are different. Some insult me and say I am crazy, some praise and encourage me, and for some it [my graffiti] is quite meaningless. The positive reactions



A graffiti art by T2.

Sneakers give art a run for its money at first-of-a-kind Sotheby’s auction

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Move over Monet. Nike is hot on your heels.

Sotheby’s in New York announced on Thursday its first-ever auction dedicated to sneakers, underlining their fast-growing status as collectibles able to command tens of thousands of dollars.

Sotheby’s is teaming up with streetwear marketplace Stadium Goods to auction 100 pairs of the rarest sneakers ever produced, including a sample of one of the first Nike Inc running shoes with a pre-sale high estimate of \$160,000.

The Nike “Moon Shoe” is one of only 12 pairs created. It was designed by Nike co-founder and track coach Bill Bowerman for runners at the 1972 Olympics trials and the pair up for auction is handmade, Stadium Goods said.

Other sneakers include 2011 and 2016 versions of the “Back to the Future Part II” limited-edition shoes by Nike that were inspired by the 1989 film starring

Michael J. Fox.

The 2016 version of the futuristic shoe, complete with self-lacing technology, is expected to sell for between \$50,000 and \$70,000.

“We’ve long talked about how sneakers are this generation’s luxury fashion, and being able to collaborate with a brand with the history and esteem of Sotheby’s is further proof of that,” John McPheters, co-founder of New York-based Stadium Goods, said in a statement.

Other shoes in the online sale, beginning on Thursday and ending on July 23, include sought-after and limited-edition sneakers produced by Adidas, Air Jordan and rapper Kanye West’s Yeezy collection.

Noah Wunsch, global head of eCommerce at Sotheby’s, said the sneaker sale was bringing together “art, culture and fashion” and marked another step in the auction house’s expansion of offerings of highly coveted luxury goods.

Bookstores in Tehran offer Cesar Aira’s “Dinner”



Front cover of the Persian version of “Dinner” by Argentine writer Cesar Aira.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Argentine writer Cesar Aira’s book “Dinner” has recently been published by Cheshmeh Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Vanda Jalili, the 2006 book is about an unnamed bachelor in his sixties who finds himself bankrupt, depressed and living with his judgmental mother.

One Saturday night, the man and his mother are invited to dinner by a wealthy friend, who regales them with stories of his travels. Anxious to show off his valuable antiques, the host shows his guests old

windup toys and takes them to admire an enormous doll.

Returning home, the narrator decides to watch TV. He lands on a channel showing a young woman and her cameraman chasing adventure late at night, reporting about the dead rising from their graves, leaving the cemetery, and sucking the blood of the living, all of which is somehow reminiscent of the dinner party.

Aira’s books “The Literary Conference” and “Shantytown” have previously been translated into Persian by Jalili and published by the same publisher.

are mostly from those who know the art of graffiti.”

He next said that he does not make a living from graffiti art, however, sometimes people like a drawing and ask him to paint for them.

“But the money I gain is actually one hundred percent of all the costs. Anyway, motivation of an artist can increase when he sells his works and will help him make additional investment in his future projects. But I should say that my earnings from graffiti are not very important for me and actually this is not my concern. I do graffiti for my own soul, because every time after I accomplish a graffiti, I have the feeling of freedom,” he explained.

According to Britannica, Graffiti is form of visual communication, usually illegal, involving the unauthorized marking of public space by an individual or group. Graffiti can be understood as antisocial behavior performed in order to gain attention or as a form of thrill seeking, but it also can be understood as an expressive art form.

Ex-Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein gets approval for new lawyers

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Former Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein got approval from a New York judge to hire a new legal team two months before his scheduled rape trial.

The two new lawyers, Donna Rotunno and Damon Cheronis, appeared at a brief hearing in Manhattan Supreme Court before Justice James Burke to make their formal applications to take over Weinstein’s defense before the Sept. 9 trial date.

“Mr. Weinstein, is that what you want?” Burke asked.

“Yes,” Weinstein answered.

Weinstein, 67, is charged in New York with sexually assaulting two women, in July 2006 and March 2013. He has pleaded not guilty to the five charges against him, which include rape, and faces a maximum sentence of life in prison if convicted.

Weinstein hired the new lawyers, both based in Chicago, last month.

Rotunno and Cheronis are Weinstein’s

third legal team in the case. Prominent Florida defense lawyer Jose Baez and Harvard University law professor Ronald Sullivan both recently left, with Baez making his departure official at Thursday’s hearing.

They, in turn, had replaced New York defense lawyer Ben Brafman, who quit the case in January.

The two accusers in the criminal case are among some 70 women, mostly young actresses and women in the film industry, who have accused Weinstein of sexual assaults dating back decades. He has denied the allegations.

The accusations helped spark the #MeToo movement in which hundreds of women have publicly accused powerful men in business, politics, the news media and entertainment of sexual harassment and abuse.

As the accusations against Weinstein mounted, his company Weinstein Co fired him and filed for bankruptcy, and he was expelled from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.