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Malaysia accepts Iran's cryptocurrency proposal

By staff and agency
 Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has accepted Iran's proposal on using cryptocurrency as an alternative to the United States' dollar.
 "We are hearing this for the first time — that Iran and Turkey are of the opinion that we should use an alternative to the U.S. dollar. We can use our own currencies or have a common currency," Free Malaysia Today quoted Mahathir

as saying on Thursday.
 "It looks like sometimes when we use the U.S. dollar, there are sanctions that can curb economic development," the Malaysian prime minister added.
 During a speech at the inauguration ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur 2019 Summit on Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani suggested that the Muslim world should take measures to put an end to domination of the U.S. dollar and financial regime.

IRISL, RAI ink co-op MOU on transit of goods

TEHRAN— Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) and Iran's Railways (known as RAI) signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation for transit of commodities, IRNA reported.
 Based on the agreement, which was inked by IRISL Managing Director Mohammadreza Modares Khabani and RAI Head Saeed Rasouli, some scheduled container

trains will start operation to boost transit of goods through Iran and the two sides will jointly establish logistic terminals for container commodities.
 Signing this agreement is in line with Iran's plans for boosting transit of goods. The country aims to increase its transport capacity through International North South Transit Corridor (INSTC). **→4**

Lebanese president asks Hassan Diab to form government

Lebanese President Michel Aoun tasked former Education Minister Hassan Diab with forming the country's next government after Hezbollah and its allies nominated him during long-awaited talks with members of parliament.
 Diab served as education minister from 2011 to 2014 in a cabinet made up of Hezbollah and its allies. The 60-year-old father of three studied computer engineering in the United Kingdom before

returning to the Lebanese capital in 1985 to join the American University of Beirut as an assistant professor. He has remained at the university ever since, rising to the post of vice president and professor of computer engineering.
 Meanwhile, Hassan Diab met with caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri Friday morning to discuss the formation of Lebanon's new government and confirm that it will be one of specialists. **→13**

EDITORIAL
Mohammad Ghaderi
 Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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Snapback mechanism: U.S.-French threadbare scenario against Iran

The dispute resolution mechanism stated in paragraphs 36 and 37 of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) is referred to as the "snapback mechanism".

Under the mechanism, if one of the JCPOA parties concludes that other party does not adhere to the obligations of the deal, it could complain to the Joint Commission established within the JCPOA framework to monitor the implementation of the deal.

If the complaint is not resolved within 35 days, as the complainant wishes, the party can consider the unresolved issue as a reason to stop complying with the deal's commitments and inform the UN Security Council that the issue will imply significant non-compliance. Thereafter, the Security Council must issue a resolution regarding suspending sanctions or reinstating them within 30 days.

If during this time, the Security Council fails to issue a resolution, all UNSC sanctions imposed before the JCPOA will be resumed automatically. The key point of the mechanism is that the resumption of the sanctions cannot be vetoed.

Although the U.S. has officially withdrawn from the JCPOA on May 7, 2018, there have been some whispers in recent days regarding citing the snapback mechanism in the deal. This is while, based on the deal, the initial complaint should be submitted to the Joint Commission of the JCPOA.

In August, Brian Hook, U.S. Special Representative for Iran affirmed the U.S. failure to spark the snapback mechanism.

Hook said in response to a question, "We're no longer in the deal and so the parties that are still in the deal will have to make their decisions with respect to using or not using the dispute resolution mechanism. There's no question that Iran is in breach of the Iran nuclear deal".

Meanwhile, the European Union's incoming foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, who recently replaced Federica Mogherini, officially announced that Iran had not violated any of the deal's provisions. **→13**

Algeria swears in its new president Tebboune

By Hana Saada

ALGERIA — Algeria swore in its new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, on Thursday, a week after the holding of the decisive presidential election.
 The newly-elected President Abdelmadjid Tebboune took the oath of office in line with the Algerian Constitution, as the Constitutional Council announced Monday evening the final results of the presidential election of December 12th. Thus, he officially began his duties for a five-year term replacing late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika who was forced to step down in April in the face of mass demonstrations that erupted in February calling for the sweeping away of the old guard.

Upon his arrival at the Palace of Nations, Algiers, uniformed officers from the four branches of Algeria's powerful military saluted Tebboune for his inauguration.

The official ceremony began by a recitation of a few verses of the Noble Qur'an and the reading, by the chairman of the Constitutional Council, Kamel Fenniche, of a Council's statement relating to the final results of the presidential election won by Tebboune with a voter turnout of 58.13%.
 In accordance with Article 89 of the Constitution, "the president of the Republic shall take the oath of office before the people, in the presence of the high institutions of the nation, in the week following his election. He shall take office immediately after his swearing-in."

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by senior civilian and military officials of the country and representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited to Algeria.

During the ceremony, first President of the Supreme Court Abderachid Tabi articulated the

oath and President took the oath by repeating it verbatim, with his right hand on the Noble Qur'an.
 The new president was decorated with the national merit award as a military band played the Algerian anthem.

In the end of the swearing-in, Abderachid Tabi stated: "In my capacity as the first president of the Supreme Court, I attest to the fact that the president of the Republic has taken the oath of office."

According to article 90, the President of the Republic shall take an oath in the following terms: "In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Most Grateful. Faithful to the supreme sacrifice and to the sacred memory of our martyrs, as well as to the ideals of the eternal November revolution, I swear by Almighty God to respect and glorify the Islamic religion." **→6**

Iraq's Sistani says early election only way out of crisis

Iraq's top Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, said Friday that an early election was the only way out of the current unrest gripping the country and a new government should be formed soon.
 More than 450 people, mostly unarmed demonstrators but also some members of the security forces, have been killed since a wave of popular unrest began Oct. 1. Protesters, most of them young, are demanding an overhaul of a political system they see as profoundly corrupt and keeping most Iraqis in poverty, Reuters reported.
 "The fastest and most peaceful way out of the current crisis, and avoiding the unknown or chaos or civil strife, is to go back to the people by holding an early election after legislating a fair electoral law," Sistani said.

Parliament failed on Wednesday to pass a new electoral law, a key demand of protesters, which would make elections fairer after votes in recent years have been marred by allegations of fraud.

"We hope that the formation of a new government is not delayed for long," Sistani said in a speech read out by a representative at a Friday sermon in the Shi'ite holy city of Kerbala.

Deadlock in parliament also held up the selection of an interim prime minister, causing lawmakers to miss on Thursday the constitutional deadline to name a replacement for Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who resigned last month but has remained in office in a caretaker capacity.

U.S., Israel orchestrating violent attacks in Iraq

Meanwhile, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq movement, says Israeli and American spy services are behind violent attacks in Iraq, and they include attacks on protesters and even the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. Speaking to Qatar's Al Jazeera TV, Khazali said the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the U.S. and Israel's Mossad have formed a joint network that leads violent groups, and uses security companies to kill Iraqi protesters.

"The U.S. seeks to tarnish our image by accusing us of complicity in killing protesters. How on earth can we kill our own people while we have lost our lives in the fight against Daesh because of them," he asked. **→13**



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Put your skates on; Yalda is to knock the door!

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — A new Yalda Night is approaching the hearts of Iranians no matter which part of the globe they live. On that graceful night the winter chill is vanquished and the warmth of love embraces the entire family.

The last evening of autumn and the beginning of winter is a ceremonious, auspicious time for Iranians and lovers of Iranian traditions everywhere on earth.

A peek into the bustling streets, grocery and confectionery stores show that Iranians are preparing in advance to celebrate Yalda Night, falling on December 21 this year. **→10**

ARTICLE
Martin Love
 Political analyst from North Carolina

If it had a soul, America may have lost it

So, Donald Trump has been impeached. So what, one must say, aside from the fact that he is only the third President to have ever been so stained by the U.S. House of Representatives (exactly along party lines), which will no doubt drive him to even more error because of his vast, narcissistic nature.

So what, because if the economy and markets don't implode between now and November, he is likely to get another four years in the White House. Frankly, he ought to have been impeached for the single reason alone of his performance in front of the big, blind crowd of his cultish followers in Michigan precisely at the hour he was impeached. And the impeachment charges?

Well, the specific charges may not rise to the level of "high crimes and misdemeanors" unless you are a Democrat. There is little of concise specificity to the articles of impeachment in the opposition's point of view, and the opposition does dominate the U.S. Senate which is not going to convict Trump. It's all been just a lot more of Trump being Trump, a gasbag of ignorance and self-dealing.

He has nothing of merit worth celebrating so far, but if truth be told, the Democrats are not far behind aside from a handful of notable Congressional reps who have frequently been vilified by members of both parties. But to get how misguided Trump is, all one had to do was listen to him fulminate off the cuff and interminably before his Michigan fans. He rambled on unbelievably and in such a macabre way, it's fascinating.

Trump is the perfect expression of a country that seems to have lost its soul, or has been losing its soul for the last 30 years or more. It's been a period when really nothing has worked out as expected, or at least not as it was promised. But yes, the wealthy have gotten wealthier, and the big corporations have profited, and fascism has slowly become the order of the day in America. **→6**

U.S. sanctions are 'collective punishment', Iranian diplomat says

Takht-Ravanchi: Sanctions are illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and cruel

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, said on Thursday that the United States' sanctions against Iran are illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and cruel.

"What the U.S. sanctions are intended to do is 'collective punishment' of the general public, which is prohibited even in armed conflicts," Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in a statement read in the UN Security Council meeting.

He said sanctions are "targeting the most vulnerable groups of ordinary people in order to create discontent within the society."

Following is the full text of the statement issued on implementation of Security Council resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal:

The Security Council is once again considering the implementation of one of its most important resolutions, namely resolution 2231, which is being vehemently violated by a permanent member of the Council, an unprecedented development in the history of the UN. Here, I wish to express my appreciation to all fourteen members of the Council for lending their valuable support to the JCPOA.

When the Council, through unanimous adoption of resolution 2231 endorsed the JCPOA, the whole world acclaimed that as a significant achievement of dialogue and multilateral diplomacy and acknowledged its indispensable contribution to international peace and security. The resolution emphasizes that "the JCPOA is conducive to promoting and facilitating the development of normal economic and trade contacts and cooperation with Iran". As the Secretary-General has rightly noted in his recent report "an essential part of the JCPOA is the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran allowing for the normalization of trade and economic relations". Furthermore, based on JCPOA, E3/EU+3 committed "to ensure Iran's access in areas of trade, technology, finance and energy", and U.S. committed "to prevent interference with the realization of the full benefit by Iran of the sanctions lifting".

On 8 May 2018, the U.S. president issued a Presidential Memoranda, "ceasing U.S. participation in the JCPOA". In fact, the U.S. decided to illegally withdraw from the JCPOA and in contravention of its international obligations returned back all of its sanctions that had been lifted in accordance with the JCPOA. This and subsequent developments rendered the JCPOA with respect to Iran's benefits almost fully ineffective and in certain aspects, the situation now is even worse than what we had before the JCPOA concluded. Since then, the application of the U.S. unlawful sanctions has been extended into other states and in essence, the U.S. is punishing them for honoring their international commitments in accordance with resolution 2231, another unmatched development in the U.N. history.

What the U.S. sanctions are intended to do is "collective punishment" of the general public, which is prohibited even in armed conflicts. They are also targeting the most vulnerable groups of ordinary people in order to create discontent within the society and as such are inhumane in nature. The U.S. sanctions are also targeting different sectors of the Iranian economy including oil and banking sectors, which are negatively affecting the daily lives of millions of Iranians. Contrary to the claims of the U.S., its sanctions are neither short of war or better than or an alternative to war; they ARE actual war but by another means and names. Pure and simple! The U.S., through weaponizing food and medicine and in total disregard of 3 October 2018 ruling of the ICJ, has extended its sanctions even to other humanitarian goods.

US officials have confirmed that the pain of sanctions for ordinary people is intentional



"It is a shame that the U.S. bullying has resulted in discontinuation of the export of certain medicines to Iran, causing a nightmare for some patients."

and part of a political strategy. US Secretary of State has gone on record at least twice with his conditions to allow food and medicine flow to the Iranian people.

By any measure, the U.S. sanctions are illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and cruel. It is a shame that the U.S. bullying has resulted in discontinuation of the export of certain medicines to Iran, causing a nightmare for some patients.

For instance, a European company, under the pressure of US sanctions, has stopped exporting special bandages for patients suffering from EB, a rare genetic condition resulting in easy blistering of the skin.

A 2-year-old girl from the city of Ahvaz, Ava, an EB patient, is one of "butterfly children" who are known so because their skin is as fragile as butterflies. To avoid infection, butterflies should be covered by special bandages. Even those bandages do not lift the pain. However, the alternative is horrible as it peels kids' soft skin at the time of removal. Nowadays, the importation of these special bandages for EBs has become almost impossible, endangering the lives of innocent children like Ava. Now butterflies are feeling the pain of the U.S. inhumane sanctions with their hearts and souls. In June this year, Ava was relieved of pain forever and passed away. Her story only reflects the tip of the iceberg, as children and adults with cancer and rare diseases are struggling in silence with death. Killing children and patients takes no courage!

U.S. maximum pressure policy and sanctions are tantamount to economic terrorism which are killing innocent people. Therefore, those who have been involved in designing, advocating and executing these sanctions must be held accountable. The Secretary-General is expected consistent with his mandate under paragraph 7 of Note. 44 to thoroughly report on the U.S. sanctions and their inhumane impacts. The United States has further illegally sanctioned nuclear measures authorized under resolution 2231, thus preventing the implementation of Iran's and other States' commitments. Furthermore, activities of the Procurement Channel have been negatively affected. Despite all hardships inflicted upon the Iranian people as a result of the United States' unlawful sanctions, Iran, at the request of other JCPOA participants and based on their assurances for compensation, waited for a

year and continued to fully implement its commitments.

On 6th July and 24th September 2018, Iran was assured by JCPOA participants of compensation especially in establishing effective financial channels, export of oil, shipping and insurance, and the protection from the extraterritorial effects of US sanctions. None of these assurances has been materialized until today.

Iran has been and continues to be committed to the implementation of the JCPOA. This fact has been time and again confirmed by the IAEA including after the reintroduction of unilateral sanctions by the United States. However, unilateral implementation of the JCPOA is not sustainable. The deal needs more than one willing and able party to be fully implemented. After exercising strategic patience for a year and in the face of apparently continued inaction of the European participants in the JCPOA and after witnessing that the promises made to Iran were not honored, Iran was left with no other option than to act and take the necessary measures to cure the imbalance created in the JCPOA. In so doing, Iran that had already triggered and exhausted JCPOA dispute settlement mechanism eventually applied the remedy manifestly recognized by the JCPOA and the Security Council. This decision was carefully crafted to save the JCPOA.

Iran has ceased performing its commitments in part in accordance with paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA. To give room for diplomacy, a step by step approach with two months' intervals has been designed. Iran's steps are reversible but the damages inflicted upon Iran and the Iranian people due to illegal sanctions are not reversible at all. How do the opportunities that are lost, the economy that is affected, and above all, the precious lives that are perished as well as the suffering of the Iranian people especially kids, elderly and patients can be reversed? Iran has ceased implementing only some voluntary measures. They have not touched Iran's cooperation with the IAEA.

They are not also inconsistent with our safeguards related obligations. The Agency has repeatedly confirmed that Iran is subject to the most robust verification system in existence anywhere in the world. It is noteworthy that in 2018 the number of all IAEA safeguard inspections around the world was 2195, while in 2019 until November, Iran was subject to more than 688 inspections

"U.S. maximum pressure policy and sanctions are tantamount to economic terrorism which are killing innocent people."

amounting to 1376 person-day inspections.

Iran has always respected its commitments and responded to logic with logic and respect with respect. However, we cannot and will not accept bullying from any quarter. Our response to threats and intimidation is in kind. At the moment, best efforts in good faith are being made by Iran to sustain the JCPOA. As soon as the full implementation of the JCPOA by other participants are guaranteed, Iran will immediately reverse all of its measures. If there is a will for JCPOA's full implementation by all concerned, there is a way. However, Iran cannot remain indifferent to the continuation of illegal sanctions and the lack of compensatory response to these sanctions by other participants. Iran will take necessary measures to secure its national interests and our options are not limited. At the same time, any unnecessary and unwarranted measures against Iran will be met with decisive action as has already been conveyed at the highest level to our JCPOA partners.

The U.S.'s offer of unconditional talks with Iran is disingenuous emanating from its habit to enter a dialogue from a position of strength and not based on equal footing. The call for a dialogue with Iran while simultaneously insisting on the application of "maximum pressure policy" against the Iranian people are mutually exclusive. Iran does not negotiate under the threat of a sword. The U.S. has to make a strategic decision. As an American proverb says, "you can't have your cake and eat it too". Either you continue with your horrible and outdated maximum pressure policy, while scolded by the Iranian people and branded at the international level as an untrustworthy partner, OR you act as a normal country and undo the sanctions. In this context, the implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 by the U.S. will pave the way for a genuine dialogue to start within the framework of the nuclear deal.

Since the conclusion of the JCPOA, a few countries have attempted to expand the involvement of the Security Council to issues beyond Iran's peaceful nuclear program. In the course of the nuclear negotiations, we resisted the temptation of some participants to include extraneous matters in the final document and hence did not agree neither to touch Iran's legitimate defensive capabilities nor to affect its role in the region including in the fight against terrorism. Recent attempts to link these issues including through misinterpretation of Annex B of resolution 2231 are completely unjust.

Acquiring legitimate means of defense is an inherent right under international law. We are living in a volatile and insecure region. Furthermore, the sale of a large amount of heavy weaponry to our region has turned it into a powder-keg. Those who ask Iran to limit its legitimate conventional capabilities are making lots of money out of exports of deadly weaponry to this region. Under no circumstances, will Iran, compromise on its security.

Iran does not possess nuclear weapons and has committed to the JCPOA not to ever seek, develop or acquire them. Accordingly, Iran's missiles are "not designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons", and therefore, they are outside the purview of resolution 2231. The term "designed to be capable" was deliberately chosen pursuant to cumbersome negotiations in order to exclude Iran's conventional missiles from the scrutiny of the resolution. This notion is well reflected in Iran's statement following the adoption of resolution 2231.

Arbitrary reinterpretation of the resolution by recourse to a non-legally binding definitions of an informal and yet exclusive 35-member club-like MTCR is totally misleading and thus unacceptable.

In conclusion, our observations with regard to the Secretary-General's report are contained in my recent letter to the Council, and covers our views on issues that have not been addressed in my remarks today.

U.S. nation accountable before God if Trump re-elected, says cleric

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani, a Tehran Friday prayer leader, has advised the Christian nation of America to reject the incumbent rulers of their country in the 2020 presidential polls.

"The Christian nation of America, if they truly believe in the Christ, should reject the incompetent rulers of America," Emami Kashani told worshippers in Tehran on Friday.



"The American people should know that if they vote for Trump in the next term and God forbid he gets re-elected, they are responsible for all the blood which will be spilt and they will be held accountable before God," he added.

The 2020 U.S. presidential election will be held on November 3, 2020. Voters will select presidential electors who in turn on December 14, 2020 will either elect a new president and vice president or re-elect the incumbents.

Emami Kashani also called on the Iranian officials and the people to be vigilant in the fact of plots hatched by the global arrogance — a term used in Iran to describe hegemonic powers — against the Muslim World.

"Today, the global arrogance and the Zionists have hatched different plots against Iran and other Islamic countries. They have established think tanks to undermine the economy, politics and the culture of Muslim nations," he said.

"The officials and the people should be aware of such conspiracies and know how to manage the situation to tackle such challenges," he added.

The cleric also said the United States and the Israeli regime created the ISIL terrorist group to dominate the region, stressing that the Islamic Ummah should carefully monitor the enemies' moves in order to counter them in the best way possible.

Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads ever since the Trump administration illegally withdrew the U.S. from the internationally-endorsed nuclear agreement and imposed unilateral sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Under the JCPOA, the official name for the 2015 nuclear agreement, Iran had agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Since the U.S. withdrawal, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran have been trying to salvage the pact, defying Washington's economic and political pressures.

The United States' coercive unilateral measures against Iran have led to heightened tensions in the Middle East, especially in the Persian Gulf.

U.S. rulers have striven in vain to intervene in Iran's affairs, says spokesman

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The United States foreign policy decision-makers have done their best in vain to intervene in Iran's internal affairs, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has said.

"US Foreign Policy team, have done their best in vain to intervene in Iran's internal affairs by raising fabricated and baseless issues with cheap literature, self-degrading in a way unprecedented in American history," Mousavi said in a post on his Twitter account on Friday.

"The US misses an inst. with a strategic view on global issues," he added.

The remarks came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement of new sanctions against Iran on Thursday.

Pompeo claimed at the same time that "the United States has stood, and will stand under President Trump, for the Iranian people."

Touching on Washington's toughest ever sanctions on Tehran, Pompeo said, "We do so for the sake of freedom, for the sake of human dignity, for the sake of respect."

U.S. President Donald Trump has adopted a maximum pressure policy against Iran since he walked away from the JCPOA. The policy includes sanctions on Iran's economy, especially its oil exports, and bans on top Iranian figures and organizations. At the same time, the U.S. president has pushed for talks with Tehran. Iranian leaders have openly rejected the notion of talks with the U.S. as long as its illegal sanctions against Tehran are in place. Tehran has described the U.S. sanctions as "economic war" and "economic terrorism".

It also says sanctions on the central bank will prevent it to buy food and medicine.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said last month that the United States' sanctions and economic war on Iran have targeted the ordinary people's health and livelihood.

"There was a time when such warfare was used to simply limit the activities of some countries. However, new warfare of the United States and what Trump has called the 'economic war' have targeted the ordinary people's livelihood and health," the chief diplomat lamented.

Earlier this month, Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki said the United States lies when it says pharmaceuticals and medical equipment are not subject to its sanctions list on Iran. Namaki has also said the U.S. is exerting pressure on all pharmaceutical companies to stop the sale of medicine to Iran.

"They have put pressure on all our financial transactions regarding medicinal drugs and are exerting pressure on all pharmaceutical companies to stop the sale of medicines to us," the health minister regretted.

Zarif hails 'friendly' Rouhani-Abe summit

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has hailed the "substantive, friendly and frank" summit between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, saying the meeting aimed to strengthen ties between the two countries.

"Substantive, friendly and frank summit between President @HassanRouhani and Prime Minister @AbeShinzo: further strengthening bilateral, regional and global cooperation," Zarif tweeted on Friday.

"Also grateful to our Japanese hosts for celebrating the winter solstice with us. #Yalda," he added.

President Rouhani has paid a landmark visit to Japan, calling on the country to help confront the United States' bid to wreck the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, according to Press TV.

When he landed in Tokyo, Rouhani became the first Iranian president to visit Japan since 2000.

The Iranian president inspected a guard of honor along with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the latter's central



Tokyo office before summit talks and a dinner scheduled to last into Friday evening.

Despite being a military ally of the U.S., Japan has tradi-

tionally maintained friendly relations with Iran as a major source of energy. In 2017, Iran supplied 5.2 percent of Japan's crude oil imports.

Iran's oil exports, however, have been disrupted by unilateral American sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Japan also relies on the Middle East for nearly 90% of its oil needs, but tensions have risen to new highs amid U.S. deployment of new troops and military assets to the Persian Gulf.

Tensions have escalated since President Donald Trump's decision last year to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the international nuclear agreement with Iran is officially called.

"The nuclear deal is an extremely important agreement, and we strongly condemn the U.S. withdrawal, which was one-sided and irrational," Rouhani said in the meeting with Abe on Friday.

"We hope that Japan and other countries in the world will make efforts toward maintaining the agreement," the Iranian president added.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	350322.6
IFX	4531.53

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,736 rials
GBP	54,947 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.36/b
WTI	\$60.91/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.77/b
Gold	\$1,480.65/oz
Silver	\$817.15/oz
Platinum	\$938.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TEDPIX gains 10,933 points in a week

ECONOMY TEHRAN — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), has increase 10,933 points, or three percent, to 350,322 during the five working days of the past Iranian calendar week (Saturday to Wednesday), IRNA reported.

Value of trades at TSE was reported to stand at 12,999 trillion rials (about \$309.5 million), experiencing two percent rise, while the worth of trades at Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), was 3,761 trillion rials (about \$89.5 million), with a three-percent weekly increase.

Dates to be offered at IME soon

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has announced that dates will be offered at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) soon, IRNA reported.

Shapour Mohammadi said while SEO is trying to thrive trades of pistachio at IME, dates will be also offered at this market. In mid-October, "futures" was launched for the pistachio deals at Iran Mercantile Exchange.



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

Addressing the ceremony to launch this financial instrument, IME Managing Director Hamed Soltani-Nejad said, "There is no futures contract for pistachio deals in any mercantile exchange in the world and it is the first time that such contract is launched in a mercantile exchange."

Germany warned crumbling economy could be sucked into 'zombification' indefinitely

Christiane von Berg, economist for Northern Europe at the credit insurance company Coface, hailed Germany for battling off fears of a recession in 2019 but at the same time warned the EU member state was not out of the woods yet. She warned of the "zombification" of the German economy, meaning businesses in the country becoming lazy having spent years being propped up or kept going artificially. She said: "In the past few months there have been reports of job cuts and some bankruptcies in the German industry."

"This could lead to the assumption that bankruptcies in Germany would have increased significantly in 2019. But that's not the case."

According to Coface estimates, the number of bankruptcies this year will be three percent lower than those declared in 2018.

There has also been a 12-month decline in the amount of bankruptcies over the past 10 years.

Experts in Germany attribute the falling number of bankruptcies primarily to the zero interest rate policy of the European Central Bank (ECB).

If German banks continue to grant loans too liberally, businesses remain in a market that is completely unviable for the foreseeable future.

The German Institute for Economic Research (IWF) admits monetary policy is an important factor in the decline of bankruptcies, adding interest rates are low and that access to credit in Europe is particularly easy for German companies.

It also identified better equity capital for companies was another factor.

Klaus-Heiner Röhl, economist at the IWF, said: "Contrary to the criticism that has occasionally been expressed that the sustained economic upswing with extremely low interest rates would have produced zombie companies that are vulnerable in the event of an economic downturn, the average balance sheet quality of companies in Germany is obviously very solid."

At the same time, the German economy should not feel too safe because of the 25-year low in bankruptcies, which could also be due to a decline in domestic competition.

He added: The "decline in the number of business start-ups could also have contributed to the weakening of insolvency."

(Source: express.co.uk)

'Boosting production of base metals a serious plan of industry ministry'

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said increasing production of base metals is one of the most serious plans that his ministry is pursuing, IRNA reported.

Making the remarks during the inaugural ceremony of a production line in Mobarakeh Steel Company in Isfahan Province on Thursday, the minister stressed that inauguration of industrial projects under the current condition (sanctions) is a victory in the economic battle.

He further mentioned this year which is named the Year of Pickup in Production by the Leader of Islamic Revolution and said, "We are seriously following up the domestic production movement and have defined a plan to reduce the imports by \$10 billion through domestic production of some products by [Iranian calendar] year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022)".

While the U.S. unilateral sanctions on Iran in recent years have upset the Iranian industry in some sectors, the statistics indicate that the minerals sector has not been affected by the sanctions, while it's



also improved.

The improvement is more noticeable in the steel sector, as according to the World Steel Association (WSA), Iran became the

world's tenth largest steel producer in 2018.

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

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

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

Also as announced by the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), annual production of crude steel in Iran is planned to rise three million tons to 28 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020).

Such progress in this sector is mainly the result of "indigenizing" approach, which is seriously followed up in all industrial sectors of the country.

In fact, indigenizing the technology of manufacturing required products, equipment and machinery to attain self-reliance is the major economic approach of the country during the sanctions.

In terms of steel, the industry, mining and trade minister has said that the country has achieved a proper self-reliance in this sector.

IRISL, RAI ink co-op MOU on transit of goods

ECONOMY TEHRAN — INSTC is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami has said the country is capable of boosting its capacity of transit of commodities to 50 million tons per year.

Making the remarks in a ceremony to celebrate the National Transportation Day on Tuesday, the minister stressed that a double effort is required to achieve this goal.

"We should make an essential improvement in our logistics power to gain our share of transit", Eslami further emphasized.

While ports are the main places where the commodities enter and exit from Iran, just four ports in the country are connected



to the railway network and railway accounts for just 14 percent of transportation from and to the ports.

It's a very small figure given geographical location of the country and the potential of its ports for transit of goods in the region.

So, connecting the ports to the railway network has been emphasized by Transport and Urban Development Ministry and also Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) over the recent years.

Railway fleet receives 456 new wagons since March

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Some 456 new wagons were added to Iran's railway fleet since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019), Saied Rasouli, the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI), announced.

The official also announced that 270 new wagons will be added to the fleet in the near future, IRNA reported.

Back in June, Rasouli had announced that 20 trillion rials (about \$476.2 million) has been allocated for renovation of 1000 passenger and freight wagons and also locomotives in the current Iranian calendar year.

He said this amount has been allocated by the Planning and Budget Organization.

In this year, which is named as the year of "Pickup in Production" by the Leader



of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, all efforts of RAI are for renovating the railway fleet of the country by relying on domestic producers, the official further stressed.

According to Saeed Mohammadzadeh, the previous head of RAI, development of Iranian railways requires more than 32,000 wagons and locomotives in the next four years when the railway infrastructures are developed in the country.

Bank of England keeps interest rates on hold despite weak economy

The Bank of England warned of mounting weakness in the British economy as it kept interest rates on hold despite two members of its rate-setting panel once again voting for an immediate cut.

Sounding the alarm that economic growth would come close to flatlining in the final three months of the year, the Bank's monetary policy committee (MPC) voted 7-2 to keep the official interest rate on hold at 0.75%.

Two of the outside experts on the nine-member panel, Jonathan Haskel and Michael Saunders, said the weakness of the economy warranted an immediate reduction to 0.5%, while seven others, including the Bank's governor, Mark Carney, voted to leave borrowing costs unchanged at among the lowest levels on record. Haskel and Saunders had voted for a rate cut at the last MPC meeting in November.

Threadneedle Street said it expected gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by only 0.1% in the fourth quarter, slightly weaker than it had previously anticipated, as household spending stalled and business investment was kept on hold in the run-up to the election and amid a lack of clarity over Brexit.

It said some company spending plans put on hold since the EU referendum could be reinstated by the end of next year but warned that heightened uncertainty over the future trade deal with the EU could continue to weigh on the economy.

In a signal that the impact of Brexit uncertainty is unlikely to diminish, despite Boris Johnson's key election message that getting Brexit done would unleash a wave of investment, the Bank said the response of companies and households to leaving the EU would depend on developments in the year ahead as ministers seek to



strike a trade deal with Brussels.

The interest rate decision

Announcing the interest rate decision, the MPC warned there was "no evidence yet about the extent to which policy uncertainties among companies and households have declined".

According to the Bank's network of agents across the country, company investment intentions remained depressed by slower global growth and political uncertainty. Firms in the manufacturing and construction sectors told the Bank's agents they thought they would benefit from an increase in investment when uncertainty started to lift. However, the agents said: "There were risks around how soon that would materialize."

The MPC said it expected inflation to remain below its 2% target next year. However, over the longer term

it still anticipated that interest rates would need to rise at a gradual pace and to a limited extent.

However, it warned there could be risks to the downside for the economy. In a heavy hint that it would be prepared to cut interest rates, the MPC said: "Monetary policy might need to reinforce the expected recovery in UK GDP growth and inflation."

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(Source: theguardian.com)

China has leeway to tackle economic risks: World Bank

Chinese authorities have the policy space to tackle economic downside risks, but the counter measures need to be consistent with the structural rebalancing of the country's economy in the longer term, the World Bank said on Thursday.

The bank maintained its prediction that China's economy will grow at a rate of 6.1 percent this year, before moderating to a projected rate of 5.9 percent in 2020 in its updated research released in December, unchanged from the previous forecast in October.

The moderate industrial growth and external risks may add to the pressure of a growth slowdown in the short term, the December edition of China Economic Update, said a brief report released by the bank.

China's GDP growth slowed to 6 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2019, down from 6.6 percent in 2018. The slowdown featured a deceleration in investment growth and weaker investor confidence amid heightened trade policy uncertainty.

The "Phase One" trade agreement between China and the United States has boosted market confidence, and analysts expect the good news can avoid further escalation of trade disputes and lead to higher trade flows.

A permanent resolution of bilateral trade tensions would be essential to reduce the negative impacts on the world's



second largest economy, said the World Bank.

Other external risks include a sharper-than-expected slowdown in major economies, particularly in parts of Europe, and weaker global trade and investment, it said.

The financial de-risking

Domestically, growth may suffer from the potential adverse effects of financial de-risking in the short term, given

its asymmetric impact on private sector financing and the risk of a disorderly unwinding of excessive leverage, the bank explained.

"Policies need to be carefully balanced to reduce cyclical risks to growth while staying the course on the necessary deleveraging of the economy," said Martin Raiser, World Bank country director for China. "This may require tolerating slower but safer growth in the short term."

"If downside risks lead to a sharp reduction in growth, the authorities have policy space to act, but this needs to be done in a way that is consistent with the desired rebalancing of the economy toward consumption, services, and private investment and with reducing financial and corporate sector risks," Raiser said.

The annual Central Economic Work Conference has just concluded last week, which set the basic policy tone for next year. It leaves plenty of flexibility in terms of actual policy implementation and the growth target is still highly important, said Song Yu, chief economist of Beijing Gao Hua Securities Co Ltd.

Infrastructure investment, as Song mentioned, is expected to be the major driving force to support the economy and avoid a sharp slowdown.

(Source: china.org.cn)

If it had a soul, America may have lost it

1 → The “average” American barely recognizes the failures because the propaganda has been so intense and successful, it seems, from the corporate media, no thanks to Clinton who during his terms permitted media consolidation and full dominance by a mere five or so media companies.

The U.S. economy and markets are inebriated, an accident waiting to happen. False statistics can't convince everybody. The military and its nearly trillion-dollar budgets year after year have bought little but scorn and horror and death overseas and unsustainable debts at home that have never before been seen in all of history. The almost two-decade long war on Afghanistan, for one thing, was never “winnable” and the Pentagon, Americans just learned this month, knew this when the war was initiated, but this was covered up.



Same with the Iraq war, except that if the goal was simply the destruction of a secular country, it succeeded. And so on in other areas of conflict such as Syria and Libya and Ukraine. It's possible to cite a much longer laundry list of what amounts to failed policies, and not just in the Middle East, but especially in the Middle East. Respect? The U.S. may have lost this forever given the magnitude of the various failures.

In truth, it's not just Trump (or Bush or Obama or the Clintons), but the entire country may need to be impeached and the payback has not even begun yet, but it's coming in the coming decade – first in dribbles as one can witness now but eventually in a flood of divisiveness and rancor and breakdown – which is why the sage among us have long counseled alleged enemies like Iran, despite the sanctions and more, to remain cool and thoughtful, to avoid war (if possible), to shore up its friendships and alliances because of all of America's detractors and enemies, the biggest by far may be its own population like Trump's fans in Michigan this week who are wallowing in self-deception even if they are not “bad” people. It is terribly sad. Ignorance is tragic.

One is almost inclined to suggest that Iran, which has since the JCPOA was trashed, still try to reach out to the U.S. and ask: Tell us Iranians what you could do for us aside from trying to crush our economy and people. We are almost 90 million strong in one of the oldest countries on earth with a proud heritage and if you were capable of putting yourself in the shoes of others, you would understand that we don't take kindly to attacks and sanctions. But still we want to know clearly: What is a FAIR quid pro quo to diminish the discord between us? Should we limit our nuclear capacities further?

Then you must resurrect the deal and drop the sanctions and then we can negotiate further and maybe go farther with that. Do you insist that we demolish what defenses we have against attack and walk away from our friends who are equally worried about your threats? In many respects, compared to your offensive capabilities, our defenses are minuscule but even so how can you expect Iran to drop them? Would you if you were in our shoes for the past 40 years?

Are we not to continue to recognize that your two allies in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Israel, continue to revel in war crimes and human rights abuses which, by the way, the entire world sees? Iran, as you know, has not attacked anyone aside from trying desperately to hold the line against further depredations by the Saudis and the Zionists against our neighbors. The Zionists, for example, with such influence in America have pushed so hard for support that America's response, aside from many billions of bucks, has been essentially to eviscerate free speech with anti-BDS laws in the U.S. and with your allies, like Britain and France, in Europe.

And what are you still doing in Syria? Please explain. Assad is popular and the Syrian Arab Army, don't you know, has virtually won the war against the terror unleashed by your foreign proxies like ISIS and al-Qaeda injected with your assistance in to Syria. And what about the theft of Syrian oil – is that truly likely to win America, allegedly a great country, friends? Why, President Assad now believes you are lying about the number of American troops or associates in Syria. The number of U.S. troops in Syria could be in the many thousands, opines a dismayed Assad, rather than the 1000 or 2000 or so the Pentagon claims are there. What is the truth? Can America TELL the truth?

The above might constitute a worthwhile, direct appeal to the Trump Administration by Iran: questions asked and questions answered coming from both sides, a basis for real talks that do not mean Iran has caved to U.S. imperialism but simply wants to discover what may be possible, what both countries can do, to reduce tensions because the world desires it. In any event, the greatest tragedy is that the U.S. has been rejecting the tremendous benefits, even in mutual trade, that would inevitably occur with a kinder, honest approach to Iran and its people.

Algeria swears in its new president Tebboune

1 → to defend the Constitution, to ensure the continuity of the State, to meet the conditions necessary for the normal functioning of institutions and the constitutional order, to work for the strengthening of the democratic process, to respect the free choice of the people, as well as the institutions and laws of the Republic, to preserve the integrity of the national territory, the unity of the people and of the nation, to protect the fundamental freedoms and rights of man and of the citizen, to work tirelessly for the development and prosperity of the people and to work, with all my might, to realization of the great ideals of justice, freedom and peace in the world. God is a witness.”

The first mission of the President of the Republic after taking the oath will consist in the appointment of the Prime Minister “after consulting the parliamentary majority”, according to the provisions of article 91 of the Constitution.

Article 93 of the country's fundamental law provides that the President of the Republic “shall appoint the members of the Government after consultation with the Prime Minister who coordinates the action of the Government”. The latter “shall draw up his action plan and present it to the Council of Ministers”.

In his first presidential address, Tebboune thanked voters who he said put the country back on the “constitutional track”, pledging to execute the 54 commitments contained in his electoral platform, including “deep” reform of the Constitution which will help build a “new Republic.” He promised that the new Constitution would limit presidents to two terms of office.

Tebboune, the independent candidate, also praised the protest movement, committing to extend his hand to protesters and launching a “serious dialogue in the service of Algeria and only Algeria,” with the main players of the popular movement Hirak.

Moreover, Tebboune declared that the fight against corruption will continue and that “the presidential pardon will not concern the individuals involved in cases of corruption.”

The electoral platform of the president elect granted utmost priority to youth matters for he is committed to listening to this segment of society, announcing that the new government “will include young ministers.”

Globally, Tebboune renewed the attachment of Algeria to the principle of non-interference in the coun-



tries' internal affairs, while “strongly” opposing any attempt of foreign interference in oil-rich country's internal affairs.

After his speech, Tebboune embraced the outgoing Head of State Abdelkader Bensalah and army chief Ahmed Gaed Salah, and awarded them medals of national merit.

Algerians hope Abdelmadjid Tebboune's inauguration will chart a new era in the North African country, allowing it to turn the page on 10 months of protests that put their legitimacy in doubt and stalled the economy.

Following his landslide victory, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune received several congratulatory messages from several sovereigns and heads of State, officials of organizations and leaders of political parties, including the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Iranian President congratulated Abdelmadjid Tebboune on the election to the post of president of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Iran's Rouhani sent a cable to Tebboune to congrat-

ulate him on his election win, expressing best wishes of success to him, and further progress and prosperity to the Algerian people.

Rouhani described Algeria's presidential election as an important step toward the realization of democracy, development and prosperity.

In this aspect, the Iranian President voiced his hope for stronger relations between the two countries during the new president's term in office.

Earlier, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi extended his congratulations to the Algerian government and nation over holding “successful” presidential election.

On Monday, the Constitutional Council announced the final results of the December 12th presidential election. Abdelmadjid Tebboune won the election with 58.13% of votes cast, far ahead of the four other candidates: Abdelkader Bengrina (17.37% of votes), Ali Benflis (10.55%), Azzedine Mihoubi (7.28%) and Abdelaziz Belaid (6.67%).

The Afghanistan fiasco and the decline and fall of the American military

By Philip Giraldi

A devastating investigative report was published in the Washington Post on December 9th. Dubbed the “Afghanistan Papers” in a nod to the Vietnam War's famous “Pentagon Papers,” the report relied on thousands of documents to similarly expose how the US government at the presidential level across three administrations, acting in collaboration with the military brass and civilian bureaucracy, deliberately and systematically lied repeatedly to the public and media about the situation in Afghanistan. Officials from the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations have all surged additional troops into Afghanistan while also regularly overstating the “success” that the United States was attaining in stabilizing and democratizing the country. While they were lying, the senior officers and government officials understood clearly that the war was, in fact, unwinnable.

The story should have been featured all across the US as Afghanistan continues to kill Americans and much larger numbers of Afghans while also draining billions of dollars from the United States Treasury, but the mainstream media was largely unresponsive, preferring to cover the impeachment saga. Rather more responsive were the families of Army Chief Warrant Officer Second Class David C. Knadle, 33, of Tarrant, Texas, and Chief Warrant Officer Second Class Kirk T. Fuchigami Jr., 25, of Keau, Hawaii. Both were killed in a helicopter crash on November 20th in Afghanistan's Logar province while assisting troops on the ground, according to a Pentagon press release. They were participating in what was characteristically dubbed Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Both men were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, Texas. The Taliban took credit for the downing of the chopper, but the Army is still investigating the cause.

Knadle and Fuchigami are only the most recent of the more than 2,400 American service members who have been killed in Afghanistan since October 2001, together with 20,589 wounded and an estimated 110,000 Afghan dead. In the wake of the Post's report, Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1974, told a CNN reporter that the Pentagon and Afghanistan Papers exposed the same governmental dysfunction: “The presidents and the generals had a pretty realistic view of what they were up against, which they did not want to admit to the American people.”



The New Republic observes how “The documents are an indictment not only of one aspect of American foreign policy, but also of the US's entire policymaking apparatus. They reveal a bipartisan consensus to lie about what was actually happening in Afghanistan: chronic waste and chronic corruption, one ill-conceived development scheme after another, resulting in a near-unmitigated failure to bring peace and prosperity to the country. Both parties had reason to engage in the cover-up. For the Bush administration, Afghanistan was a key component in the war on terror. For the Obama administration, Afghanistan was the ‘good war’ that stood in contrast to the nightmare in Iraq.”

The Afghan War's true costs have never been precisely calculated, though they certainly exceed \$1 trillion and counting. The documents relied upon for the Post report include more than 2,000 pages of confidential interviews with people who played a direct role in the war, including soldiers and diplomats, as well as civilian aid workers and Afghan officials. Many of the interviews were initially carried out by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). The Post divided the interviews and supporting documentation into subject categories that demonstrate how the situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate as soon as the United States followed up on its rapid invasion with a plan for nation building. Resorting to the usual American expedient, the occupiers flooded the country with money, which meant that the only thing blooming on the thin soil was corruption, apart from the poppies that have made Afghanistan the world's leading supplier of opium.

One contractor who was involved in nation building described how he was required to spend \$3 million daily for

projects in an Afghan district roughly the size of a US county. He asked a visiting congressman if he could be authorized to spend that much money in the US “[The lawmaker] said hell no. ‘Well, sir, that's what you just obligated us to spend and I'm doing it for communities that live in mud huts with no windows.’”

In another interview the report cites Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, the White House Afghan war czar during the Bush and Obama administrations, who told the interviewers in 2015. “We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan — we didn't know what we were doing,” later adding “What are we trying to do here? We didn't have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking.”

Army Colonel Bob Crowley, who served in Kabul in 2013-4, described how at headquarters “Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible,” adding also how “Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone.”

Part of the problem with Afghanistan was the rotation of American soldiers in and then out after one year or less, just as they were learning about the country and the problems they faced. It has led to the joke that the United States has not fought an eighteen-year war in Afghanistan: it has fought a one-year war eighteen times.

The Post investigative report coincides with an interesting deconstruction of the US military and how it operates. David Swanson of World BEYOND War provides a lengthy review of West Point Professor Tim Bakken's new book *The Cost of Loyalty: Dishonesty, Hubris, and Failure in the US Military*. Per Swanson, the book “traces a path of corruption, barbarism, violence, and unaccountability

that makes its way from the United States' military academies (West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs) to the top ranks of the US military and US governmental policy, and from there into a broader US culture that, in turn, supports the subculture of the military and its leaders. The US Congress and presidents have ceded tremendous power to generals. The State Department and even the US Institute of Peace are subservient to the military. The corporate media and the public help maintain this arrangement with their eagerness to denounce anyone who opposes the generals. Even opposing giving free weapons to Ukraine is now quasi-treasonous.”

Bakken even disputes the widely held view that the military academies have high academic standards. He describes how the “system” pays to get potential athletes and accepts students nominated by congressmen commensurate with donations made to fund re-election campaigns. Swanson sums it up by observing how the academies offer “a community college-level education only with more hazing, violence, and tamping down of curiosity. West Point takes soldiers and declares them to be professors, which works roughly as well as declaring them to be relief workers or nation builders or peace keepers. The school parks ambulances nearby in preparation for violent rituals. Boxing is a required subject. Women are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted at the three military academies than at other US universities.”

Bakken concludes that appreciating the fundamental structural flaws in the US armed forces “leads to a clearer understanding of the deficiencies in the military and how America can lose wars.” In fact, he does not even seek to identify a war that the United States has won since World War 2 in spite of the country being nearly constantly engaged in conflict.

Together the Bakken book and the Afghanistan Papers reveal just how much the American people have been brainwashed by their leaders into believing a perpetual warfare national narrative that is more fiction than fact. Donald Trump may have actually appreciated that the voters were tired of the wars and was elected on that basis, but he has completely failed to deliver on his promise to retrench. It suggests that America will remain in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future and the inevitable next war, wherever it might be, will be another failure, no matter who is elected in 2020.

Ph.D., Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest
(Source: strategic-culture.org)

Peace on the Korean Peninsula requires the consensus of all parties involved

By Yang Yizhong & Paul Wang

MODERN DIPLOMACY — On December 16, China and Russia proposed that the UN Security Council lift a ban on North Korea's exporting statues, especially seafood and textile items. Tension has been rising between the United States and North Korea over the past weeks after a series of weapon tests conducted by Pyongyang and hostile rhetoric traded between the two sides. As usual, Beijing has reiterated that it hopes the two sides could meet each other halfway to push for denuclearization, indicating U.S. lifting sanctions in exchange for Pyongyang abandoning its nuclear and missile programs. Echoing China's calling, Russia said the draft, whose measures also included the lifting of a ban on the North Koreans working abroad, was aimed at encouraging talks between Washington and Pyongyang. Yet, the White House said that the president insisted on keeping sanctions in place. And they need to see full and verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. It is clear that the U.S. position regarding sanctions has not changed. Meanwhile, Pyongyang has vowed to take an unspecified "new path" if Washington fails to soften its stance before the end of the year.

In effect, the U.S. special envoy Stephen Biegun has started his week-long trip to East Asia, first touring to Japan and then to South Korea, two key allies of the United States in the region. Not surprisingly, Washington also declared that Biegun will visit Beijing on Thursday and Friday after China and Russia proposed lifting some UN sanctions on North Korea while he called on Pyongyang to return its offer of talks, saying Washington remains committed to the nuclear talks with Pyongyang. It is held that during his stay in Beijing, Biegun will hold talks with Chinese officials to "discuss the need to maintain international unity" on the Korean Peninsula issue.

Henry Kissinger once said that in foreign affairs, the acceptance of the framework of the international order by all states involved, at least to the extent that no one party feels so dissatisfied that it expresses its anger in a provocative manner. Thus a legitimate order is by no means making conflicts impossible, but it limits their scope. Conflicts may occur, but they will be fought in the name of the existing structure and the peace which follows will be justified as a better expression of the "legitimate", general consensus. In the classical sense, diplomacy implies the adjustment of differences through negotiation, and is possible only in "legitimate" international orders. Trump did express that he would be disappointed if North Korea continues to try to obtain what it needs by a provocative way, referring to two weapon tests on December 7 and 13. Yet, when his envoy Biegun ended a three-day visit to Seoul on Tuesday, he also said the U.S. doesn't have a deadline and is willing to discuss all issues of interest if Pyongyang is sincere to return to the negotiation table. The signal from Washington is clear that "it is time for all parties concerned to do the jobs as Stephen Biegun and his team are here. It is well-known how to reach us. Let's get this done."

Diplomacy essentially speaks soft by insisting on negotiations. It is the positions of China and its strategic partner Russia, alongside South Korea which, though an ally of the United States, has proposed that the nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington remain possible when the two sides hold off any words and deeds rattling each other. During the 35-minute session at the Blue House in Seoul, President Moon requested Biegun's continued efforts to move forward the Korean peace process. It is widely held that the latest moves by Pyongyang are not intended to deteriorate its relations with the United States. Instead, it is trying to "coerce" Washington to go back to the negotiation table and reopen talks. If there is at least one thing that Washington and Pyongyang are on the same page, it is that both of them would not like to see peace talks broken down and work towards a possible denuclearization deal. For many reasons, little progress has been made on



this issue despite three meetings between Kim and his U.S. counterpart since last year. Yet, the critical difference between two parties lies in the approach of the negotiation. The leader in Pyongyang has made it clear many times that the U.S. should propose a new plan of a possible denuclearization deal before the dialogue. However, the U.S., already holding a draft in hand, is reluctant to show its initiative before the game even begins. Otherwise, Pyongyang would win the game as it would show the U.S. is coerced to accept Pyongyang's terms, which would be absolutely objected by the hawks in the White House.

Accordingly, there comes the dilemma. Although both sides are willing to get the job done, the United States wants to propose the new plan during the talks rather than prior to it. With the year-end deadline set by Pyongyang approaching and Washington not making any concessions, it seems that Kim Jungun is tired of waiting. Trump has established good personal relations with Kim, so at least there is no hostility at the highest level. Yet, with the 2020 elections approaching, a possible new leader would bring new uncertainties. In addition, the location for the important test is the Sohae satellite launch site, which Kim has promised to dismantle at the Singapore summit. All these might be seen as Kim's tact to issue an "unhappy" warning to Trump. But, despite all uncertainties, as a Chinese scholar observed, the impetus is always there as long as North Korea wants to lift sanctions to develop the economy, and if Trump wants to end the 70-year-long conflicts and leave the significant diplomacy legacy.

The good token should be noted, what used to drive the two side apart is the approach towards denuclearization: that the U.S. insisted on total denuclearization first while North Korea demanded that it would only accept a step-by-step and reciprocal deal. Now with the most hawkish character John Bolton leaving the White House, Washington is also softening its tone. U.S. special envoy Stephen Biegun has been a supporter of a step-by-step deal; last week, U.S. envoy to the U.N. Kelly Craft has also stated that Washington was prepared to be flexible in how they approached the issue. True, there have been no details to reveal just how "flexible" the U.S. is prepared to be, yet the commitment to push the dialogue between the two sides is still there.

From the very beginning, China has played a unique role in safeguarding the peace of the peninsula and the whole region. More than four formal meetings in one year between Chinese leader Xi and his Korean counterpart

have sufficiently revealed the pivotal and irreplaceable role of China in leading the way for denuclearization. If people are serious to read through the "Four-point" proposal by Xi during his two meetings with Kim, it is self-evident that China along with Russia has played the role in driving towards a peaceful settlement on the Korean Peninsula issue. First, China has insisted on denuclearization which needs to protect both sides' core security interests, and Kim himself has agreed to give up the nuclear program if the US and South Korea respond to his proposal with good will. Second, since China and North Korea have resumed their friendship, Xi and Kim have highlighted the party-to-party strategic coordination as part of their shared political heritage. Considering the uncertainties in American politics, China has reiterated that the Korean Peninsula issue can be resolved only through peaceful means. Third, China and North Korea have stressed that their ties have common destinies when it comes to geopolitical issues, economic development and ideological affinities. Especially, China has vowed to stand ready to work with all the parties involved in order to adopt the dual-track approach. Thus, China has taken on great geopolitical significance in the Asia-Pacific, and it is vital that tensions on the Korean Peninsula be kept from escalating in the whole region.

In light of this, China would be able to play a constructive and fruitful role in the upcoming meetings with Stephen Biegun. Considering that among all the parties involved with the Korean nuclear issues, China is the only power that has forged and continues to enhance the comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia and has maintained mutual cooperation with the Republic of Korea (ROK), let alone China's long-time friendship and strategic alliance with North Korea. In addition, China has resumed good working relations with Japan, whose PM Shinzo Abe spoke highly of China's role in solving the Korean Peninsula issue through peaceful means. Perhaps, the most important is that Xi and Trump have forged good personal relations as it was quoted that President Trump paid great attention to China's stance on the Korean Peninsula issue, and is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with China to resolve the issue through negotiations and consultations. Due to this reality, it is possible that China will be able to promote the consensus between the U.S. and North Korea and all parties involved. This is the foundation of the peaceful settlement of the denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

Global wave of debt is largest, fastest in 50 years

MD Staff — Debt in emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) climbed to a record US\$55 trillion in 2018, marking an eight-year surge that has been the largest, fastest, and most broad-based in nearly five decades, according to a new World Bank Group study that urges policymakers to act promptly to strengthen their economic policies and make them less vulnerable to financial shocks.

The analysis is contained in Global Waves of Debt, a comprehensive study of the four major episodes of debt accumulation that have occurred in more than 100 countries since 1970. It found that the debt-to-GDP ratio of developing countries has climbed 54 percentage points to 168 percent since the debt buildup began in 2010. On average, that ratio has risen by about seven percentage points a year—nearly three times as fast it did during the Latin America debt crisis of the 1970s. The increase, moreover, has been exceptionally broad-based—involving government as well as private debt, and observable in virtually all regions across the world.

"The size, speed, and breadth of the latest debt wave should concern us all," said World Bank Group President David Malpass. "It underscores why debt management and transparency need to be top priorities for policymakers—so they can increase growth and investment and ensure that the debt they take on contributes to better development outcomes for the people."

According to the report, the prevalence of historically low global interest rates mitigates the risk of a crisis for now. But the record of the past 50 years highlights the dangers: Since 1970, about half of the 521 national episodes of rapid debt growth in developing countries have been accompanied by financial crises that significantly weakened per-capita income and investment.

"History shows that large debt surges often coincide with financial crises in developing countries, at great cost to the population," said Ceyla Pazarbasoglu, the World Bank Group's Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions. "Policymakers should act promptly to enhance debt sustainability and reduce exposure to economic shocks."

The analysis found that this latest wave is different from the previous three in several ways—it involves a simultaneous buildup in both public and private debt; it involves new types of creditors; and it is not limited to one or two regions. Some of the increase in debt has been driven by China, whose debt-to-GDP ratio has risen 72 points to 255 percent since 2010. But debt is substantially higher in developing countries even if China is excluded from the analysis—among EMDEs, it is twice the nominal level reached in 2007.

Those characteristics pose challenges that policymakers haven't had to tackle before. For example, nonresident investors today account for 50 percent of the government debt of EMDEs, considerably more than in 2010. For low-income countries, much of this debt has been on non-concessional terms, and outside the debt-resolution framework of the Paris Club.

Under the circumstances, policymakers should develop mechanisms to facilitate debt resolution when it becomes necessary, according to the report. Greater debt transparency would also help.

Jeff Halper: Israel's demolishing Palestinian houses policy of ethnic cleansing

TEHRAN (FNA) — Jeff Halper, political activist, says Israel's aim is to take more Palestinian lands by driving them out of their territory or confine the remaining people in a relatively small area.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with FNA, Jeff Halper said Israel extends the notorious separation wall "as long and as high as Israel needs to define its demographic borders and the cantos in which the Palestinians will be confined".

Jeff Halper is an American anthropologist, author, lecturer, and political activist who has lived in the West Bank since 1973. He is a co-founder of The People Yes! Network (TPYN) and the former Director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN).

Below is the full text of the interview:

Q: What is Israel's philosophy of demolishing Palestinians' homes? It has enough resources to devastate all the West Bank? Why does Israel demolish homes area by area?

A: Israel's policy of home demolitions goes back to the Nakba in 1948, when it systematically demolished more than 530 entire villages, towns and urban areas, some 52,000 homes. Some other 55,000 have been demolished in the occupied Palestinian Territory since 1967, plus thousands more within Israel until today. It is a policy of ethnic cleansing, designed to drive as many Palestinians out of the country or to confine those that stay to small enclaves on 15% of the country. Israel will not demolish homes in those enclaves (Areas A & B, Gaza except in military attacks) and the enclaves of East Jerusalem and Israel proper since it needs them to house the population in concentrated areas.

Q: How do you view the demolition of Palestinian homes near the separation wall in East Jerusalem al-Quds?

A: All demolitions are war crimes since they violate the Fourth Geneva Convention that protects a civilian population living under occupation. The act itself was not unusual. Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes is a routine, almost daily occurrence. What set it apart was the scale, the impunity, and the political implications. On July 22, some 900 Israel forces were deployed to demolish 13 apartment blocks, evicting people in 70 apartments.

The action in July had all the elements of the slow-moving but relentless process of demolition: Israel's use of zoning, planning, law, and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy as mechanisms for taking all the Palestinian land available for the natural expansion of its towns, cities, and villages, while freezing Palestinian building in 1948 in Israel and in 1967 in the occupied territories.

Q: Palestinians cannot build apartment buildings on their own lands near the apartheid wall even with the permission issued by the Palestinian Authority. Getting a building permission from Israel is not possible, either. Do you think the apartheid wall is being extended even more into the West Bank?

A: No, the apartheid wall is as long and as high as Israel needs to define its "demographic borders" and the cantos in which the Palestinians will be confined. House demolitions today is clearing land in order to link up the settlements into large settlement blocs.

EU policies don't tackle refugee crisis, help ultra-right to beat others soon

TEHRAN (FNA) — From the Far East to the Middle East and beyond, many long-suffering nations are still bearing the brunt of America's endless war, state-sponsored terrorism, economic terrorism, permanent occupation and resource theft.

The effects of these US-backed conflicts and deepening and fragmenting landscape highlights how ending the endless war as well as adhering to international law and governance with short and long-term efficiency should become normative when dealing with all these contemporary challenges and crises.

The so-called European refugee crisis from late 2014 and its aftermath have come to symbolize such an emergency situation. They are the reasons why Europe is no longer willing to help the "World's Sheriff" to continue its misadventures in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. They have also lost big time in the processes of America's endless wars and military occupations.

Strange enough, the refugee crisis and its socio-political impacts in Europe has allowed far-right parties to take advantage of nationalistic values, with migration viewed through the lens of security - limitation of refugee flows and the fight against terrorist groups

— law and order, while the centre-left have had to bridge the working class's fear of cheap labor and economic competition with the middle-class's liberal socio-cultural preferences.

The European Union's reaction towards the Syrian-Middle East refugee crisis and its aftermath cannot be seen as a political crisis reaction per se, since the solutions it initiated to manage migration built on existing legislation and practices, helping to consolidate these emergencies in order to nationalize migration politics. This was a huge mistake.

There is a clear political red line between addressing so-called root causes and managing the refugee crisis by securing external borders and preventing movement of war refugees. What we are witnessing is rather a political crisis and intentional inaction, which have lasted at least since 2001. The crisis is the reason why European Western policies are still unable or unwilling to help to end America's endless war and military misadventures in the Middle East, especially in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen.

The EU's refugee crisis and migration policies have, with their primary focus on securitisation, come to symbolize a harmful politicization of humanitarian-

ism, which seems to persist into the New Year period and very like beyond. In the following years, little progress will be made towards a unified European refugee and migration policy. As a result, EU countries would very much continue to support America's endless war in the Middle East and beyond, especially its sanctions regime and economic terrorism against countries that are not on the same page with Washington and the Zionist regime of Israel.

The time is now for the EU countries to search for a new strategic rationalist raison d'être for their common foreign policy, through attempting to politically solve the ongoing crises in the Middle East and ending their devastating support for America's endless wars and military occupations that they all know have only worsened terrorism and extremism not just in the region, but in Europe.

Sadly enough, the EU has failed to solve the structural and systemic impasse in approaching migration flows and refugee crisis, which will not end by continuing to support America's wars and military adventures, including economic terrorism earmarked by economic sanctions and financial restrictions.

There are clear misinterpretations and ambiguities in Europe's war-on-terror agenda towards migration and

refugee crisis, which have toxically been coined with security politics of Washington. Europe has no choice but to find a common ground and work towards a genuine security union with other countries which are at the forefront of the real war on terrorism and extremism, including Iran, Russia and China.

EU countries should work even more closely with countries like Iran to tackle human trafficking, drug trafficking, secure borders, optimize effective returns and tackle root causes of refugee crisis through all-inclusive initiatives that put an end to endless wars and permanent military occupations in the region.

The EU's current interaction with Iran, China and Russia and partnerships of border control are narrow and ultimately self-eroding. Its policies do not tackle any root causes of the current refugee crisis. By aiding Washington to continue its self-serving wars and occupations, they risk limiting international accountability and aggravating the situation in the Middle East - some of the actual root causes of Europe's current refugee crisis and growing insecurity.

If present EU rulers continue their current subordination to the US, they will soon see themselves removed from power and replaced by far right.

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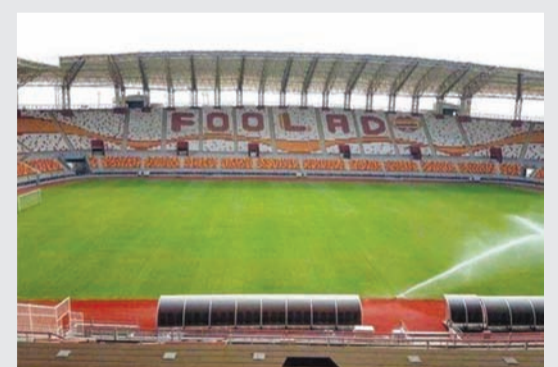
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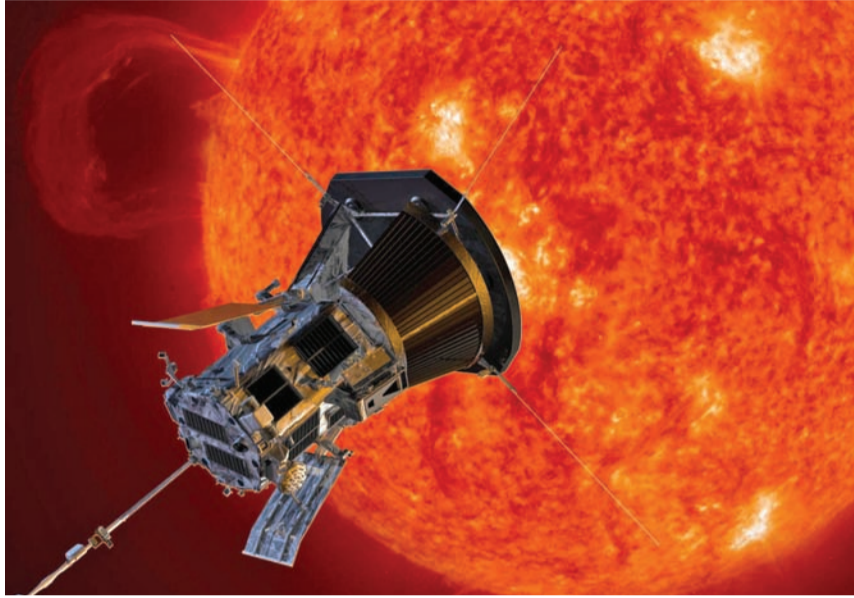
NASA's probe soaring near Sun reveals surprises about solar wind

Troves of new data from a NASA probe's close encounters with the Sun are giving scientists unique insight about the solar wind and space weather more generally as the spacecraft zooms through the outermost part of the star's atmosphere.

Researchers on Wednesday described the first published findings from the Parker Solar Probe, a spacecraft launched in 2018 to journey closer to the Sun than any other human-made object. The findings, offering fresh details about how the Sun spawns space weather, are reshaping astronomers' understanding of violent solar wind that can hamper satellites and electronics on Earth.

"We were certainly hoping we'd see new phenomena and new processes when we got close to the Sun - and we certainly did," Nicola Fox, director of the U.S. space agency's heliophysics division, told reporters. "Some of the information that we found pretty much confirmed what we expected, but some of it is totally unexpected."

Earth is roughly 93 million miles from the Sun. The probe ventured as close as 15 million miles (24 million km) to the Sun to gather the data used in the studies published



in the journal Nature. The probe eventually will travel within about 4 million miles (6 million km) from the Sun's surface, seven

times closer than any previous spacecraft. The probe has endured extreme heat while flying through the outermost part of the Sun's

atmosphere, called the solar corona, that gives rise to solar wind - the hot, energized, charged particles that stream outward from the Sun and fill the solar system.

Oscillations in the speed of these charged particles beaming outward from the solar corona have previously been thought to dissipate gradually, much like the waves seen after plucking a guitar string fading from the middle.

One of the probe's "really big surprises," according to one of the researchers, was the detection of sudden, abrupt spikes in the speed of the solar wind that were so violent that the magnetic field flips itself around, a phenomenon called "switchbacks."

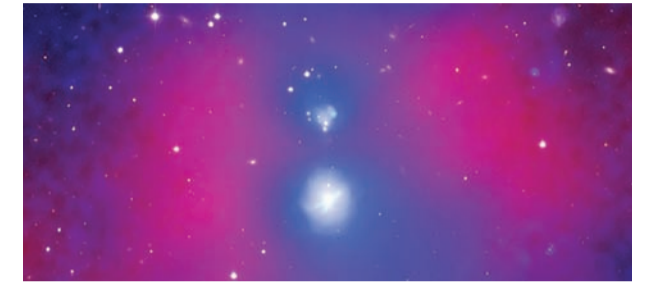
"We're finding these discrete, powerful waves that wash over the spacecraft, kind of like rogue waves in an ocean," said Justin Kasper, a principal investigator whose team at the University of Michigan built a solar wind-sensing instrument on the Parker probe. "They carry a tremendous amount of energy." "This will dramatically change our theories for how the corona and solar wind are being heated," Kasper added.

(Source: Reuters)

Astronomers have detected two galaxy groups on a violent collision course

Astronomers are keeping a close eye on what they say could be the most violent collision of galaxies ever observed, with two groups of galaxies currently coursing towards each other at around 6.4 million kilometers (or 4 million miles) an hour.

The two groups of galaxies are on the way to forming a larger group known as a cluster, and researchers think this spectacular slamming match could reveal invaluable insights into how such clusters grow and evolve.



All this is happening around 380 million light-years from Earth, in a system called NGC 6338. Its total mass is estimated to be somewhere around 100 trillion times that of the Sun - 16 percent of that is hot gas, 1 percent is stars, and the other 83 percent is thought to be dark matter.

Enlisted to help record the event for posterity are the Chandra X-ray Observatory operated by NASA and the ESA's XMM-Newton up in space, plus the Giant Meterwave Radio Telescope (GMRT) and the Apache Point Observatory down on the ground.

"The NGC 6338 system provides an excellent example of both rapid radiative cooling and violent merger processes at the group scale," the team writes in a study documenting this collision.

It's not just the speed of the galaxy collisions that makes NGC 6338 special, but the heat, too: The hot gas in the system is reaching around 20 million degrees Celsius (a little over 36 million degrees Fahrenheit).

The latest data reveal regions of gas being heated by shock fronts, created in a similar way to sonic booms by waves of energy travelling at incredibly high speeds - in this case it's happening as the galaxy groups collide. This heating had been predicted by computer models before, but has now been observed for the first time.

What's missing is heat generated by supermassive black holes; this heat source is commonly found in galaxy groups and clusters, but it appears to be missing in NGC 6338.

Galaxies often clump together in groups or clusters, pulled together by the effects of gravity, and astronomers have plenty left to learn about the strange physics of such massive congregations. The largest clusters can contain thousands of galaxies. (Just think about it for a second.)

Scientists have already found galaxy clusters helpful for probing the mysteries of dark matter, using starlight between the clusters to map out where dark matter might be hiding.

Astronomers are also interested in the magnetic fields stretching between and within galaxy clusters. These bridges of radio-emitting plasma are hard to detect, but can teach us more about the gravitational pull of these big groups of galaxies.

The clustering of galaxies also affects star formation because of the forces at work, so with another cluster on the way to being created in NGC 6338, astronomers will be eager to find out what else they can find out.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Data shows earliest supermassive black holes had plenty to eat

By Brooks Hays

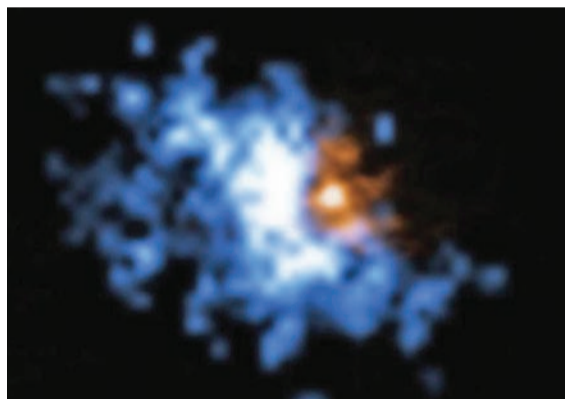
Every since scientists found supermassive black holes in the early universe, they have been trying to figure out what they ate.

Models of the early universe predicted that most of the gas and dust present would be used up by star formation. But new research suggests an excess of gas surrounding young galaxies would have helped sate growing black holes in the early universe.

"We are now able to demonstrate, for the first time, that primordial galaxies do have enough food in their environments to sustain both the growth of supermassive black holes and vigorous star formation," lead researcher Emanuele Paolo Farina, of the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, said in a news release.

Until now, scientists weren't sure how supermassive black holes grew to such great sizes so shortly after the Big Bang.

"The presence of these early monsters, with masses several billion times the mass of our sun, is a big



mystery," said Farina.

Farina and his colleagues were able to spot the gas and dust that fueled the rapid growth of early supermassive black holes using the European Southern Observatory's Atacama

Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array, or ALMA.

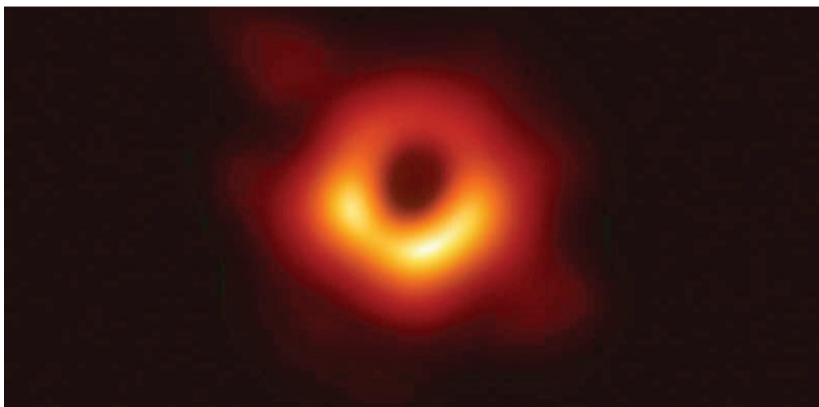
Using ALMA's MUSE instrument, researchers imaged several quasars, supermassive black holes at the centers of galaxies, in the distant universe. The quasars appeared as they were when the universe was just 870 million years old. The images, described this week in the Astrophysical Journal, revealed massive reservoirs of cool, dense hydrogen gas surrounding 12 of the 31 surveyed quasars.

The gas halos imaged by MUSE, the Multi Unit Spectroscopic Explorer, extended out some 100,000 light-years from the centers of each quasar. Scientists suggest the gas would have offered plenty of sustenance to the rapidly growing black holes.

In the future, scientists hope to image quasars and galaxies in the early universe in even more detail using the Extremely Large Telescope - currently under construction and expected to capture first light in 2025.

"With the power of the ELT, we will be able to delve even deeper into the early Universe to find many more such gas nebulae," Farina said.

Historic 1st photo of a black hole named science breakthrough of 2019



The first image of a black hole, previously thought nigh impossible to capture, was named the top scientific breakthrough of 2019 by the journal Science.

Black holes have gravitational pulls so powerful that, past thresholds known as their event horizons, nothing can escape, not even light. Supermassive black holes millions to billions of times the mass of our sun are thought to lurk in the hearts of virtually every large galaxy, influencing the fate of every star caught in their gravitational thrall.

Using Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity, German physicist Karl Schwarzschild was the first to lay the foundation of the science describing black holes. In the decades since then, scientists have detected numerous signs of black holes, such as the effects their gravity have on their surroundings and the ripples in the fabric of space and time known as gravitational waves emitted when they collide.

Although researchers had spent years theorizing about black holes, few imagined they would ever get a chance to actually see one. Since black holes reflect no light, they are perfectly camouflaged against the darkness of space. In addition, black holes are very small by cosmic standards - for example, the supermassive black hole Sagittarius A*, located in the Milky Way's core, is about 4 million times the mass of the sun but only about 14.6 million miles (23.6 million kilometers) in diameter, half as wide as the distance between Mercury and the sun.

However, about two decades ago, astronomers began wondering if they might be able to capture a photo of a black hole if it was backlit against the hot swirling gases close to its event horizon. These gases shine bright at many wavelengths of light, including ones that could pierce any murky clouds that may surround them. Scientists could then detect a dark spot

against a bright background, the so-called black hole shadow.

In April, the international Event Horizon Telescope consortium revealed they successfully captured the first images of a black hole shadow. "Seeing is believing," Avi Loeb, chair of astronomy at Harvard University, told Space.com.

The key to this breakthrough was how the researchers linked radio dishes across the globe to create a virtual telescope effectively about the size of Earth, stretching from the United States to Mexico to Chile to the South Pole. Ultimately, they succeeded in taking a photo of the silhouette of the supermassive black hole at the center of the nearby galaxy Messier 87. Although Messier 87 is 2,000 times farther from Earth than Sagittarius A*, its central black hole is more than a thousand times the mass of Sagittarius A*, so it appears about as big in the sky - about the size as an orange on the moon.

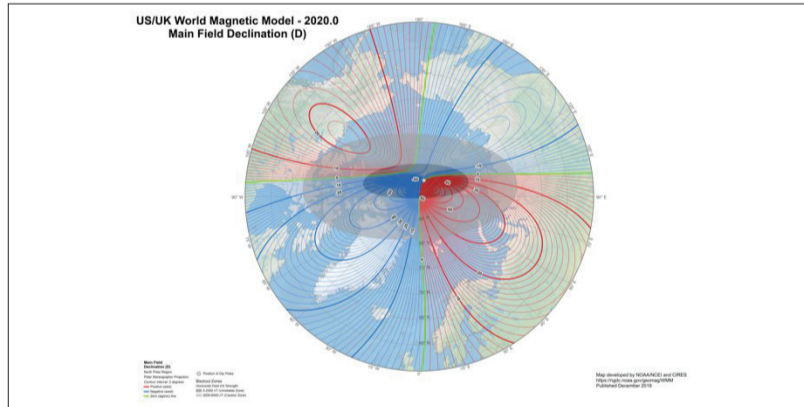
"Having the first image of a black hole is a major breakthrough," Loeb said. "Albert Einstein and Karl Schwarzschild would have been delighted to see this image merely a century after contemplating the modern concept of black holes."

Currently, there are plans to capture images of more black holes with even greater resolution. In 2017, the Event Horizon Telescope included eight radio observatories, and three more are expected to join by 2020, boosting its power, Loeb said.

In the future, researchers hope to see explosive activity from black holes, such as when they rip a star apart or when they burst with jets of plasma traveling near the speed of light. "But most importantly, we hope to see something unexpected that would revolutionize our views on black holes and the behavior of matter near them," Loeb said.

(Source: msn)

Earth's magnetic North Pole keeps moving towards Siberia



Our planet is restless, and its poles are wandering. Of course, the geographic North Pole is in the same place it always was, but its magnetic counterpart - indicated by the N on any compass - is roaming towards Siberia at record-breaking speeds that scientists don't fully comprehend.

It's worth stating that while the pace is remarkable, the movement itself isn't. The magnetic north pole is never truly stationary, owing to fluctuations in the flow of molten iron within the core of our planet, which affect how Earth's magnetic field behaves.

"Since its first formal discovery in 1831, the north magnetic pole has travelled around 1,400 miles (2,250 km)," the NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) explains on its website.

"This wandering has been generally quite slow, allowing scientists to keep track of its position fairly easily."

That slow wander has quickened of late. In recent decades, the magnetic north pole accelerated to an average speed of 55 kilometers (34 miles) per year.

The most recent data suggest its movement towards Russia may have slowed down to about 40 kilometers (25 miles) annually, but even so, compared to theoretical measurements going back hundreds of years, this is a phenomenon scientists have never witnessed before.

"The movement since the 1990s is much faster than at any time for at least four centuries," geomagnetic specialist Ciaran Beggan from the British Geological Survey (BGS) told FT.

"We really don't know much about the changes in the core that's driving it."

While researchers can't fully explain the core fluctuations affecting the North Pole's extreme restlessness, they can map Earth's magnetic field and calculate its rate of change over time, which helps us to predict how

it may be distributed in the future.

That system produces what is called the World Magnetic Model (WMM): a representation of the field that powers everything from navigational tools like GPS to mapping services and consumer compass apps, not to mention systems used by NASA, the FAA, and the military, among other institutions.

Despite its importance, the WMM's powers of foresight - like the magnetic north pole itself - are not set in stone, and the readings need to be updated every five years to keep the model accurate.

"Provided that suitable satellite magnetic observations are available, the prediction of the WMM is highly accurate on its release date and then subsequently deteriorates towards the end of the five-year epoch, when it has to be updated with revised values of the model coefficients," the NCEI explains.

That's the point we're up to now, with the bodies that maintain the WMM - the NCEI and the BGS - having finally updated the model last week.

The refresh actually comes a whole year ahead of schedule due to the unusual speed with which the magnetic north pole has been drifting, meaning that the WMM's predictions have deteriorated faster than usual this cycle, despite the recent slowdown.

While the speed fluctuations seem crazy, it's actually a more moderate range of pole movement than has happened in Earth's history: when the magnetic poles move far enough out of position, they can actually flip, something that happens every few hundreds of thousands of years.

There's no telling for sure when that might happen next, but if and when it does happen, it could have serious implications for humanity.

In the meantime, the new WMM data is good until 2025, and rest assured, no imminent flipping is predicted for now.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Scientists closer to solving Newton's 'three-body problem'

For more than three centuries, Newton's laws of motion have helped scientists understand the relationships between body of mass and the forces that act on it, like the forces acting on a planet orbiting the Sun.

Newton's equations weren't perfect, however.

When trying to account for three bodies - a moon orbiting a planet orbiting a Sun, for example - Newton struggled to solve the equations related to mass and motion.

Simply put, neither Newton's laws of motion, nor any physical laws, explain the movements of three bodies in orbit. The equations don't compute.



Fast forward 350 years, and scientists have made one of the largest steps yet in solving Newton's three-body problem.

For the new research, scientists focused on recent discoveries related to unstable three-body systems, chiefly, that models suggest unstable three-body systems will eventually expel one of their members, with the remaining two forming a stable relationship. Astrophysicist Nicholas Stone, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Racah Institute of Physics, and Nathan Leigh, a professor at Chile's La Universidad de Concepción, used mathematical equations to describe and predict the movements of planets in an unstable system.

"When we compared our predictions to computer-generated models of their actual movements, we found a high degree of accuracy," Stone said in a news release.

While their work - published this week in the journal Nature - doesn't solve Newton's three-body problem, the authors claim their statistical representation of an unstable three-body system will help scientists visualize the complicate processes involved in three-body systems.

"Take three black holes that are orbiting one another," Stone said. "Their orbits will necessarily become unstable and even after one of them gets kicked out, we're still very interested in the relationship between the surviving black holes."

Moving forward, scientists hope to tweak their equations to explain the relationship between two bodies that have recently expelled the third body and formed a newly stable relationship.

(Source: UPI)

Pakistani health tourists encouraged to visit Iran

TOURISM TEHRAN — A Pakistani health official has encouraged patients to travel to Iran for benefiting from the neighboring country's experience in this sector.

"We are looking to increase health tourism cooperation with Iran and we will try to encourage liver patients in Pakistan, if possible, to travel to Iran and utilize its medical and therapeutic capacities," Dr. Mian Aziz Ur- Rehman, the CEO of Pak Health Care, was quoted by IRNA as saying on Wednesday.

A team of experienced Iranian physicians and surgeons from Tehran's Imam Khomeini Hospital Complex conducted first-ever free liver transplant and hepatitis camp in Pakistan on December 17 and 18.

The Pak Health Care center in Lahore initiated the event to invite Iranian specialists and liver transplant surgeons and hold a two-day conference with the aim of screening patients with liver and hepatitis.

The team led by Dr. Ali Jafarian, the head of liver transplant department of the Imam Khomeini Hospital Complex, examined liver transplants and hepatitis patients, who were come from all over Pakistan.

The patients who have been facing difficulties due to non-issuance of an Indian visa for the treatment got the opportunity to be checked by experienced doctors from Iran's largest liver transplant hospital, the report said.

The patients and their relatives welcomed the Iranian medical camp saying they would prefer Iran to other countries for the liver transplant due to highly-experienced doctors and facilities available in the country.

Dr. Jafarian, who also served as vice-chancellor of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), and his team visited Pakistan on the special request of Pak Health Care center keeping in view the problems faced by liver transplant and hepatitis patients.

Earlier Pakistani liver transplant patients used to travel to India as cost of the treatment is low as compared to western hospitals, however, for quite some time India has stopped issuing the medical visa to Pakistani patients.

Iran is among the top ten countries in the world in liver transplants. The Iranian transplant facility is highly equipped and cheaper than other countries with higher success rates.

The first liver transplant surgery in the world was performed in 1964, but it was not until 1980 that it was confirmed as a treatment. Iran saw its first liver transplant surgery in 1993 in Namazi hospital in Shiraz, IRAN said.

Many domestic experts say that medical tourism in Iran produces win-win outcomes as the country yields considerable benefits to international health-care seekers, offering affordable yet quality treatment services.

People from the Persian Gulf littoral states, Iraq and Syria as well as Iranian expatriates residing in Canada and Germany constituted the majority of medical travelers to the Islamic Republic, who received plastic, cosmetic, open-heart and orthopedic surgeries amongst other treatments, Mohammad Panahi, a deputy for the association, said in July.

Medical tourism fetched Iran some \$1.2 billion last year, Panahi said, adding that the figure has increased by 20-30 percent in the first four months of this year.

Iran hosted a record high of nearly 600,000 medical travelers during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-July 21), nearly equal to the figure for the whole past year, according to an Iranian association for the health tourism promotion.

The country has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in [calendar year] 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Put your skates on; Yalda is to knock the door!

→ You can hear her breath in the face of parents purchasing and setting out dried nuts, cookies, pomegranates and watermelons; and impatient children who are waiting for her to arrive!

It's a time for pleasant family reunions that entails laughter, merriment and good cheer. Hearts move closer to one another in the company of loved ones on Yalda.

Though it is not even an official holiday, Yalda still stands head and shoulders above some other ancient traditions. By the way, television and radio programs fully cater to it by airing special programs.

The reason is that it revolves around the rich, genuine Persian traditions. That's why families are still eager to seize the moment and become fully engaged, putting their cell phones and other distractions aside.

Of all the ancient Persian festivals, only two are celebrated by Iranians worldwide -- Yalda Night (the birth of a new sun) and Noruz or Persian New Year (the birth of a new day).

Nationally called "Shab-e Yalda" or "Shab-e-Chelleh", it literally means the night of the forty. This refers to the first forty days of winter that are often the coldest and toughest to bear.

The story of Yalda may perhaps be interpreted as a tale of courage and effort during darkness, a triumph of light and human warmth that ultimately causes the spring to bloom in hearts.

People on Yalda Night are usually served with fresh fruits and colorful Ajil (a mixture of dry fruits, seeds and nuts) in floral bowls. To Iranians, fruits are reminders of abundance in summer. Watermelon and pomegranates, as symbols of bounty, are the traditional fresh fruits of this night. It is believed that eating watermelon before the arrival of winter can immunize the body against illness.



You can hear her breath in the face of parents purchasing and setting out dried nuts, cookies, pomegranates and watermelons; and impatient children who are waiting for her to arrive!

Following a hot dinner, many people often recite poetry, narrate stories, chant, play musical instruments or just chat cozily until midnight or so.

Well, this was a glimpse of the Yalda celebration in honor of the longest night of the year!

Iran eyes UNESCO tag for Yalda
Iran seeks to register the ancient festivity of "Yalda" on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021.

According to the UNESCO website, Yalda ceremonies, in the best way, point to cultural diversity and human creativity, especially when one considers the wide range of the communities that celebrate it.

Facts to know
- Yalda Night is celebrated on the last day of Azar (the last month of autumn in the Iranian calendar year) and before the first day of Dey (the first month of winter).

- Watermelon and pomegranate are amongst the most characteristic features of Yalda Night so that a few days prior to Yalda, their prices usually soar.

- Yalda, though not very common, is a female Persian name.

- In the ancient Iranian calendar, winter is divided into two parts, Chelleh Bozorg (literary meaning the bigger forty) from 22nd of December to 30th of January and Chelleh Koochak (the smaller forty), which starts from 30th January to 10th of March.

- The word Yalda, meaning birth, was imported from Syriac into the Persian language by the Syriac Christians.

- Narratives say that Yalda Night marks the birth of winter and the eventual triumph of the sun as the days grow longer.

- Ancient Iranians assumed Naneh Sarma begins to descend on earth by Yalda Night. Literally meaning "coldness grandma", Naneh Sarma is a folklore character who brings in the cold of winter but also the promises of spring ahead.

Malayer one step closer to "a world city of woodcarving"

HERITAGE TEHRAN — World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region Director Ghada Hijavi and some of her fellow experts are to visit the city of Malayer on Monday to follow up on their assessment to name the city "a world city of woodcarving", a title granted to Abyaneh in 2018, IRNA reported.

Located in west-central Hamedan province, Malayer has long been a hub for woodcarving and carved-wood furniture.

Malayer is home to over 4,000 furniture workshops in which more than 8,000 wood masters and some 25,000 crafters are engaged. It was named a national city of woodcarving earlier in the year 1395 (ended March 2017).

On Tuesday, the WCC delegation visited handicraft workshops, stores and exhibits in the southern city of Shiraz, its



ancient and modern arts, and associated bazaars to assess the city for becoming "a world city of handicrafts".

So far, the council has granted the same titles to several Iranian cities and villages including Abadeh for its art of "Woodcarving" and the village of Khorashad for the craft "Toebafi" (traditional handwoven fabrics).

Back in February, the oasis city of Meybod celebrated becoming a world city for Zilou, a traditional type of floor covering commonly woven across the central Iranian city and its outskirts.

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

Crafts, regionals arts, souvenirs on show in Shiraz



HERITAGE TEHRAN — Dozens of exhibitors, craftspeople and folk artists from various parts of Iran came together under one roof in the 11th Pars tourism exhibition, which came to an end on Friday.

The four-day exhibit turned the spotlight on health and religious tourism, hospitality and hoteling, marine and air sports, online travel services, free trade zones, and recreational activities amongst others.

Celebrated as the heartland of Persian culture for over 2000 years, Shiraz has become synonymous with education, nightingales, poetry and crafts skills passed down from generation to generation. It was one of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world and was the Iranian capital during the Zand dynasty (1751-1794).

Iran's handicrafts exports reached \$289 million in the past Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019), showing three percent growth year on year, based on data released by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.



The 'worst' airlines for long and short-haul flights named by Which?

American Airlines and British Airways have been rated among the worst airlines for long-haul flights, according to a survey of travelers by a consumer watchdog.

The UK flag carrier was criticized for the "quality of its food and drink, the comfort of its seats and value for money for its short-haul and long haul services," in the annual report by Which? Travel.

More than 6,500 travelers were asked about customer service, boarding and cabin environment as part of the survey.

American Airlines was named the worst long-haul airline, with a score of 48%.

"American Airlines takes customer feedback very seriously, and we were disappointed to see the findings of the Which? survey, based on the experiences of 53 customers," a spokesman for the airline told CNN.

"However, we recognize there is always room for improvement and we will continue to strive to deliver an excellent service that cares for our customers on life's journey."



British Airways received a score of 55% for both short-haul and long-haul flights, coming in third from bottom and second from bottom in the respective league tables. But the airline questioned the accuracy of the UK-based organization's report.

"Our own data shows customer satisfaction scores have increased, and continue to increase, as we deliver our £6.5 billion (\$8.4 billion) investment for customers on new aircraft, new food, new lounges and new technology," said British Airways in a statement.

Ryanair was the worst rated short-haul airline, scoring just 44%, with Vueling Airlines (54%) and Wizz Air (56%) faring little better.

At the other end of the scale in the short-haul category, Jet2 won plaudits for offering great service at affordable prices.

For long haul Singapore Airlines did best, while Emirates and Virgin Atlantic also scored well.

"Year after year the same culprits continue to sink to new lows, yet for many of us, there is a choice. You don't have to keep booking with an airline that has let you down -- or one that you loved for years but has slipped in quality," said Rory Boland, Which? Travel editor, in a statement.

(Source: CNN)

ROUND THE GLOBE

City of Quito

Quito, the capital of Ecuador, was founded in the 16th century on the ruins of an Inca city and stands at an altitude of 2,850 m. Despite the 1917 earthquake, the city has the best-preserved, least altered historic center in Latin America.

The city offers a remarkable example of the Baroque school of Quito (Escuela Quiteña), that brings together the indigenous and European artistic traditions and which is renowned for providing the greatest contribution of Spanish America to universal art.



The height of this art is represented by veritable spiritual citadels, among which are San Francisco, San Domingo, San Augustin, La Compana, La Merced, the Sanctuary of Guapulco and the Recoleta of San Diego, to name just the principal ones. These are recognized not only for their artistic value from the architectural viewpoint but also for their decorative elements (altarpieces, paintings, sculptures).

The city of Quito forms a harmonious ensemble where nature and man are brought together to create a unique and transcendental work. The colonizers knew how to adapt their artistic sensibility to the reality that surrounded them, building their architecture in a very complex topographical environment.

In the city center, there are convents and churches as well as houses (1 or 2 floors with one or several patios), usually built with earthen bricks and covered with stucco, combining the monumental with the simple and austere.

The city of Quito, the cradle of Pre-Colombian cultures and an important witness of Spanish colonization maintains, for the time being unity and harmony in its urban structure despite centuries of urban development.

(Source: UNESCO)

By Prof. Louis René Beres

Impeachment and the “Higher Law”: An unexamined legal opportunity for U.S.

reason.[9]

Although, by the eighteenth century, God had been “withdrawn” from any immediate philosophical contact with humankind, and had already been transformed into the Final Cause or Prime Mover of the universe, “nature” still remained available as both a convenient and capable substitute.[10]

There is much more. Reflecting the unique influence of Isaac Newton, whose Principia was first published in 1686, all of creation could now be taken as a recognizable expression of divine will.[11] Reciprocally, however, the only true way to ever truly “know” this original will of God was to first discover the underlying and eternal Law of Nature.

In essence, Locke and Jefferson had deified nature and “denatured” God.[12]

But what exactly was this purported “Law of Nature,” a basic law that is accepted in the Declaration and Constitution as a continuously binding set of obligatory norms, and which could still pertain to a present-day American president? Above all, Jefferson learned from Locke, such law was a necessary source of Reason: Still more exactly, according to Locke’s Second Treatise:

The state of nature has a law to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions....

In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of men....

A criminal, who having renounced reason, the common rule and measure God hath given to mankind, hath, by the unjust violence and slaughter he hath committed on one, declared war against all mankind.[13]

As reason is the only sure guide to what God has given to humankind, it must inevitably become the only reliable foundation of true law. This Lockean and Jeffersonian idea of a transcendent or Higher Law is made manifest not only in the Declaration of Independence, but also in the Constitution.[14] Inter alia, the Ninth Amendment, in stipulating that “the enumeration of certain rights in this Constitution shall not prejudice other rights not so enumerated,”[15] reflects codified belief in a perpetual law that is justly superior to any expressed will of human governance.

This vital conviction runs continuously from ancient times, especially traditional Jewish Law, [16] up to the present intellectually detached “Trumpian moment.” The evident roots of such a prospectively lethal detachment lie in a broadly cast indifference to anything based upon Reason and a more person-specific indifference to history. What ought we ever really expect from a president who unambiguously prefers “attitude” to “preparation”?

There is still more. The Fragments of Heraclitus attest to the venerable antiquity of a Higher Law: “For all human laws are nourished by one, which is divine. For it governs as far as it will, and is sufficient for all, and more than enough.”[17] Such Heraclitean dicta, offered somewhere around 500 B.C.E., entered easily into later Stoic philosophy and already described a universal and expectedly rational body of human law. Hard as it may be to imagine amid American politics in 2019, this intellectual corpus was familiar to many of the Founding Fathers.

In 442 B.C.E., Sophocles further clarified the idea of all true law as an act of discovery, thus challenging the superiority of human rule-making in Antigone. [18] Already exploring the inevitable conflicts between claims of the state and those of individual conscience, this classic challenge has since been taken to represent the supremacy of a proper Higher Law overall man-made law — now an incontestable supremacy. Later, in the nineteenth century, American Transcendentalist philosopher Henry David Thoreau, noting that men live with “too passive a regard for the moral laws,” [19] cited directly to Antigone as a stirring example of “civil disobedience.” Still later, in these United States, the derivative legal and ethical conclusions of Antigone were learned and conceptually embraced by Martin Luther King.

It follows that the authority of Natural Law already has an authentic history in American society and politics. Ipso facto, it is not “merely” a pompous invention of certain interested philosophers and university professors. Or in more lay-person parlance, Natural Law already “has legs.”

But now back to the philosophers. Building upon Plato’s theory of Ideas,[20] which sought to elevate “nature” from the merely transient sphere of contingent facts to the much “higher” realm of immutable archetypes or Forms.[21] Aristotle advanced in his Ethics the derivative concept of “natural justice.” [22] Quoting the Antigone, he argued (in a posture of perpetual significance) “an unjust law is not a law.” [23] This irreducible position stands in markedly stark contrast to the more instrumental opinion of the Sophists — i.e., that justice is never more than an expression of supremacy, that it is only what Thrasymachus cynically calls, in Plato’s Republic, “the interest of the stronger.” [24]

Were he actually made aware of such scholarly origins and underpinnings, US President Donald Trump would assuredly judge himself to be among contemporary “Sophists.” This clarifying acknowledgment, to be sure, would be uttered openly by Mr. Trump, and with unmitigated pride.

More precisely, apropos of President Donald Trump’s jurisprudentially disjointed presidency,



this visibly crude brand of Realpolitik has become the openly acknowledged philosophic foundation of current U.S. foreign policy. Left unmodified by timeless principles of a Higher Law, the deleterious consequences for America and the wider world are not difficult to decipher.[25]

Prospectively, these consequences include very tangible US declensions into catastrophic war, [26] potentially even a nuclear war. Notable, in this regard, is the ongoing expansion of what might best be termed “Cold War II” with Russia; simultaneously, the undiminished nuclearization of North Korea and the ongoing recombination of ISIS Jihadist terrorists under the banner of al Qaeda. Significantly, along all of these cited dimensions of decline, a sitting American president is evidently complicit.

Once again, history can be instructive. The Stoics, whose legal philosophies arose on the threshold of the Greek and Roman worlds, regarded nature itself as humankind’s supreme legislator. [27] Applying Platonic and Aristotelian thought to a then-hopefully emerging cosmopolis, they defined this nascent order as one wherein humankind, by means of its allegedly established capacity to reason, can commune directly with the gods. [28] As this definition required further expansion of Plato’s and Aristotle’s developing notions of universalism, the Stoics consciously articulated a further division between *lex aeterna*, *ius natural* and *ius humanum*. [29]

Lex aeterna is the law of reason of the cosmos, the logos which rules the universe. As an emanation of cosmic reason, human reason, it is assumed, rules the lives of men. It follows that natural law partakes of eternal law, though it has a more limited range of application. Unlike the more elitist conception of Plato (and, to a certain extent, even Aristotle), the Stoic idea of an innate “right reason” presumed no meaningful divisions between peoples. [30]

Instead, in linking all persons with the cosmic order, it established the essential foundations of an authentic and immutable universality.

Cicero, in *De Republica*, had defined the state as a “coming together of a considerable number of men who are united by a common agreement about law and rights and by the desire to participate in mutual advantages.” [31] This definition shed a useful light on the problems surrounding positivist jurisprudence, a legal philosophy that values any state’s edicts as intrinsically just and therefore obligatory. [32] In a suitably famous passage of *De Republica*, one well known to Jefferson and other Founders, Cicero sets forth the still classic articulation of Natural Law:

True law is right reason, harmonious with nature, diffused among all, constant, eternal; a law which calls to duty by its commands and restrains from evil by its prohibitions.... It is a sacred obligation not to attempt to legislate in contradiction to this law; nor may it be derogated from nor abrogated. Indeed, by neither the Senate nor the people can we be released from this law; nor does it require any but oneself to be its expositor or interpreter. Nor is it one law at Rome and another at Athens; one now and another at a late time; but one eternal and unchangeable law binding all nations through all time.... [33]

It goes without saying that US President Donald Trump has literally no acquaintance with any such still-binding or “peremptory” ideas.

But what is to be done when positive law (which now includes US Constitutional and statutory law) is at variance with “true law”? The Romans had a remedy in all such challenging matters. They simply incorporated into their various statutes a contingency clause that man-made law could never abrogate those obligations that are inherently right or presumptively even sacred. [34] On several occasions, Cicero and others actually and meaningfully invoked this clause, or jus, against one particular statute or another. [35] In this way, the written law of the moment, never more than an artifact of the extant civic community, remained correctly subject to “right reason.”

Later, St. Augustine reaffirmed that temporal law must always conform to the unchangeable eternal law, [36] which he had earlier defined as “the reason or will of God (*ratio divina vel voluntas Dei*).” [37] Aquinas continued this tradition of denying the status of law to prescriptions that are inherently unjust (lex iniusta non est lex). [38] “Human law,” he wrote in the *Summa*, [39]

“has the quality of law only insofar as it proceeds according to right reason; and in this respect it is clear that it derives from the eternal law. Insofar as it deviates from reason it is called an unjust law, and has the quality not of law, but of violence.” [40]

The concept of a Higher Law, later to figure so importantly in the legal development of the United States of America, was widely integrated into medieval jurisprudential thought. [41] In John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, “There are certain precepts of the law which have perpetual necessity, having the force of law among all nations and which absolutely cannot be broken.” [42] Recognizing the idea that all political authority must be intrinsically limited, John noted that the prince “may not lawfully have any will of his own apart from that which the law or equity enjoins, or the calculation of the common interest requires.” [43]

“... or the calculation of the common interest requires.” Viewed against the backdrop of the current US president — now, correctly analogous to the medieval “prince” discussed by John of Salisbury — such “perpetual law” must of necessity prohibit any presidential placement of personal interest over the discernibly “common interest” of the United States. Natural Law, *inter alia*, still exists to frustrate political injustice, a vital function that could soon become material to any authoritative launch of impeachment proceedings against Donald Trump.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Natural Law doctrine was reaffirmed and secularized by Grotius, [44] the “father” of all modern international law. Reviving the Ciceronian idea of Natural Law and its underlying optimism about human nature, Grotius is credited with liberating this idea from any once-remaining dependence on ecclesiastical or Papal interpretation. [45] Building upon the prior speculations of the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria, who had proclaimed a natural community of humankind and the universal validity of human rights, [46] Grotius fashioned a conceptual “bridge” from the Christian Commonwealth of the Middle Ages to a brand new interstate society. [47]

In this connection, he strengthened the idea of a universally valid Natural Law, one transcending in obligation all human law, including the cumulative positive law of any single sovereign state. [48] This is an idea, of course, that lies at the conceptual heart of US law, but it also entirely alien to the understanding or vision of current US President Trump.

Unlike Machiavelli and Hobbes, [49] Grotius did not consciously reduce law to any presumed will of a prince or a separate state. [50] Rather, while recognizing such will as a properly constitutive element within the much wider international legal order, he also understood that the binding quality of human edicts must always be derived from a more overriding totality of “natural” imperatives. [51] Accordingly, he proceeded to reject *raison d’état* as a just cause for war, [52] a purposeful rejection that may sometime no longer resonate in US President Donald Trump’s personal ideas of governance.

This brings us directly to the conveyance of Natural Law ideas into American political theory, a transmittal that was preeminently the work of Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690). [53] The specified American “duty” to revolt whenever governments commit “a long train of abuses and usurpations” [54] flows largely from Locke’s seminal notion that civil authority can never extend beyond the securing of humankind’s natural rights. [55] Regarding any prospective excursions into US presidential impeachment, the motto that Jefferson chose for his own seal was, “Rebellion to Tyrants Is Obedience to God.” [56]

As for the right to pursue happiness, which Jefferson drew largely from Burlamaqui’s incorporation into natural law, [57] it had nothing to do with today’s shallow presidential celebrations of raw commerce and exaggerated materialism. Not at all.

Nor could this right have any bearing on any soon-to-be contemplated US presidential impeachment proceedings. Though happiness was viewed by Jefferson (in plausible deference to Pufendorf and Locke) as a welcome condition to be achieved as the direct result of humankind’s overriding commitment to reason, [58] never specified were any corresponding or corollary presidential obligations.

Above all, the Declaration of Independence implemented a fundamental social contract that sets limits on the power of any government. [59] Its most central purpose, therefore, was to better articulate a set of universally valid constraints upon absolutely all secular political authority. Moreover, as justice, which is necessarily based on natural law, binds all human society, the rights described by the Declaration of Independence could never be reserved only to Americans.

Instead, by ready and verifiable deduction, they must extend to all human societies, and can never be rendered subject to abrogation by positive law. Today, this general applicability of an imperative to “do justice” is routinely ignored by an American president who is utterly disinterested in human rights, especially on those matters regarding immigration to the United States and the granting of refugee or asylum status. Notably, such matters of international law are *ipso facto* binding upon the United States, both by virtue of the ubiquitous and universal natural law, but also in consequence of the US Constitution (especially Art. VI, the “Supremacy Clause”) and various leading US Supreme Court decisions (especially the *Pacquete Habana*, 1900).

The compelling theory of a Higher Law, which should have a designated useful place in any forthcoming impeachment proceedings that would indict President Trump regarding his very evident disregard for worldwide human rights, is based on clarity, self-evidence, and coherence. Its legal validity, it follows, can never be shaken by any presumed presidential imperatives of geopolitics or “America First.” As noted by the Swiss scholar Emmerich de Vattel in the 1758 edition of *The Law of Nations* (a work in which several American fathers of independence had discovered important and usable maxims of political liberty): “No agreement can bind, or even authorize, a man to violate the natural law.” [60]

Prudently, Vattel had cautioned that only a strict obedience to higher legal obligations can produce a virtuous and thereby safe and prosperous state: “One would have to be very ignorant of political affairs not to perceive how much more capable a virtuous Nation is of forming a happy, peaceful, flourishing and secure state, respected by its neighbors and formidable to its enemies.” [61] Going forward with any Senate impeachment proceeding, Vattel’s earlier wisdom could sometime have its proper and utilitarian place. At a minimum, it could stand as an unchallengeable corrective to the manifestly unjust imperatives of “America First.”

Placing themselves “on a level with wood and earth and stones,” [67] these creations of the “mass” (the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard would prefer the term “crowd”) are incapable of making any essential moral or legal distinctions. This incapacity is easily enough recognized today, where so many of our fellow citizens remain unwilling to acknowledge the brutally stark differences between *prima facie* presidential wrongdoing and legally correct presidential behavior.

Could the United States still create the conditions for a conscientious “corporation” though the enhanced education of an informed citizenry? From Rousseau to the present, this has been the preferred path of virtually all democratic theory. Rousseau believed that law and liberty could best exist in a city-state of properly educated voters like Geneva:

He stipulates in Book III of the *Social Contract*: “First, a very small state where the people can be readily got together and where each citizen can with ease know all the rest; secondly, great simplicity of manners, to prevent business from multiplying and raising thorny problems; next, a large measure of equality in rank and fortune, without which equality of rights and authority cannot long subsist; lastly, little or no luxury — for luxury either comes of riches or makes them necessary.”

But the contemporary United States is not at all like Geneva, and Rousseau’s idea that (even under very specified conditions) a majority can be trusted with what is really best for “The People” is too-often mistaken. Now, the dangers of the “general will” have been made manifest not only in the exploits of Robespierre and Napoleon, but also in the stunningly inauspicious selection of US President Donald Trump and his generally anti-historical/anti-intellectual followers.

Whether this selection shall lead to proper and pragmatic efforts at presidential removal is still unclear.

There is more. Rousseau’s deification of The People actually points toward the very opposite of our own Higher Law tradition. The Genevan made “The People” sovereign; for us, ultimately, sovereignty must somehow come to reside in The Citizen. Earlier, as Thoreau had understood, apathy, complacency, passivity and moral cowardice are the inevitable qualities found in the “mass” of men and women. True hope, therefore, can lie only in those residually still-thoughtful individuals whose primary allegiance is directed toward properly overriding and universal laws; that is, not in the presumptive “good citizen,” but rather in the indispensable “wise minority.”

It is time to finally inquire: What is the real task of this body of enlightened persons, one which could in fact represent a true and distinct majority in formation? Thoreau speaks truthfully of civil disobedience, one still possible act of “counter-friction.” Now, confronted with an American president who could bring unparalleled harms to the United States, suddenly or in unanticipated increments — as we have seen, such harms could soon include even the onset of a catastrophic nuclear war [68] — Thoreau would urge, as he once did about still-earlier policy deformations (see *Civil Disobedience*): “Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.”

To this point, most visibly at partisan political levels, Thoreau’s earlier wisdom has fallen on variously deaf Congressional ears.

Largest nursery in Iran inaugurated

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The largest nursery in Iran, which is said to be the largest as well in the Middle East, was inaugurated in a ceremony in Tehran on Friday.



Construction of Shobeir Nursery started in 2015 under the auspices of 350 philanthropists. The project cost 190 billion rials (about \$450,000 at the official rate of 42,000 rials), IRNA reported.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, Vahid Qobadi-Dana, head of Welfare Organization, said there are more than 26,000 parentless children and children with irresponsible parents living across the country, of whom around 10,000 are held in 34 nurseries.

Methane leak 'visible from space' is even bigger than previously thought

The first satellite designed to continuously monitor the planet for methane leaks made a startling discovery last year: A little known gas-well accident at an Ohio fracking site was in fact one of the largest methane leaks ever recorded in the US.

The findings by a Dutch-American team of scientists, published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, mark a step forward in using space technology to detect leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming, from oil and gas sites worldwide.

The scientists said the new findings reinforced the view that methane releases like these, which are difficult to predict, could be far more widespread than previously thought.

"We're entering a new era. With a single observation, a single overpass, we're able to see plumes of methane coming from large emission sources," said Ilse Aben, an expert in satellite remote sensing and one of the authors of the new research. "That's something totally new that we were previously not able to do from space."

Scientists also said the new findings reinforced the view that methane emissions from oil installations are far more widespread than previously thought.

The blowout, in February 2018 at a natural gas well run by an Exxon Mobil subsidiary in Belmont County, Ohio, released more methane than the entire oil and gas industries of many nations do in a year, the research team found.

The Ohio episode forced about 100 residents within a one-mile radius to evacuate their homes while workers scrambled to plug the well.

Natural gas production has come under increased scrutiny because of the prevalence of leaks of methane — the colourless, odourless main component of natural gas — from the fuel's supply chain.

When burned for electricity, natural gas is cleaner than coal, producing about half the carbon dioxide that coal does.

But if methane escapes into the atmosphere before being burned, it can warm the planet more than 80 times as much as the same amount of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Indian woman commits sati suicide

(August 07, 2002)

A woman has burned herself alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, committing the sacred but outlawed Hindu practice of 'sati'. This report from Adam Mynott:

Police in the Panna district of Madhya Pradesh had been alerted that a woman was going to commit sati. Two officers hurried to the village of Tamoli Patna to try to intervene but were beaten back by villagers with stones. The sixty-five-year-old woman, Kuttu Bai, sat on the funeral pyre with the head of her dead husband on her lap. According to reports, four thousand villagers watched her being burned alive, committing the sacred Hindu practice of sati, which was outlawed a hundred and seventy-three years ago under British rule in India. Hindu tradition says that the dead woman becomes a goddess and her family will be blessed for seven generations. Cases of sati are very rare; the last high-profile incident was in 1987 in Rajasthan, when an eighteen-year-old woman was burned to death. There was a huge controversy and a new law was enacted. Now, anyone helping someone to commit sati faces the death penalty.

After someone has committed sati the scene of the suicide becomes a revered holy place, but the Madhya Pradesh home minister, Mahendra Boud, has ordered that a shrine should not be built in Tamoli Patna and police have surrounded the village to prevent people from visiting the site of the funeral pyre. Women's groups in India have called for the arrest of people in the village who allowed the sati to go ahead.

Words

alerted: warned or made fully aware of something
commit: to do something that cannot be changed
funeral pyre: a large pile of wood upon which a body is burned as part of a religious service

sacred: holy
outlawed: made illegal
high-profile incident: well publicized and important event
huge controversy: very big disagreement or row
suicide: the act of killing yourself
shrine: a holy building
site: place

(Source: BBC)

Iran's Mahak, Italy's Gaslini ink MOU to support children with cancer

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Iranian Mahak Society to Support Children with Cancer and the Italian Gaslini Children's Hospital signed a memorandum of understanding in Tehran on Wednesday to exchange experience in the field of supporting children suffering from cancer.

The agreement was signed at the place of the Italian embassy in Tehran with the Italian ambassador Giuseppe Perrone in attendance, IRNA reported.

The two sides voiced commitment to cooperate in providing each other with physicians and nurses as well as medical equipment special for children with cancer.

On the sidelines of the signing ceremony, the Italian envoy said: "We are



supposed to help children who are grappling with health problems. Improving their life expectancy is the main theme of cooperation between the two sides."

Alberto Martini, the scientific director of the Gaslini Research Institute, for his part said Mahak and Gaslini will certainly gain better results for offering help to cancer patients. "We know this issue as one of the main goals on our path toward supporting child patients. It is hoped that the cooperation will be expanded in the future."

Arasb Ahmadian, the managing director of Mahak, for his part said that scientific, research, and medical cooperation is one of the ways for countries to boost relations. Such cooperation can ease, and even remove, effects of sanctions.

"They've been angels to me": Poles rally to help stranded Iranian truck driver get home

An Iranian driver whose truck broke down in Poland has been helped to return home after a crowdfunding campaign brought in 242,000 zloty (around 57,000 euro) to help fix his vehicle.

Fardin Kazemi was delivering raisins to Poland when his vehicle — a 30-year-old American International 9670 — broke down on 3 December, reports Polsat News. This left Kazemi stranded in Koziegłowy, a small town in Silesia, 5,400 kilometres away from his wife and children back in the Iranian city of Khoy.

News of his difficulties started to spread among Polish truck drivers, who began organising help with fixing the vehicle. "So far from home, without friends, without anyone — it is obvious that it is good to help," said mechanic Piotr Klimas. A Persian translator from the nearby city of Czestochowa was brought in to help communicate with Kazemi.

In the meantime, Kazemi continued to live out of the truck. "He is so attached to it that he doesn't want to leave," said Tomasz Doniec, the main organiser of the campaign to help the Iranian get home.

However, the problems with the engine proved more serious than first thought. Although not impossible to fix,



the costs and time involved made it unfeasible. And so, instead, a crowdfunding campaign was launched to buy a second-hand tractor unit for Kazemi.

The appeal — hosted on popular Polish crowdfunding site Zrzutka — set a target of 99,000 zloty. Following a huge show of support, that amount was raised in less than 24 hours, and the total has now reached almost 240,000 zloty.

Other offers of support have also poured in. One cus-

toms agency, for example, has offered to help prepare the necessary paperwork, says Doniec.

"The Poles have been angels for me; their help is a miracle of God," Kazemi told local newspaper Dziennik Zachodni.

"I have travelled all over Europe for 27 years...[but] so far have not had the opportunity to get to know Poles better. Now it turns out that they are wonderful people, and it is difficult to believe their help," said Kazemi, who also wished the people of Poland a merry Christmas.

Despite the success of the fundraiser, the organisers hit an unexpected snag. In response to UN sanctions, Iran has imposed an embargo on certain goods from the European Union, including lorries, reports Polsat News. Doniec says they are seeking the consent of the Iranian authorities to bypass the embargo, and have had support from the Iranian consul in Poland.

The latest reports, published in Dziennik Zachodni on Wednesday, indicate that Doniec and Kazemi are going ahead with buying a truck — a 2017 DAF, because Iran only allows foreign vehicles to be registered if they are less than three years old.

(Source: notesfrompoland.com)

TB infection from cow to cow more likely than transmission by badger

Tuberculosis in cattle can be spread by badgers but cow-to-cow transmission is more significant than badger-to-cow, according to the first study to provide direct evidence of the disease passing between the two species.

Scientists undertook whole genome sequencing of different strains of bovine TB to detect how it moved between cows and badgers in Woodchester Park, Gloucestershire.

They found that transmission within each species was more frequent than from one species to another but that transmission occurred almost 10 times more frequently from badgers to cows than from cows to badgers.

Despite the expansion of a controversial badger cull to 43 zones across western England from Cornwall to Cheshire, bovine TB has continued to rise. In 2018, 44,656 cows were slaughtered in Britain as a result — the highest ever number and an increase of 50% on 2005, when just under 30,000 cows were slaughtered. The disease costs taxpayers £100m a year in compensation for prematurely slaughtered cattle.

Scientists from 12 institutions across Britain and Ireland including the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Oxford, and University College Dublin, compared the genomes of Mycobacterium bovis (M. bovis) found in cattle and badgers, the animals' locations, when they were infected and



whether they could have been in contact.

Their analyses, published in the journal eLife, found that the transmission of M. bovis within each species was most significant. By examining different mutations of the disease, the scientists estimated that transmission occurred between badgers at least 2.7 times more frequently than badger-to-cattle transmission, while the transmission from badgers to cattle was almost 10 times more frequent than the disease passing from cattle to badgers.

The study used data gathered at Woodchester Park, where bovine TB is well-established in local cattle and the badger population, which has been scientifically studied since 1976. It revealed that a prevalent type of M. bovis had been in badgers since scientific data was first collected from the local population, but that different types of the disease had subsequently been introduced into the area by cattle.

(Source: The Guardian)

EU ministers opt to continue overfishing, despite 2020 deadline

Europe's fish populations will continue to be over-exploited despite a longstanding 2020 deadline for setting fishing quotas at sustainable levels, after ministers from across the EU forced through higher limits than scientists advised.

Key species such as cod in the west of Scotland and Irish Sea, some herring stocks, sole and plaice in the Celtic Sea, pollock in western waters, and ling and tusk in the north-east Atlantic, will all be under renewed and unsustainable pressure, according to campaigners. Quotas for some species were increased from last year, despite advice that they should be brought down.

"The limits agreed by ministers suggest that progress to end overfishing has stalled or even reversed," said Andrew Clayton of the Pew Charitable Trusts. "This is especially disappointing for 2020, the legal deadline in the common fisheries policy to end overfishing. Missing the deadline means putting stocks such as cod under heavy pressure in 2020, even though their populations are at critical levels."

The quota for haddock in the North Sea for the UK was raised by 23% and UK catches of sole in the western Channel raised by 19%.

George Eustice, the UK fisheries minister, defended the decisions made at a tense meeting that ended early on



Wednesday morning: "This year there has been some very challenging science for cod stocks in many parts of the north-east Atlantic, and we have responded to conserve stocks. I know that some of the quota reductions will be very difficult for some sectors of the industry — however, we know that to protect the profitability of fisheries in the future, we must fish sustainably today."

He condemned the EU's "outdated method for sharing quota" among member states, saying it meant the UK got a "very small share of the cod in our own waters", but pledged that would be reconsidered after Brexit. The UK would also put in place its own policies to ensure fish catches were managed sustainably, he said.

The UK will still have to negotiate with EU member states and non-EU nations such as Norway and Iceland over shared fishing grounds after Brexit.

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

50bcm of groundwater withdrawn annually in Iran

An annual amount of 50 billion cubic meters of groundwater resources are withdrawn to supply agricultural, industrial as well as drinking water in Iran, a researcher in the field of water resources has stated. The amount is 10 times greater than the water covering Lake Urmia, amounting to 5 billion cubic meters, ISNA news agency quoted Mohammad Reza Goldansaz as saying on Sunday. About 60 percent of drinking water and the water used in industrial sector and 50 percent of the water consumed in agriculture sector is pumped from aquifers, he noted. Referring to the country being highly dependent on underground water, Goldansaz said that if the resource runs out, we will face serious problems.

سالی ۵۰ میلیارد متر مکعب از آب‌های زیرزمینی برداشت می‌شود

یک پژوهشگر حوزه منابع آب با اشاره به اینکه سالانه ۵۰ میلیارد متر مکعب از منابع آب زیرزمینی برای مصارف خانگی، صنعت و مصارف کشاورزی برداشت می‌شود. محمدرضا گلدانساز در گفت و گو با ایسنا اظهار داشت: سالانه حدود ۵۰ میلیارد متر مکعب از منابع آب زیرزمینی برداشت می‌شود که این مقدار به اندازه حجم ۱۰ دریاچه ارومیه است. وی با بیان اینکه وابستگی ما به آب زیرزمینی بسیار زیاد است و اگر روزی این منبع تمام شود با مشکلات زیادی روبرو می‌شویم، اظهار کرد: در کشور ما به دلیل وجود شرایط اقلیمی خشک و نیمه خشک، وابستگی به منابع آب زیرزمینی قابل توجه است و حدود ۶۰ درصد مصارف خانگی و صنعت و حدود ۵۰ درصد مصارف کشاورزی توسط آب زیرزمینی تأمین می‌شود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"intra-, intro-"

■ **Meaning:** within, inside
■ **For example:** I guess John is *introvert*, he always sits in a corner alone not talking to anyone at the party.

PHRASAL VERB

Pick on somebody

■ **Meaning:** to behave in an unfair way to someone, for example by blaming them or criticizing them unfairly
■ **For example:** Why don't you pick on someone else for a change?

IDIOM

Cutting edge

■ **Explanation:** the newest, most advanced stage in the development of something
■ **For example:** The company is at the cutting edge of aeronautics.

Yemen's Houthis, Saudi-sponsored militiamen exchange prisoners

Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement and Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi have exchanged dozens of prisoners in a swap in the southern Yemeni governorate of Ta'izz, local sources and media reports say.

Local sources said 75 detainees affiliated with Hadi's former administration were released on Thursday.

In exchange, 60 people affiliated with the Houthi Ansarullah movement were also released, according to Arabic-language al-Masirah television network.

Yemen's third city of Ta'izz is a volatile front line and has been frequently hit by Saudi airstrikes in recent years.

The head of Yemen's National Committee for Prisoners Affairs (NCPA), Abdulqader al-Mortada, has recently blamed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for obstructing prisoner swaps under an agreement reached during UN-sponsored peace negotiations in Sweden last year, arguing that Riyadh is insisting on the release of Saudi troops only.

The head of the Houthi-affiliated NCPA further highlighted that the fate of an estimated 15,000 people from both Saudi-backed militia forces and the Hou-



this remains unclear, stating that they are believed to either have gone missing in action or been kept as prisoners.

Ansarullah delegates and Hadi loyalists held peace negotiations in Rimbo, north of the Swedish capital city of Stockholm, in December 2018. The talks resulted in

the announcement of a breakthrough agreement.

The document included three provisions: a ceasefire along the Hudaydah front and the redeployment of armed forces out of the city and its port; an agreement on prisoner exchange; and a statement of

understanding on the southern Yemeni city of Ta'izz.

Riyadh has reportedly been holding informal talks with the Houthis since late September about a wider ceasefire as it seeks to exit an unpopular war after its main coalition partner the United Arab Emirates withdrew troops earlier this year.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of Hadi back to power and crushing the Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a non-profit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past four and a half years.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

(Source: Press TV)

Arab League censures Brazil's decision to open trade office in occupied al-Quds

The Arab League has condemned Brazil for opening a trade office in the occupied Jerusalem al-Quds, stating that the move will "seriously damage" the South American country's political and economic interests in the Arab world.

The pan-Arab organization criticized Brazil's move as a violation of international law and voiced its continued support for the Palestinian cause plus the legal status of Jerusalem al-Quds at an emergency meeting convened in the Egyptian Cairo on Thursday.

"This unilateral and unlawful action" is a bias toward Israel and supports Israel's "illegal policies aimed at controlling the occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem)," the Arab League said. It further noted that such a "negative change in Brazilian foreign policy toward Palestinians would seriously damage Arab-Brazilian shared political, economic and diplomatic interests."

It expressed "deep regret" that the Brazilian government had reversed its decades-long Mideast policy.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's representative, Ambassador Ahmed al-Baker, expressed his country's "complete rejection of any act of prejudice toward the legal status of" Jerusalem al-Quds.

He added that Brazil's opening of a technical office in the city constitutes a "clear and obvious violation of interna-

tional resolutions."

Algeria also warned that Brazil's step would inflame tensions in the Middle East region, and undermine efforts for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It urged the Brazilian government to reevaluate its decision.

On Sunday, Brazil opened a trade office in Jerusalem al-Quds and announced its intention to relocate its embassy in the occupied territories from Tel Aviv to the disputed holy city next year.

Israel captured East Jerusalem al-Quds in the 1967 Middle East war, and annexed it afterward, claiming it part of its indivisible capital. This is while Palestinians view East Jerusalem al-Quds as the capital of their future independent state.

Earlier this month, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates summoned the Brazilian representative to Palestine to express its outrage over a visit by a Brazilian legislator to a settlement in the central part of the occupied West Bank.

Palestinian Deputy Foreign Minister for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs Hanan Jarrar stated that Francisco Mauro Brasil de Holanda was called in on December 5 over the visit of Eduardo Bolsonaro, a parliamentarian and a son of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, to Psagot settlement.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump impeachment: Republicans, Democrats spar over next steps

The day after the United States House of Representatives voted to impeach President Donald Trump played out much like the day before: with partisan jabs, name-calling and fighting over next steps.

Trump was impeached on Wednesday for obstruction of Congress and abuse of power related to his dealings with Ukraine.

The votes came down largely along party lines with only two Democrats voting against the abuse of power article, and three Democrats against obstruction of Congress charge. All Republicans who were present voted against the impeachment articles, and the one Independent in the House voted in favor.

Wednesday's votes followed six hours of heated debate over the articles with Democrats trying to lay out their case, and Republicans attacking the process itself.

The votes set up a likely trial in the Senate, but when a trial would take place and what it would look like remains a major point of contention between the parties.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi added to that contention on Wednesday night when she evaded questions on when she plans to send the articles to the Senate, which must happen before any trial can occur.

"It would have been our intention" to send the articles immediately, but "we'll see what happens over there," Pelosi told reporters, referring to the Senate.

On Thursday morning, she again reiterated that Democrats were waiting to "see the process that is set forth in the Senate" before naming House managers who would act as prosecutors in the trial. She did not say, however, if, or when, she planned to send the articles to the Senate.

More than two dozen Democrats have urged Pelosi to withhold the articles until trial plans acceptable to the Democrats were agreed upon.

Trump, however, railed against any delay.

"I got impeached last night without one Republican vote being cast with the Do Nothing Dems on their continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in American history," the president tweeted. "Now the Do Nothing Party want to Do Nothing with the Articles & not deliver them to the Senate, but it's Senate's call!"

When asked about the Republicans assertion that Democrats were playing games with the articles of impeachment, Pelosi shot back: "Frankly, I don't care what the Republicans think."

(Source: al Jazeera)

Lebanese president asks Hassan Diab to form government

Hariri calls on supporters to leave the streets, after scuffles with Army

→ I "I confirm that the government will be one of independent specialists, and that we will take care of the country and address the problems that we all know about," Diab told reporters after visiting Hariri at his Downtown Beirut residence.

"I will include specialists from all fields ... and we will work as one team," he added.

Diab said the meeting had a "special flavor," that Hariri had offered his total cooperation in forming a new government and that his stance was one of a statesman.

Earlier Friday, Diab told the German TV station Deutsche Welle that a new government will be formed within six weeks.

"Previous governments in the last decade took a year to form and I seek to form a government in the next four

weeks or a period that does not exceed six weeks," Diab said in an interview.

In binding consultations Thursday, Diab received the backing of a parliamentary majority to become the country's next prime minister.

He received a total of 69 votes, with support from the Shiite parties Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, and their Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement.

Despite being designated to occupy the highest Sunni post in Lebanon's government, Diab failed to win support from Saad Hariri's Future Movement - the largest Sunni party in Lebanon. Lebanese Forces and the Progressive Socialist Party also declined to participate in Diab's government.

Diab, a career academic and former education minis-



ter, has attempted to position himself as an independent specialist.

(Source: agencies)

Diplomats race to defuse tensions ahead of N. Korea's deadline

A last minute flurry of diplomacy aimed at engaging with North Korea ahead of its declared year-end deadline for talks has been met with stony silence from Pyongyang so far, with the looming crisis expected to top the agenda at summits in China next week.

The U.S. special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, was due to leave Beijing on Friday after meeting with Chinese officials. Earlier in the week, Biegun also made stops in Seoul and Tokyo for discussions

with counterparts.

It is unclear if Biegun had any behind-the-scenes contact with North Korean officials, but his overtures and calls for new talks were not publicly answered by Pyongyang.

Biegun's trip came as China and Russia teamed up this week to propose a resolution that would ease some United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea as a way to jumpstart talks.

Next week, Chinese, South Korean and Japanese leaders are due to meet in China, with North Korea likely to top the agenda.

"It's kind of creepy that there haven't been any statements from high level (North Korea) Foreign Ministry officials this week..." Jenny Town, managing editor at the North Korea monitoring website 38 North, said on Twitter. "The silence, even after Biegun's speech in Seoul, makes me concerned."

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has given the United States until the end of the year to propose new concessions in talks over North Korea's nuclear arsenal and reducing tensions between the long-time adversaries.

North Korea has said it is up to the United States to decide what "Christmas gift" it will receive this year, without specifying what Kim's decision may be.

(Source: Reuters)

India sees deadly citizenship law protests as police ban assembly

Tensions remain high in India with security heightened and internet blocked in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka states, where three people died in violent protests against a new citizenship law seen as anti-Muslim.

In New Delhi, thousands of people from a Muslim-dominated area of the capital rallied after the Friday prayers amid heavy security deployment by the police, who detained dozens of demonstrators.

Earlier on Friday, clashes between the police and demonstrators erupted in Uttar Pradesh state's capital, Lucknow, when police halted a few hundred people on their way to a planned protest, with security forces firing tear gas and

charging with batons, an AFP news agency reporter at the scene said. Three protesters were shot dead on Thursday, taking the death toll to nine - six were killed earlier in the northeastern state of Assam - in a wave of anger that is emerging as a major challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which makes it easier for "persecuted" minorities from three neighbouring countries to get citizenship but not if they are Muslims, has stoked fears that Modi wants to remould India as a Hindu nation, which he denies.

Remove Modi

Chants of "Remove Modi" filled the air after the Friday

prayers at the historic Jama Masjid as protesters - some carrying a huge Indian national flag - gathered to march towards central New Delhi.

Riot police brought water cannons to the area, while nearly two dozen buses were deployed to detain the protesters. Drones flew in the air to monitor the security.

A leading activist from the Dalit community - the former untouchables - was picked up by the police, but he managed to slip away, Indian media reports said.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Iraq's Sistani says early election only way out of crisis

U.S., Israel orchestrating violent attacks in Iraq

→ Rather, Khazali added, it is the groups affiliated with the U.S. that set fire to "our bases and murdered our forces, but we did not take revenge, because those acts were aimed at moving the country toward a civil war and tarnishing the image of Hashd al-Sha'abi."

"We have information that indicates the U.S. is seeking to create chaos in Iraq through its intelligence apparatus and saboteurs inside the country and using its embassy," he warned.

Khazali said the U.S. embassy and its State Department are using their dominance over social media and the potential of the U.S.-based TV channel Alhurra to provoke riots in Iraq.

He also warned against an Israeli plot to convince Washington to move Iraq toward destruction as part of its political project.

"Even some attacks on the U.S. embassy in Iraq have been carried out with the Israeli support," Khazali said.

"Some of these attacks are orchestrated by the Israeli intelligence agencies, but another part is carried out by a group that seeks to protest the U.S.' violation of red lines in Iraq."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Khazali slammed Washington for "crossing the red lines" by interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq, saying the U.S. has in recent months strived to force Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi into resignation.

"That's because Abdul-Mahdi rejected a U.S. request to enjoy half of the country's oil reserves in return for its reconstruction," Khazali revealed.

(Source: agencies)

Erdogan says Turkey will retaliate against possible U.S. sanctions

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan was quoted as saying Friday that Ankara would retaliate against potential U.S. sanctions over its purchase of Russian defense systems and a natural gas pipeline.

U.S. Congress has moved to impose sanctions on Turkey over its purchase of S-400 defense systems from Russia and related to Russia's TurkStream pipeline, which will carry Russian gas to Turkey.

Asked about the various sanctions against Ankara, Erdogan repeated that the S-400 deal was already completed.

"Now they are saying, 'we will impose sanctions against this' regarding TurkStream," he was quoted as saying. "This is a breach of our rights in the fullest sense. We will of course have our own sanctions against all of these."

(Source: Anadolu)

Snapback mechanism: U.S.-French threadbare scenario against Iran

→ Evidence suggests that the U.S. is likely to ask for triggering the snapback mechanism, in line with the deal brokered between U.S. Senator Ted Cruz and U.S. Secretary State Mike Pompeo.

According to the Associated Press, the State Department agreed to release a portion of an internal legal opinion that says the U.S. has the right to demand that all UN sanctions on Iran be reinstated, despite President Donald Trump pulling the U.S. out of the nuclear deal. In exchange, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, lifted his hold on the nomination for Stephen Biegun to serve as the State Department's No. 2 official.

Following official nomination of the State Department's No. 2 official as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, David Hale, who testified behind closed doors and was involved in Trump impeachment due to the Ukraine scandal, will be No.3 official at the State Department.

In such situation, if Pompeo resign from his position to take part in the Senate election, Hale will serve as secretary of state.

The Associated Press reported that the Iran opinion will be used by Cruz and other Iran deal opponents to argue that the U.S. should invoke a "snapback" mechanism for UN sanctions that is allowed under the Security Council resolution that enshrined the 2015 agreement known as JCPOA.

Although the European officials have also learned about the game by the U.S. officials, the European troika has shown that it is unable to confront Washington's illegal activities.

France is the most sophisticated actor in the scene, as French officials and foreign minister have threatened to trigger a snapback mechanism on the eve of Vienna talks.

In the other words, it is the 16-year strategy adopted by the European countries toward the nuclear negotiations to gain more concession by threatening to trigger a snapback mechanism and creating a negative atmosphere. It is the past "carrot and stick" policy.

China won't tolerate foreign forces meddling in internal affairs: Xi

Chinese President Xi Jinping has once again warned "foreign forces" against meddling in the country's internal affairs, as he swore in a new government for the Chinese territory of Macau.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of Macau's handover to China, the president said his government would not "tolerate" any interference in the port city or in Hong Kong. Macau, a former Portuguese colony, is governed under China's "one country, two systems" formula, just as Hong Kong is.

The system guarantees a "high degree of autonomy" for the regions for a period of 50 years with the government in the mainland maintaining control of defense and foreign affairs.

Xi said Macau's "tradition of valuing unity must be preserved."

"I must emphasize, since Hong Kong and Macau's return to the motherland, dealing with these two Special Administrative Regions' affairs is entirely China's internal affairs and none of the business of foreign forces," he added. He also swore in the region's new chief executive, Ho Iat-seng.

Under the one country, two system rule, Macau has its own government, legal and financial affairs, as does Hong Kong.

Xi also praised Macau's government for enacting a national security law that prohibits "treason, secession and subversion" against the central government in Beijing.

(Source: Xinhua)

Liverpool hopeful on Van Dijk fitness for Club World Cup final

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is hopeful Virgil van Dijk will be fit to play in Saturday's Club World Cup final against Flamengo after the Dutchman missed their semi-final.

"Virgil was part of training today so we will see how it looks at the end," Klopp said at a press conference at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha, where Saturday's game will be played.

Van Dijk had played in every match this season for the Anfield club, with the exception of the League Cup, before sitting out Wednesday's 2-1 win over Mexican side Monterrey.

With Joel Matip and Dejan Lovren also absent, Jordan Henderson dropped into central defence to partner Joe Gomez in that game.

Fabinho is also missing for the Premier League leaders, while Georginio Wijnaldum -- who travelled to Qatar despite picking up an injury in last weekend's win over Watford -- again sat out training.

"We have no new injury concerns," Klopp added. "We played on Wednesday and now it's Friday so we are using each hour for recovery and then we will see who we can line up tomorrow."

(Source: Guardian)

Bryant, Duncan, Garnett head 2020 Hall of Fame nominees

Kobe Bryant, Tim Duncan, Kevin Garnett and Chris Bosh were named Thursday in a star-studded list of nominees for entry into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Between them, Bryant, Duncan, Garnett and Bosh, amassed 13 NBA titles, four NBA regular season MVP, five NBA finals MVP awards and 59 All-Star game appearances.

The quartet were named on a 50-strong list of players and coaches which will be whittled down to around a dozen names during the All-Star Weekend in Chicago on February 14-16.

Bosh, whose career was cut short in 2016 after problems with blood clots, said he was honoured by the nomination.

"My career ended earlier than expected and that hurt immensely," the former Miami star said. "To come to this point being nominated for the Hall of Fame with my heroes is truly an amazing feeling."

The final picks for enshrinement will be revealed during college basketball's Final Four championship in Atlanta in April.

Other first timers nominated this year include Shawn Marion, Buck Williams, Mark Eaton and Michael Finley.

The list also includes several players who have been nominated before but who have yet to earn enough votes for entry, including Tim Hardaway, Richard Hamilton, Chris Webber and Ben Wallace.

Coaching nominees meanwhile include Rick Adelman, George Karl, Dick Motta and Rudy Tomjanovich.

Women's nominations feature three-time WNBA champion Swin Cash and 2012 WNBA Finals MVP Tamika Catchings, as well as trailblazing San Antonio Spurs assistant coach Becky Hammon.

(Source: AFP)

Juve hail Ronaldo's gravity-defying leap that lifted them top

Juventus on Friday applauded Cristiano Ronaldo after his incredible leap to score the winner against Sampdoria pushed the Italian champions top of Serie A.

Ronaldo, 34, defied his age and seemingly gravity on Wednesday when he met Alex Sandro's looping cross with what the club called "no ordinary header".

"As he rose up into the air, where he seemingly hung suspended for a split second of time, Ronaldo reached an impressive height of 2.56m (8 foot 4 inches) when his head connected to the ball," Juventus said on its website.

"He jumped 71cms off the ground to nod in his 11th headed goal since joining Juventus."

The incredible goal just before half-time put Juve on 42 points, three ahead of Inter ahead of their match with struggling Genoa on Saturday.

Fans on Twitter noted Ronaldo had previously headed goals by jumping 2.93 metres against Manchester United in 2013 and 2.61 metres against Wales in 2016.

(Source: Goal)

Tokyo 2020 Olympics unveil final budget of \$12.6 billion

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics are expected to cost some 1.35 trillion yen (\$12.6 billion), organisers said Friday, unveiling a final budget showing increased revenue balancing out extra costs including countermeasures against heat.

However, officials admitted the budget does not yet include an estimated three billion yen for moving the marathon and race walk north to Sapporo, as they wrangle with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) over who bears the cost.

Revenues from domestic sponsorship and robust ticket sales have increased income by 30 billion yen, according to the fourth and final version of the Olympic budget.

This equals out a rise in forecast expenditure for items such as transport and security -- as well as the heat-busting measures.

The overall 1.35-trillion-yen budget for the Games is unchanged since the last version of the budget unveiled last year.

There is also a 27-billion-yen "contingency" pot to deal with possible emergencies such as natural disasters.

Organisers are still negotiating with the IOC over the cost of moving the marathon to the northern city of Sapporo due to the expected heat in the Tokyo summer.

"This is an unprecedented matter so there are no procedures," explained Gakuji Ito, executive director for planning and finance at Tokyo 2020.

"We will go into it line-by-line and we will interact with the IOC on a daily basis," he told reporters.

Organisers have also unveiled a series of countermeasures against the heat and humidity, including water mist sprays and special heat-absorbing paint on roads -- all of which cost money.

The IOC, wary that the ballooning cost of hosting the Games is putting some cities off from bidding, has urged Tokyo to make even more cuts.

But Tokyo is also being squeezed in the other direction, with some sports voicing fears that the cuts could harm the athletes' experience plus the all-important "look" of the Games.

(Source: France 24)

FIFA may be open to 'cross-border' leagues - Infantino

FIFA could drop its long-standing opposition to cross-border leagues, as it looks to help countries who are struggling to compete with the giants of the game, president Gianni Infantino said on Friday.

FIFA has always opposed attempts to create multinational leagues, saying that the basis of the game was the national competition.

Infantino's predecessor Sepp Blatter was strongly opposed to such plans and European governing body UEFA has also blocked such initiatives and looked to its own competitions as a way of providing extra competition and revenue for clubs.

Yet faced with the commercial power of the big leagues, such as England's Premier League, Spain's La Liga and Germany's Bundesliga, Infantino says that the idea of new structures should be considered.

"We need to be open to discussions. The Belgians and the Dutch have been discussing creating a Benelux league and these discussions have been going on for 20 years and we are always saying no, because we are based on national leagues," he told reporters.

"But maybe it helps? Maybe it is the only way out, maybe in Europe they have to think about this, maybe in Africa. I was proposing something like this for Africa. I think we have the duty to study these things then we will see where it goes."

In the early 2000s a plan was drawn up for an 'Atlantic League' featuring clubs from the



Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal and Scotland, with some Scandinavian countries but was rejected by UEFA.

There have also been suggestions of a Czech-Slovak league, a Balkan league and a 'Habsburg League' in Central and Eastern Europe.

Hard-line stance

Currently clubs in Northern Ireland and

the Republic of Ireland are in exploratory talks about a possible 'All-Island League', while Scottish pair Rangers and Celtic have often talked about joining the English Premier League.

Fuelling such talk has been the fact that clubs from smaller leagues have increasingly struggled to reach the group stages, let alone the knockout phases, of the Champions League.

Although FIFA allowed an exemption for Major League Soccer, which includes clubs from the United States and Canada, it has taken a hard-line stance on all other such attempts.

In 2013, a plan emerged for Russian clubs to break away and resurrect the old Soviet competition with a multinational structure but Blatter's FIFA firmly rejected the plan.

In comments which will raise eyebrows at UEFA and the Premier League, Infantino, who has already introduced a new 24-team Club World Cup to start in 2021, said FIFA had a duty to look at how less financially successful clubs and nations could compete.

"The Premier League is the most successful competition and congratulations to the Premier League because they created a fantastic competition and a great product as well. Obviously, they want to remain the top for the next hundred years as well," he said.

"And the others, they want to become the top. So can we do something to make the others better without taking away anything from those who are at the top and... (who) have a lot of merit for how football has developed in the world today?"

"It's not about bringing anyone down. It's rather about bringing those who are today down a little bit further (up) and we are willing to discuss with everyone about everything. And then we will see."

(Source: Reuters)

El Clasico fallout: Real Madrid takes aim at referee, VAR



Spain's two biggest football clubs haven't been happy with refereeing, with Real Madrid the latest to take a swipe at the officials in the wake of Wednesday's controversial goalless draw in El Clasico.

Managers complaining about decisions after games is nothing new but Real Madrid took the unusual step of criticizing referee Alejandro Jose Hernandez Hernandez and VAR on its website.

It flagged two incidents involving defender Raphael Varane in the first half in Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium and specifically mentioned Hernandez Hernandez and Ricardo De Burgos Bengoetxea, who, according to Real Madrid, was in charge of VAR.

"Neither referee nor VAR system saw two penalties on Varane," was the headline it used Wednesday, alongside a picture of the French international seemingly having his shirt pulled in the Barcelona penalty box by Ivan Rakitic.

Then it wrote: "Raphael Varane was involved in two controversial moments in el Clasico at the Camp Nou."

"The Frenchman could have had two penalties in the first half but Hernandez Hernandez did not give (either) of them. On minute 17, the madridista went to head a corner before (Clement) Lenglet stood on his thigh muscle in the area, but neither the

referee nor VAR (where De Burgos Bengoetxea was in charge) deemed it a penalty.

"Two minutes later and following another corner, the central defender had his shirt pulled by Ivan Rakitic, which saw him end up on the ground in the penalty area. However, once again, neither the referee or the VAR system decided to award the penalty."

Madrid based sports newspaper AS used a photo of Lenglet making contact with Varane on its front page, accompanied by a headline of, "White Tsunami without goal and without VAR."

Neither La Liga or the Spanish Football Federation's Technical Committee for Referees, which assigns officials was immediately available for comment.

Varane's injured thigh And in a story recounting the incidents, it incorporated a tweet showing Varane's thigh with red stud marks.

But at least publicly, Real Madrid manager Zinedine Zidane didn't add fuel to the fire, saying he wasn't going to "dwell on these things."

"After the performance we put in, we could have won the game, but that's the way things go in football," Zidane was quoted as saying by the Real Madrid website. It was Barcelona's turn to be upset about the officials in its 2-2 draw at Real Sociedad on Saturday.

(Source: CNN)

Sharapova still has 'fire and motivation' despite 2019 misery



Maria Sharapova insisted Thursday that she still has the "internal fire and motivation" to compete professionally, despite the lingering shoulder problem that kept her out of action for long stretches this season.

The former world number one was only able to play in eight events in 2019, contesting just 15 matches in total.

The Russian five-time major champion made her first on-court appearance since her US Open first round exit in August in an exhibition in Abu Dhabi on Thursday, where she fought back from a break down in each set to defeat Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic 6-4, 7-5.

"Any chance that I get to come out and play competitively is a really good day because I just haven't played a lot," Sharapova told reporters at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.

"Definitely I'm coming out of this match happy that I was out there again and it can only get better from here."

While she wouldn't reveal too many details about the state of her shoulder injury, she did say she "felt fine" after her clash with Tomljanovic, while keeping her expectations in check having been sidelined for nearly four months.

Sharapova plans on travelling Down Under for next month's Australian Open but confirmed she will not be playing the

Olympic Games in Tokyo.

With many question marks still surrounding her form and her shoulder, she's unsure what her 2020 calendar will look like.

"I think that will be one of the biggest challenges for the new year, it's to have a set schedule," said the 32-year-old.

"I definitely look forward to going to Australia and seeing how things go, see how the body holds up there."

"It's tough to tell, I've barely played any events last year. The start and stopping was one of the most challenging parts of the year as well, just when you think I got going a little bit I had to tone it down and stop and then just keep training. Although it seems I haven't played actually I've been working a lot."

The US-based Russian will fly home for Christmas, then compete in a couple of exhibition matches in Hawaii, before heading to Australia where she plans on playing a warm-up event ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the season in Melbourne.

Asked how she's been able to maintain her spirits during her lengthy struggle with injuries, Sharapova added: "I really love what I do. I think you see it when I am on the court, when I do have the chance to compete, I really enjoy being there. I really have a great purpose for what I do."

(Source: Eurosport)

Modest Maradona museum pays tribute to patron saint of Naples

For some Diego Maradona is the greatest footballer of the 20th century, for others - mainly English - he is the cheating possessor of the hand of God. In Italy, however, he is and always will be the patron saint of Naples.

And just as saints have their altars so Maradona has his museum, an extraordinary treasure trove of artefacts that includes the left boot with which the Argentine scored twice against Belgium in the semi-finals of the 1986 World Cup.

You can also find his first contract with Napoli and even the sofa from his Naples apartment where singer Julio Iglesias once sat. It's all here in the cellar museum.

Maradona arrived at Napoli as a world record \$10.48 million signing from Barcelona in July 1984.

His time in Catalonia had been difficult and Naples was a bolt-hole. He was to stay seven years, captaining the team to their first-ever Serie A title in 1986-7.

They did it again three years later and during Maradona's stay the Neapolitans also won the Coppa Italia, UEFA Cup and Italian Super Cup.

It was a golden age which Napoli have never come close to repeating, so it is no surprise to find a museum that commemorates such a rich epoch.

Massimo Vignati's museum, though, is one of a kind. It does not appear on any map of Naples, nor is it in travel guides, and entry is free. And yet, this basement of a typical building in Secondigliano, a tough neighbourhood



in the north of the city, breathes all things Diego.

It is a delightful melange of Maradona mania with photos, pennants, balls, armbands and shirts, some washed or signed, others not.

Some items equate almost to holy relics -- the bench on which Maradona changed at the San Paolo stadium and the K-Way jacket which features in the memorable footage of him ball-juggling to the sound of Opus "Live is Life" during an incredible warm-up before facing Bayern Munich in 1989.

Family guy

This astonishing hoard also testifies to the unique bond between the Argentine genius and a family which was at

the heart of his seven-year stay in Naples.

"I was fortunate that for 37 years my dad was the caretaker of the San Paolo stadium and the Napoli changing rooms. And my mother was Maradona's housekeeper and cook," Vignati told AFP.

His sister babysat Diego's daughters Dalma and Giannina while Massimo, as a child and then adolescent, rubbed shoulders with the city's idol on a daily basis.

"We were with Diego from Monday to Sunday," says Vignati, looking at the photos of a time when the Argentine's apartment on the heights of Posillipo, an upscale district of the city, was like his second home.

"He and his wife gave us all these things because they knew we were a lot of children, five boys and six girls."

"I was a ballboy during Maradona's seven seasons. On Mondays, I went to play five-a-side, I did not go to school. "And on Tuesdays, sometimes he took me to the Napoli training session... 'Diego, let's go in the Ferrari!'"

For a long time, the wonders now on display in the Vignati cellar were locked away at the San Paolo.

"My father had two rooms," says Vignati, whose second son is called Diego. "One for all these memories and one for drinking a good Neapolitan coffee."

"After his death, I brought everything here. But the club knows that this place exists."

(Source: AFP)

Wrestler Hassan Yazdani suffers torn meniscus

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Olympic **d e s k** gold medalist Hassan Yazdani tore the meniscus in his knee during the training for the 2019 World Wrestling Clubs Cup held in Bojnurd, northeast of Iran.

He tore the meniscus in his knee and will get an MRI on Saturday to determine the extent of the injury.

"I previously had a partial tear in my meniscus but this time it forced me to miss the competition," Yazdani said.

"Fortunately, it is not as long as expected and I think I will come back after one month because I want to hoist our flag in the Olympic once again," he added.

Yazdani will most likely miss 40th Takhti International Wrestling Cup which will be held in Kermanshah from Jan. 8 to 10.

He has already secured his place at the 2020 Olympic Games.

Yazdani is an Olympic and World Champion in freestyle wrestling in two weight categories. He became Olympic champion in the 74kg category at the 2016 Summer Olympics after defeating Russian wrestler Anuar Geduev in the final. The following year he became World Champion at the 2017 World Wrestling Championships in the 86 kg category.

He has won two world championships gold medals (2017 Paris, 2019 Nur-Sultan) so far and one gold in 2018 Asian Games.

Yazdani has also won a gold medal at the 2014 Junior World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia.



Ex-Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger invited to Iran



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Arsene **d e s k** Wenger, who now works as FIFA's new Chief of Global Football Development, has been invited to Iran.

At a meeting held in Doha, Qatar between Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) President Mehdi Taj and Wenger, the two sides discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations.

According to Iran Football Federation's website, Taj invited ex-Arsenal manager to travel to Iran to hold an advanced coaching term for the Iranian coaches and the Frenchman has reportedly accepted it.

Wenger, one of the longest-serving

coaches in Premier League history, won 17 trophies during his time with the Gunners, including three Premier League titles.

He has been linked with a number of managerial vacancies across European football over the last year-and-a-half, most recently at Bayern Munich, who are on the lookout for Nico Kovac's successor at the moment.

Qatar also were among the countries who had been reportedly kinked with Wenger.

He had previously insisted that he missed the "intensity" of top-level management, but he will now be taking on a new challenge in a quite different capacity.

Sepahan pummel Shahin to remain top, Persepolis, Shahr Khodro earn late victory



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Sepahan **d e s k** football team defeated rock-bottom Shahin Bushehr 5-0 on Thursday to remain top of the Iran professional league (IPL) table over Persepolis on goal difference.

On Thursday, Sepahan beat Shahin Bushehr in Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium.

Brazilian forward Kiros Stanley scored a hat trick and Mohammad Mohebbi and Mohammad Karimi also scored a goal each.

In Bushehr, Persepolis defeated Pars Jonoubi 1-0 courtesy of Mehdi Torabi's last-second strike.

In Tehran, Esteghlal suffered a bitter

2-1 loss against Machine Sazi. Mohammad Ghaderi and Ahmad Reza Zendeirooh scored for the visiting team and Cheick Diabate scored Esteghlal's goal.

In Tabriz, Tractor brought an end to Naft Masjed Soleyman's 15-game unbeaten run in the current season. Akbar Imani scored in the 68th minute.

On Friday, Shahr Khodro defeated Paykan in Mashhad thanks to Amirhossein Moradmand's header in the injury time.

Foolad were held to a 2-2 draw by Foolad in Abadan and Nassaji beat Gol Gohar 1-0 in Ghaemshahr.

Saipa also defeated Zob Ahan 3-1 in Tehran.

Takumi Minamino joins Liverpool

Liverpool FC have confirmed the signing of Japan international Takumi Minamino from RB Salzburg, the club announced on Thursday.

The Japan international forward will officially become a Reds player on January 1 after he finalized personal terms and passed a medical on Merseyside.

On signing with the English Premier League leaders, Minamino said: "It has been a dream, my dream to become a Liverpool player. And I'm so excited that the moment has come true."

"To play in the Premier League was one of my targets. I think this is the top-class league in the world; I was thinking if my career as a footballer progressed smoothly, someday I would be able to play in the Premier League."

"But I never thought I would be able to play in this team and I'm really happy about it. I'm looking forward to it."

Minamino has faced Liverpool twice this season while lining up for Salzburg in the Champions League group-stage encounters.

Indeed, the 24-year-old was on the scoresheet in the



meeting at Anfield in October when he struck to help the Austrian side fight back from three goals down to draw level at 3-3 before Mohamed Salah netted a winner.

More recently, Minamino completed the 90 minutes for Salzburg as the Reds secured a place in the last 16 of the Champions League with a 2-0 victory at Red Bull Arena on December 10.

"From those games I learned this team has such a high

level of technique and intensity," he added.

"Their football is of such a high level and I did feel that they were the champions of the Champions League. Feeling that, it makes me feel even happier that I can play in this team. I'm really happy to be part of that team."

"My target is to win the Premier League and the Champions League, and to make good contributions to the team."

In moving to Anfield, he brings an end to his five-year spell with Die Mozartstädter, whom he joined from Cerezo Osaka in January 2015.

Minamino began his career at J-League side Osaka, playing alongside legendary forward Diego Forlan.

The midfielder won the AFC U-23 Championship in 2016, before narrowly missing out on the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates, with his side losing narrowly to Qatar.

In total, Minamino made 199 appearances for Salzburg, scoring 64 goals, while he has earned 22 caps for Japan and netted 11 times since making his debut in October 2015.

(Sources: Liverpool FC, AFP)

Bento pleased with Korea Republic's identity

Korea Republic head coach Paulo Bento was beaming with pride after his charges clinched their fifth EAFF E-1 Football Championship on Wednesday, claiming that they did so "in our style".

The regional trophy marks Bento's first after taking the job in August 2018, and the 50-year-old coach was quick to acknowledge and praise the players and staff for their superb efforts.

"I would like to say congratulations and thanks to the players and coaching staff," said Bento, who was formerly in charge of Portugal. "I also want to thank everyone for their continued support of our team."

"It was a good game and both teams played fiercely. We won thanks to our players reading the game flow every moment and

understanding what to do.

"I think it's a fair victory. Although they did not have enough time to recover after the second game, they played well at the expense of each other. I want to say congratulations to the players once again."

It was a first-half effort from Hwang In-beom, whose left-footed strike beat Kosuke Nakamura in the box, that separated the two teams as Korea Republic claimed the 1-0 victory.

On top of the Taeguk Warriors' ability to break down their East Asian rivals' strategy, Bento reinforced the importance of playing to their "style", which he has continuously drilled into the team since his tenure began.

"We've figured out how Japan is going to build up from the goalkeeper, and how

we're going to put pressure on it. We also prepared our counter-attack using quick wingers. These strategies, combined with the players' work, helped us win."

"Most of all, it's important to have a good game while maintaining our style. We can win, win or lose, but it's important to be sure of what we are creating and what our style is. We share trust and confidence with the players. I think we have made our own identity in the past year. I will continue to lead the team into the future."

Bento will be hoping that his side maintain their form before resuming their Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 campaign next March.

(Source: Korea Football Association)



Iran, Kuwait match abandoned at FINA World Junior Water Polo

Iran and Kuwait match in the FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championships 19th place was abandoned due to fighting on Thursday.

The conflict happened in the third period when Iran was 12-4 ahead at the Al-Nasar Sport Club in Kuwait City.

Iran had already defeated Kuwait 15-7 in its first match.

The FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championships 2019 was held in Kuwait from Dec. 12 to 20.

FINA Junior Water Polo World Championships is an international water polo tournament held every two years for the players under the age of 20. It was launched by FINA in 1981 for men and in 1995 for women.

The 2009 championships were played with U18 teams each, but in 2011 the FINA switched to U20 teams again.

(Source: Insidethegames)

Iran claim two more medals at Murat Dedeman FIS Cup

TASNIM — Atefeh Ahmadi and Porya Saveh Shemshaki from Iran won two silver medals at the final day of the Murat Dedeman FIS Cup on Friday.

The competition was held in Palandoken in Erzurum, Turkey from December 17 to 20.

Ahmadi seized a silver at the Women's Giant Slalom, clocking 1:27.93.

Turkey's Ozlem Carikcioglu won a gold with a time of 1:26.22 and her countrywoman Sila Kara took a bronze with 1:28.97.

Saveh Shemshaki also won a silver at the Men's Giant Slalom with a time of 1:24.85. Tiriel Luka Abramovic from Turkey finished in first place with 1:23.26.

Greek Asterios Bakas came third with 1:25.03.

Iran wrapped up the competition with one gold, six silvers and four bronze medals.

Bazare-e Bozorg win World Wrestling Clubs Cup title

IRNA — Bazar-e Bozorg of Iran freestyle wrestling team won the title of the 2019 World Wrestling Clubs Cup on Thursday.

Bazar-e Bozorg defeated another Iranian team Sina Sanat Izeh 9-1 in the final match.

Azerbaijan also beat Iran's Gohar Zamin Sirjan 6-4 in the third place playoff.

The sixth edition of the competition was held in Bojnord. Armenian and Indian teams also participated in the event.

World Wrestling Clubs Cup is an international wrestling clubs competition among teams representing member nations of the United World Wrestling (UWW) the sport's global governing body.

The tournament was held on the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation in 2014 in Iran.

Alireza Mansourian steps down as Zob Ahan coach

TASNIM — Alireza Mansourian stepped down as Zob Ahan football club's coach by mutual consent.

The 48-year-old coach replaced Omid Namazi as the Isfahan-based football team head coach in November 2018 but was forced to leave his post following poor results.

Zob Ahan sit in 10th place in Iran Professional League, nine points above the relegation zone.

Zob Ahan lost to Saipa 3-1 on Friday.

Dubai to host 2022 Wheelchair Basketball World Championships

The Wheelchair Basketball World Championships are coming to Middle East for the first time after the IWBF announced Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) as hosts of the 2022 edition.

The decision was made at the IWBF Executive Council meeting 6-7 December alongside the 2019 Asia Oceania Championships, in Pattaya, Thailand, where Australia and China won the men and women's tournaments, respectively.

IWBF President, Ulf Mehrens, said: "Hosting the World Championships in West Asia will be a milestone for our sport and is extremely important for the Asia Oceania Zone to continue its growth. We have full confidence that Dubai will exceed our expectations and create a great event and a celebration of Paralympic sport."

"It was an extremely difficult decision for the IWBF Executive Council to make with Canada and the UAE both presenting very thorough and exciting host options, and I'd like pass on my sincere thanks to both of them for their hard work and effort that went into the proposals."

Dubai have a proven track record of running world-class sporting events, including the 2019 World Para Athletics Championship and the Fazza Cup, an international wheelchair basketball tournament for the past 11 years.

Majid Abdulla Al Usaimi the CEO of Dubai Club for People of Determination and the President of the Asian Paralympic Committee said: "We are confident that with the experience of the team we have brought together for the (Local Organizing Committee), which has more than 15 years' experience in organizing large sporting events, will make the World Championships one of the most significant sporting events of the year 2022."

Dubai 2022 will be the first major event to follow the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The last Worlds took place in 2018 in Hamburg, Germany, where history was witnessed. Great Britain captured their first men's world title, while the Netherlands triumphed for their maiden gold medal in the women's side.

The first unofficial Wheelchair Basketball World Championships for men was held in 1973, in Bruges, Belgium, with Great Britain capturing the top prize.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The life-span granted by God is sixty years.
Imam Ali (AS)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES



Painting
■ An exhibition of calligraphic paintings by Ali Shoja and Nasrin Hadian is underway at Ariana Gallery. The exhibition will be running until December 23 at the gallery located at No. 9 Fereshteh St., off East Maryam St., in the Elahieh neighborhood.



Drawing
■ Homa Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of drawings by a group of artists including Maryam Espandi, Reza Sediqian, Elham Yazdani, Ashkan Abdoli and Omid Moshkar. The exhibit titled "Fragments" runs until December 31 at the gallery located at No. 8, FORTH Alley, Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.



■ Drawings by Amir-Nasr Kamguyan are on display in an exhibition at Mohsen Gallery. The exhibit named "Thoughts Box" runs until December 25 at the gallery located at 42 East Mina Blvd., Naji St., off Zafar St.



Painting
■ A collection of paintings by Somayeh Khodai is currently on view in an exhibition at Abtin Gallery. Entitled "Metamorphosis", the exhibit will run until December 24 at the gallery located at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.



■ Mehrraz Tavakkoli is showcasing her latest paintings in an exhibition at Art Center Gallery. The exhibit will be running until December 24 at the gallery located at 145 North Salimi St., Andarzu Blvd. in the Qeitarieh neighborhood.



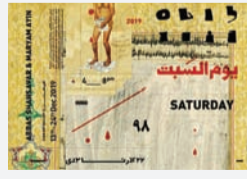
■ An exhibition of paintings by a group of artists including Ali Ettehad, Sepideh Zarat, Elaheh Keshavarz, Pedram Lesani, Ali Nasir, Delbar Shahbaz and Mansur Qandriz is underway at El Gallery. The exhibit titled "Two Portraits" runs until December 27 at the gallery that can be found at 1 Hamid Dead End, off Lesani Alley, Jebbeh St., off Mahdieh St. in the Elahieh neighborhood.



■ Paintings by Davar Yusefi are on display in an exhibition at Sareban Gallery. The exhibit named "Beyond the Instant" will continue until December 23 at the gallery located at 130 Hoveizeh St. off Sohrevardi St.



■ Mohammadreza Atashzad, Ali Golbaz, Bahman Niku, Ahmad Moqaddasi, Marjan Modaresi, Mahmud Samandarian and 10 more artists are displaying their latest paintings in an exhibition at Laleh Gallery. The exhibit titled "Rangaab" will run until December 24 at the gallery located on Fatemi St., off Laleh Park.



■ Tarrahan Azad Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by Maryam Aini and Abbas Shahsavari. The exhibit titled "Saturday" runs until December 24 at the gallery that can be found at 5 Salmas Square, off Fatemi St.



Multimedia
■ An exhibition of sets of installation, paintings and drawings by Habib Farajbadi is currently underway at Etemad Gallery 1. The exhibition runs until December 31 at the gallery located at 25 Shirudi Alley, Mofatteh St., near Haft-e Tir Square.



Photo
■ Photos by Golar Jahanian are on display in an exhibition at O Gallery. The exhibition will be running until December 24 at the gallery, which can be found at 18 Shahin St., Sanai St.

"Tangle" tops at Iranian animation celebration

A R T TEHRAN — "Tangle" by d e s k Maliheh Gholamzadeh won three main awards including the best animated short movie of the year award at the 11th edition of the Iran Independent Animation Celebration at the Abbas Kiarostami Hall of the Farabi Cinema Foundation in Tehran on Thursday.

Gholamzadeh was crowned best director, while the Association Internationale du Film d'Animation (ASIFA) award was also presented to the animated film.

"Tangle" is about the people who lose their homes in wars and are forced to leave all their memories and loved ones behind.

Samaneh Shojaei's short animation "Gray Body" received two awards including best animated effects at the gala.

The film brought the best writing award for its writer Amin Kafashzadeh, while Shojaei received an honorable mention for directing the animation.

"Gray Body" is about a doctor who is visiting with one of his patients, while there is a room full of psychiatric patients who are waiting for him and cannot be calm anymore.

"Legendary Numbers" by Mehdi Alibeigi was selected as best series of the year.

The best music award was presented to composer Peyman Yazdani for his collaboration in "Each Other" directed by Sara Tabibzadeh and "Heaven" by Farnush Abedi won the award for character design.



A scene from "Tangle" by Iranian director Maliheh Gholamzadeh.

Iranian Cinematic Research Awards honor top winners



A R T TEHRAN — The 3rd edition of the Annual Iranian Cinematic Research Awards was held at the Iranian Academy of Arts on Thursday honoring the top winners of the four main categories.

"Evaluation of Policies Focused on Cultural Economy in the Field of Cinema in Post-Revolutionary Discourses" by Farnaz Sarbandi received the top award in the thesis category.

In the article category, three researchers Sajjad Sotudeh, Milad Sotudeh and Shahab Esfandiari received the top award for their research work "The Role of Decoupage in Moral Judgment in Two Films of 'Glass Agency', and 'A Separation'".

In the visual research category, Somayeh Chaichi won the top award for her documentary "Iranian cinema in Search of Happiness".

And in the independent research section, Mohammad Sarvi Zargar received the top award for his research

"Western Writing in Iranian-style, Cognitive Research in Iranian Cinema".

The awards have been established by the Cinema Organization of Iran (COI) to honor top research centers, works, articles and theses on cinema.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Cinema Organization of Iran director Hossein Entezami emphasized conducting research in different fields especially cinema.

"Cultural policy makers and cinema professionals are the main users of the research, and we need to make efforts to attract and follow the research that is more practical," he added.

He also hoped to encourage more researchers and improve the current conditions.

In her brief words secretary of the event Azam Radvard also said that the main goal of the awards is to elevate Iranian cinema through research works.

Lebanese narrator Sara Kasir tells stories to children in Tehran

C U L T U R E TEHRAN — Sara Kasir, d e s k an experienced storyteller from Lebanon, gave a performance for Iranian children on the second day of the 22nd International Storytelling Festival in Tehran on Wednesday.

She gave her performance at the Behnam Hall of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), the IIDCYA announced on Friday.

On telling stories to children of other countries, Kasir said that she usually tailors her performance for the non-Arab children, and that she has her own secrets in narrating her stories that can attract the children.

She also said that one of her major concerns in telling stories to others is the size of large halls.

"I need to have eye contacts with the participants while telling stories since stories require more intimacy between the storytellers and the audience. That is why I came down the stage while I was performing for the children here



Sara Kasir (R), an experienced storyteller from Lebanon, gives a performance for the Iranian children at the 22nd International Storytelling Festival in Tehran on December 18, 2019. (IIDCYA/Mahmud Rahimi)

in Tehran to have eye contacts with the children," she said.

She next called the festival a unique one in its kind, adding that she has traveled

to many countries but has not seen such a great festival.

She was also fascinated by the gathering of so many Iranian narrators in one festival, and expressed regrets over why Lebanon does not have as big a festival of storytelling.

The 22nd International Storytelling Festival opened on Tuesday with narrators from Iran and several other countries.

Eight Iranian storytellers along with narrators from Turkey, Lebanon, Japan and Spain gave performances in the international section category.

The festival is comprised of different sections with participants ranging from children to grandmothers and grandfathers.

Writer Mostafa Rahmandust, children's TV programmers Majid Qannad and Giti Khameneh, and actor Reza Kianian were among the narrators in the guest section of the festival.

The festival, which aims to promote storytelling traditions among the younger generation, will end today.

Tehran concert to celebrate musician Bijan Kamkar's 70th birthday



Bijan Kamkar in an undated photo.

A R T TEHRAN — The d e s k Iranian ensemble Mahur will give a concert at Tehran's Andisheh Hall on January 16, 2020 to celebrate prominent Kurdish musician Bijan Kamkar's 70th birthday.

A repertoire of Persian and Kurdish folk music will be performed during the concert.

The ensemble led by Hossein

Rezainia and Mahur Roshan features a number of musicians including Arian Rezaei, Negar Ezazi, Milad Abbasi, Fardin Lahurpur, Hassan Mekaniki and Hossein Qasemzadeh on daf and ney.

Kamkar, who is the lead singer of the Kamkars Ensemble, will accompany the group as the vocalist and daf player.

Tehran's City Theater Complex hosting play on Rostam and Sohrab



Theatrical performance on stage with actors in traditional costumes.

A R T TEHRAN — d e s k "Sugjameh" a play based on the story of Rostam and Sohrab from the Shahnameh, the epic masterpiece of the Persian poet Ferdowsi, is on stage at Tehran's City Theater Complex.

The play is written and directed by Meysam Abbasi and has been on stage at the Sayeh Hall of the complex since December 10.

In the Shahnameh story, Rostam kills Sohrab without knowing that he is his son.

"This is a modern adaptation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab with a new approach," he added.

David Shams, Ali Beik-Mohammadi, Neda Nuri, Mohsen Alimohammadi, Soroush Taheri and Reza Nematian are the main actors of the play.