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Official says cyber
sanctions may
be introduced
against Iran

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'Car-free Tuesdays' gains momentum in Iran

INTERVIEW
By Parvin Telli

TEHRAN — The campaign for car-free Tuesdays, which is gaining momentum across Iran, was actually mounted last November in Arak, a city overburdened by its too many pollutant industries.

Entering into its 22nd week on coming Tuesday, the campaign was kicked off by Mohammad Bakhtiari, 25, who has majored in architecture and is a member of a local NGO with 1,000 members known as "the guardians of the environment of Arak city."

Mohammad, whom I caught for a phone interview when riding his bike Friday in Arak, said, "With air pollution getting worse, I did not like to sit back doing nothing. I thought everybody is responsible for this problem. And I was thinking of a way to involve more people to help with it."

Mohammad vigorously added, "The best was to encourage people to rethink about the use of their cars. Thus, I drafted a poster for car-free Tuesdays and shared it on social media for two weeks."

"Meanwhile, I went into the streets in Arak with the poster in hand and explained it in person to people. Within the first two weeks, a bike-riding campaign from [the city of] Rafsanjan joined the campaign."

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Mohammad Bakhtiari kicked off campaign for car-free Tuesdays last November

Tehran says no hajj pilgrimage, blames Saudis for impasse

POLITICAL TEHRAN — After several rounds of negotiation between Iranian and Saudis officials to hash out discrepancies over the hajj issue, on Sunday Hajj and Pil-

grimage Organization of Iran (HPOI) announced it won't dispatch pilgrims this year to Mecca because of inconsistency at decision-making level by Saudis. Iran and Saudi Arabia have been at

loggerheads over arrangements for Iranians to attend hajj pilgrimage after 464 Iranians lost their lives in a stampede in the area of Mina in September 2015 during the last hajj. →2

Rouhani: We welcome close ties with 'friendly' Ukraine



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Hosseinzadeh appointed new managing director of BMI

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ali Tayyebnia appointed Mohammadreza Hosseinzadeh as the new managing director of Bank Melli of Iran (BMI), IRNA reported on Sunday.

Hosseinzadeh replaced Abdolnaser Hemmati, who is now assigned as the head of Central Insurance of Iran.

BMI is the first national Iranian bank. The bank was established in 1927 by the order of the Iranian parliament and since then it has consistently been one of the most influential Iranian banks.

Iranian institute to hold cartoon contest on Zionism

ART TEHRAN — Masaf, an Iranian institute that organizes programs on Imam Mahdi (AS) and other Islamic teachings, plans to hold a cartoon contest on Zionism.



The Zion Caliphate International Cartoon and Caricature Contest will be held in two categories, the institute announced on Sunday.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of the political Zionist movement, and Elizabeth II, the queen of the United Kingdom, are the themes of the caricature section.

The cartoon section will focus on terrorism and racism, and the crimes committed by the ISIL.

The institute asked artists from around the world to submit their works until June 16.

Top winner in the cartoon section will be awarded \$5,000 in cash while the first winner in the caricature section will receive \$1,000.

All intl. environmental MOUs brought into effect: Ebtekar

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — All international environmental memorandums of understandings inked so far have been brought into effect, chief of Iran's Department of Environment (DoE) said here on Sunday.

Masoumeh Ebtekar made the remarks in a press conference held on the occasion of the World Environment Day, June 5.

Signing MOU with Austrian Raiffeisen Bank in line with boosting Iran's National Environment Fund, China's \$3 million contribution for provision of greenhouse emission control devices, and Italy's \$3 million contribution spent on air pollution mitigation equipment are of the agreements which are put in action, Ebtekar explained.



Iran's wetlands restoration programs are triumphant

Commenting on the effective measures DoE so far taken to tackle environmental predicaments over the current administration, Ebtekar gave full credit to the ongoing wetlands' restoration programs for the partial revival of them.

"The truth is that Iran's precipitation pattern has not changed dramatically and if it wasn't for the measures

taken by DoE for the wetlands such as Hamoun, Hour-al Azim and Urmia they wouldn't be now partially revived," she highlighted.

Water transferring plans required to undergo environmental assessment

"In order to move forward with any proposed water transferring plans we first need to ensure that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before implementing it," the DoE chief said. "First we need to make sure that the water right of the wetlands remains intact and then we can think of adopting them," she added.

She went on to say that "provincial water transferring is of no use unless we go out of option and be forced to do so to supply potable water for a region."

→10

Iranian FM aims to drums up business in Poland

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif arrived in Poland on Sunday for a two-day visit during which he will meet his Polish counterpart Witold Waszczykowski.

Zarif is to take part in a Polish-Iranian economic forum on Monday.

Iran's ambassador to Poland, Ramin Mehmanparast, told Polish Radio that talks with Waszczykowski would take in bilateral relations as well as the situation in the Middle East.

"We are counting main-

ly on the further development of relations between the two countries, which are already good. We are convinced that - in connection to the crises in the Middle East - our consultations and contacts will be very important," he said.

The two ministers are also to sign an agreement on co-operation. The main focus of the Iranian foreign minister's visit is economic.

In recent years, Polish-Iranian trade was worth around \$70 million annually.

(Source: thenews.pl)

Iraqi forces complete buildup around IS-held Fallujah

TARIQ CAMP, Iraq (AP) — Iraq's special forces completed a troop buildup around Fallujah on Sunday ahead of an operation to retake the Islamic State-held city west of Baghdad, a military officer said, as the militants attacked a newly-liberated town to the west.

Teaming up with paramilitary troops and backed by aerial support from the U.S.-led coalition, the government launched a large-scale offensive to dislodge IS militants from Fallujah a week ago.

The city, located about 40 miles (65 kilometers) west of Baghdad, is one of the last major IS strongholds in Iraq. The extremist group still controls territory in the country's north and west, including Mosul, Iraq's second largest city.

The last battalion from Iraq's Special Forces Service arrived at dawn Sunday



at the sprawling Tariq Camp outside Fallujah, said Maj. Dhia Thamir. He declined to comment on troop numbers or the timing of the expected assault.

He said troops have recaptured 80 percent of the territory around the city since the operation began and are currently battling IS to the northeast as they seek to tighten the siege ahead of a planned final push into the city center. In a televised speech to parliament,

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said the "current second phase of the Fallujah operation" will last less than 48 hours, after which the offensive to recapture the city will begin.

Al-Abadi called on residents of Fallujah to either leave the city or stay indoors. Government officials and aid groups estimate that more than 50,000 people remain inside the center of the Sunni majority city.

As he cleared his weapon and checked his Humvee at the camp, soldier Ali al-Shimmari said he was "totally ready" for the battle. "I phoned my family in the morning and asked them to pray for me to get back safe to them," he added.

"I'm determined to end Daesh," al-Shimmari continued, using the Arabic acronym for the group. →3

Even-tempered Larijani takes helm as interim speaker

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Principlist Ali Larijani was elected interim speaker of the new Iranian Majlis (parliament), dashing reformists' hopes to take the helm of the influential legislature.

Larijani, already holding the post for the last eight years, won with 173 votes in duel with Mohammad Reza Aref backed only by 103 MPs.

Out of a total 281, five voted for neither.

Masoud Pezeshkian, a reformist MP from Tabriz, was also elected as first deputy speaker, winning 154 votes. Principlist Mohammad Deqhani, also secured second deputy speaker by garnering 136 votes.

While Larijani was representing the principlist faction, Aref had been fielded by the Hope bloc, which consists predominantly of reformists.

According to the parliamentary regulations pamphlet, the interim presiding body will have the gavel until two-third of MPs' credentials are approved, as required by the constitution.

Following the approval, MPs will cast their votes to decide the permanent presiding board for a one-year term.

Results for the interim term come as a blow to reformists who were holding caucuses before the Majlis ushered in, hoping for taking the seat. →2

Iran can fulfill Ukraine's energy needs: Ukrainian FM

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said Tehran and Kiev can satisfy each other's demands for agricultural products and energy.

Iran and Ukraine have common challenges in agriculture and economy, Klimkin said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency in Tehran on Sunday, adding that Ukraine can help to ensure food security in Iran, while Iran can in turn help to provide Ukraine's energy security.

Referring to his visit to Iran and meetings with top Iranian officials, the Ukrainian minister said Kiev is after establishing strategic ties with Tehran.

He also hailed the great opportunities for closer ties with Iran following the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a lasting nuclear deal between Tehran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the US, Britain, France and Germany).

Iran is a strategic power that can play a significant role in providing security, Klimkin added.

The minister further said that termination of anti-Iran sanctions under the JCPOA has made it possible for Iranians and Ukrainians to open banking accounts in both countries, paving the way for enhancing interactions between the two countries' big and small businesses.

The Ukrainian top diplomat had a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Sunday morning.

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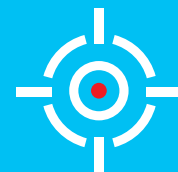
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MEDIA MONITOR



Veep recommends stronger ties with Indian Ocean littoral states

TEHRAN — First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri on Saturday urged administrative agencies, particularly Chabahar officials, to pursue expansion of ties with Indian Ocean littoral states and inking co-operation document with them.

He said about two billion people live in the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman and for this reason Iran, despite opposition by certain countries, should develop its ties with the countries of this region, the YJC reported.

Speaking in a local ceremony, Jahangiri said connecting the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman is a golden opportunity for Iran to develop the Makran seashores.



Larijani's accession clarified majority-minority proportion: Habibi

TEHRAN — Larijani's accession to the speaker's position of the Majlis clarified the proportion between the majority and minority in the new parliament, the secretary general of the Islamic Coalition Party believes.

Some think "Tehran is tantamount to Iran", but the truth is all those who live in this vast country have equal rights, Mohammad Nabi Habibi said, ISNA reported on Sunday.

In the parliamentary election on February 26 the 30-member candidate list in Tehran, led by reformist Mohammad Reza Aref, win all the 30 seats allocated for the Tehran constituency.



U.S. about to pay for purchased Iranian heavy water

TEHRAN — The U.S. is about to pay for the heavy water it has purchased from Iran, according to Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

He said on Sunday that Iran is in talks for selling more heavy water to other countries including Russia, the IIRB reported.

Elsewhere, Araqchi added that Tehran is about to file a suit against U.S. confiscation of \$2 billion of Iranian assets before international courts.

He also stated the U.S. would not have considered a nuclear deal with Iran if it still had hopes of a military action.



Mottahari to run for parliament speaker

TEHRAN — Tehran representative Ali Mottahari will run for the post of speaker in the new parliament, according to independent and moderate front leader Qodrat-Ali Heshmatian.

Heshmatian also said the independent and moderate front endorses five out of twelve members of the interim presiding board, Serat News reported on Sunday.



Hackers of govt. website traced back to S. Arabia: Iranian police

TEHRAN — Iran's Cyber Police Chief Kamal Hadianfar said on Sunday that a recent cyber-attack against a government website has been traced back to IP addresses in three Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia.

The country's cyber police unit has carried out a series of investigations, learning that hackers from three Arab states, mainly Saudi Arabia, were behind a cyber-attack launched on the Statistics Centre of Iran on May 24, Hadianfar said on Sunday, Tasnim reported.

He also said Iran has submitted a report regarding the IPs and exact locations of the hackers to Saudi Arabia via international police body Interpol to take the necessary steps on this issue and arrest the cyber criminals.



Iraqi forces backed by Iranian advisors leading push to retake Falluja from Daesh

TEHRAN — Iraqi forces enjoying the support of Iranian advisory officers have become the face of an operation to retake the terrorist stronghold of Falluja from Daesh, New York Times reported on Sunday.

On the outskirts of Falluja, tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers, police officers and Shiite militiamen backed by Iran are preparing for an assault on the city. Iran has placed advisers, including its special Quds Force Commander Qassim Suleimani, on the ground to assist in the operation.

Even-tempered Larijani takes helm as interim speaker

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Whatsoever the parliamentary make-up, Iranians will expect a change of tack and this has been mainly influenced by the performance of the previous parliament, particularly when it comes to the economic sector.

In addition to all challenges inherited from the Ahmadinejad administration such as, inter alia, high inflation rate and unemployment, the new parliament should act in more harmony with the incumbent government so as to find a way out of the economic stagnation.

The economic agenda with a resistance economy orientation was a key theme in the statements issued by the Supreme Leader and the president, both delivered on the occasion.

■ Interim speaker says resistance economy high on agenda

In his first address to MPs, the interim speaker drew their attention to the economic challenges the country is confronted with, saying, "The country is facing serious economic challenges which can be dealt with via convergence and use of scientific approach."

Elsewhere, in his remarks, Larijani hinted at issues related to the country's foreign policy, highlighting that Iran is not a "separate island" on the Earth.

"We are not a separate island in the international arena and as underscored by the Supreme Leader, we will keep relations with all countries, which entails accurate diplomacy."

Larijani also offered gratitude to Aref, who also run for the interim post, hailing him as an "old friend" and "one of good figures of the country."

Also on Sunday Aref said a focus on resistance economy will be the "most important priority" for the new parliament.

According to IRNA, Aref said attention to knowledge-based economy is a



© Mehr/Majid Haghdoust

Interim parliament speaker says Iran is not a separate island, keeping ties with all foreign countries.

Larijani highlights role of friendship groups in boosting ties

POLITICAL
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TEHRAN — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that parliamentary friendship groups can play an important role in strengthening ties between Iran and Ukraine.

"Efforts should be made to push the friendship groups to be more active, because they can play a part in expansion of political and economic relations as well

as strengthening parliamentary ties," Larijani said during a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin in Tehran.

Larijani also said that Ukraine can invest in Iran to help the country develop its railway network.

He also suggested that Ukraine should expand economic relations with Asian and European countries in order to find a way out of its current

crisis.

For his part, Klimkin said that Iran and Ukraine have many commonalities and called for expansion of relations.

He invited the Iranian Majlis speaker to visit Ukraine. Expansion of the parliamentary relations between the two countries can help promote the political and economic ties, the Ukrainian minister noted.

Rouhani: We welcome close ties with 'friendly' Ukraine

POLITICAL
d e s k

TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday called Ukraine a "friendly country" and said Iran welcomes expansion of ties between the two countries in various areas.

"Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Ukraine have been good and growing and Tehran calls for boosting these friendly ties," Rouhani said during a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin in Tehran.

Rouhani also said it is essential to expand cooperation between the two countries' private sectors.

Banking cooperation between the two countries will facilitate economic relations, the president said.

The president also called for expanding relations in spheres of culture, science, technology and tourism.

Elsewhere, Rouhani said that "political dialogues" are the only ways to settle the crises in the region and establish security.



© Mehr/Hossein Esmadelli

■ Iran, Ukraine can have constructive cooperation, Zarif says

In a separate meeting with Klimkin on Sunday Foreign Minister Mohammad

Javad Zarif also said Iran and Ukraine can establish "constructive cooperation" in areas such as campaign against drug trafficking and organized crimes.

Tehran says no hajj pilgrimage, blames Saudis for impasse

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Saudis had conditioned Iranians performing this year's hajj on visas being issued in a third country and non-Iranian airlines transferring them to Mecca, both rejected by Tehran.

In a communique by HPOI, the decision has been linked with, inter alia, Saudis' lack of cooperation to allay Tehran's concerns about "safety" of Iranian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia.

The two have been exchanging accusations, blaming each for the gridlock.

According to Al-Jazeera, a statement from the Saudi pilgrimage ministry said the Iranian government "will be responsible in front of Allah Almighty and its people for the inability of the Iranian citizens to perform hajj for this year."



On the other hand, Iranian Culture and Islamic Guidance Ali Jannati has said "Performing the hajj ritual this year is virtually impossible" because of Saudis' continuous sabotaging of the process.

Earlier, he had said, "We are seriously seeking to dispatch pilgrims to Mecca."

Also, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has said Tehran will exercise restraint with Saudi Arabia on the issue of hajj ritual.

"The Saudi government refuses to provide safety and transportation and facilitate visa issuance for our pilgrims," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossein Jaberian-Ansari said in his recent press conference.

The hajj standoff is also fueled by Tehran and Riyadh being at odds over other issues, notably the conflicts in Syria and Yemen in which they support opposing sides.

The row has further been complicated after Riyadh severed all diplomatic ties with Tehran as its diplomatic posts in Tehran and Mashhad were attacked in public mobs, triggered by the Saudi execution of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

Official says cyber sanctions may be introduced against Iran

POLITICAL
d e s k

TEHRAN — Civil Defense Organization Commander Gholamreza Jalali said on Sunday that cyber sanctions may be imposed against Iran.

Threats against the country have changed in terms of quality and quantity, he said on the sidelines of an exhibition on local cyber industry.

"A wise view on cyberspace is required and it should not be considered a pure threat or

great opportunity," the brigadier general said. He said that cyberspace influences political and social spheres.

Quoting Jalali, Fars news agency reported on Saturday that a group of Saudi hackers launched cyber attacks on a number of Iranian government websites, but failed to incur major damage.

"Saudi Arabia sought to materialize its threats through such attacks but it was mostly a type of show-off," Jalali told Fars.

"These attacks were carried out on the first layer and didn't inflict heavy damage," he added.

According to a report posted on the Tasnim news agency on Saturday, Jalali has also said Iran plans to stage specialized war games in coming months to increase its cyber defense capabilities.

He said many hostile countries have established cyber armies and the Islamic Republic is one of their possible targets.



"Holding specialized cyber war games is one of the priorities this year," the official said.

Iran to attend high commission on tech. coop. with Russia

Sattari, Iran's VP for science and technology, heading a delegation will visit Moscow Mon. to attend the third meeting of Iran-Russia high commission on technological cooperation.

The commission which was established last year and is co-chaired by Sattari and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, comprises 10 specialist committees and sub-committees in the fields of space and aeronautics, nanotechnology, biological and medical technology, energy, and information technology.

Sattari is also scheduled to meet with Russian Presidential Aide Andrei Fursenko as well as a number of other officials of industry and science.

On this two-day visit, the Iranian delegate will take part in meetings with officials of executive committees and working groups, as well as make a visit to advanced

technology-industrial complex RSC Energia, Russia's cosmonaut training center, and a number of other centers.

Korolev Rocket and Space Corporation Energia, also known as RSC Energia, is a leading manufacturer of spacecraft and space station components in Russia, established in 1946. The company is the prime developer and contractor of the Russian manned spaceflight program.

(Source: Mehr)

NEWS

Turkey's new prime minister wins vote of confidence in parliament

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim's government on Sunday won a vote of confidence in parliament as well as approval for his legislative program, Parliament Speaker Ismail Kahraman said.

Yildirim is a close ally of President Tayyip Erdogan and a co-founder of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalk?nma Partisi). He was declared prime minister after he was elected as the new leader of the AK Party at a party congress.

Yildirim's appointment marks another step in Erdogan's plan to create a full presidential system in Turkey.

Yildirim replaces Ahmet Davutoglu, who said he was stepping down after weeks of tension with Erdogan.

Kahraman said the result was 315 votes for approving the government and 138 against.

(Source: Reuters)

Jordan's King Abdullah dissolves parliament, names caretaker PM

Jordan's King Abdullah appointed veteran politician Hani Mulqi as prime minister after dissolving parliament by royal decree on Sunday, following the end of its four-year term, and charged him with conducting new elections by October.

The monarch accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, as is customary under the constitution, before appointing an interim head of government.

Under the constitutional rules the election should be held within four months under the constitution and after the lower house passed an amendment to the electoral laws in March government sources and political analysts say there are likely to be more candidates from political parties vying for votes with traditional tribal and family allegiances.

But Jordan's main political opposition to the government comes from the Muslim Brotherhood movement which is facing increasing legal curbs on its activities, leaving mostly pro-monarchy parties and some independent Islamists and politicians to compete in the elections, the sources say.

In 2011, under pressure from the popular protests across the Arab world, Jordan's parliament endorsed constitutional changes that devolved some of the monarch's powers to the parliament.

(Source: Reuters)

Westerner arrested among ISIL in Yemen's Aden: police

Seven suspected members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, including a Westerner, have been captured in an offensive in Yemen's port city of Aden.

The captures were made part of an offensive by forces loyal to ex-Yemeni president Abd Rubbuh Mansur Hadi against al-Qaeda and ISIL, which has claimed a wave of deadly attacks in recent months in Aden.

A militant commander, quoted by the AFP news agency, said the arrests were made in the al-Mansoura district of the southern province of Aden on Saturday.

ISIL and other Takfiri groups have exploited a massive Saudi invasion and its attacks on Ansarullah (Houthi) movement to expand their footholds in Yemen.

There has been an uptick in violence since Saudi-backed forces stormed the city of Mukalla near Aden.

On May 23, twin bombings claimed by ISIL killed at least 41 people in Aden which has turned to a major hub for Takfiri groups since Saudi-backed troops



overran the city in July.

A security source told local news site Aden al-Ghad that the cell of seven was led by a French national.

France is said to be the biggest source of European foreign militants joining ISIL, with more than 900 French nationals thought to have left the country to fight

for the group in Iraq or Syria.

It is not known how many French or European nationals could have joined the group in Yemen, where ISIL has not long had a presence.

Aden has served as Hadi's temporary headquarters since fleeing the capital Sana'a in September 2014.

Militant groups have consolidated their power in Aden after Hadi's forces drove the Ansarullah out of the port city and other southern provinces in July with the Saudi military support.

Riyadh stands accused of even supporting Takfiri militants in a bid to contain the Ansarullah, with numerous reports of Saudi airdrop of weapons in areas under the control of the extremists.

The House of Saud regime launched its offensive against Yemen in late March 2015 in a bid to bring Hadi back to power. More than 9,400 people have been killed and at least 16,000 others injured since the onset of the aggression.

(Source: Press TV)

Venezuelan government 'holds talks' with opposition

A group of former presidents has held secret meetings in the Dominican Republic with Venezuelan officials and government opponents in an attempt to mediate the South American nation's political standoff, an opposition leader has confirmed.

Jesus Torrealba, executive secretary of the opposition alliance, confirmed on Saturday that the meetings, which were initiated under the auspices of the Union of South American Nations, or UNASUR, took place.

But he said there was no face-to-face encounter, and instead the two sides exchanged messages through the ex-presidents.

The OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nation is suffering a severe recession due to low oil prices and a collapsing socialist economic model.

President Nicolas Maduro is locked in a standoff with Congress after the opposition won a sweeping legisla-

tive majority last year.

Government-backed newspaper Ciudad Caracas described the encounter as an "exploratory meeting for the start of dialogue," adding that the meeting included ex-leaders of Spain, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

Rodriguez retweeted state-run broadcaster Telesur saying the government had met with the opposition.

A Foreign Ministry official however, declined to comment.

The head of Venezuela's MUD opposition coalition tweeted: "There is no 'opposition-government' meeting in the Dominican. Representatives of the coalition are attending a meeting with (the ex-presidents)."

Former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, who is leading the recall push, said in an interview this week that dialogue would simply allow the government to buy time and that the only way to resolve the crisis was through a vote.

A dialogue effort in 2014 brought the two sides together amid months of violent anti-government street protests that left more than 40 people dead. Both sides agree that the talks did not produce any substantive agreements.

Opposition leaders accuse the National Election Council of stalling their effort to recall Maduro, whose popularity in March dropped to 27 percent, according to local pollster Datanalisis.

They also say the ruling Socialist Party has used a pro-government Supreme Court to shoot down nearly every law passed by Congress since the opposition won a two-thirds majority of seats in December.

Maduro insists his government is the victim of an "economic war" led by business leaders with the backing of Washington.

(Source: agencies)

Between 700-900 migrants may have died at sea this week: NGOs

ROME (Reuters) At least 700 migrants may have died at sea this past week in the busiest week of migrant crossings from Libya towards Italy this year, Medecins San Frontieres and the UN Refugee agency said on Sunday.

About 14,000 have been rescued since Monday amid calm seas, and there have been at least three confirmed instances of boats sinking. But the number of dead can only be estimated based on survivor testimony, which is still being collected.

"We will never know exact numbers," Medecins San Frontieres said

in a Tweet after estimating that 900 had died during the week. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said more than 700 had drowned.

Migrants interviewed on Saturday in the Sicilian port of Pozzallo told of a large fishing boat that overturned and sank on Thursday with many women and children on board.

Initial estimates were that 400 people died, but the UN Refugee agency said on Sunday there may have been about 670 passengers on board.

According to testimony collected

by EU border agency Frontex, when the motorless fishing boat capsized, 25 swam to the boat that had been towing it, while 79-89 others were saved by rescuers and 15 bodies were recovered. This meant more than 550 died, the UNHCR said.

The migrants -- fleeing wars, oppression and poverty -- often do not know how to swim and do not have life jackets. They pay hundreds or thousands of dollars to make the crossing from Libya to Italy, by far the most dangerous border passage for migrants in the world.

Britain to stockpile tanks in Eastern Europe

The British military may soon start stockpiling tanks and other heavy equipment in Eastern Europe as part of NATO's military beef up close to Russia's border. The decision may come at the upcoming NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) summit in Warsaw in July.

Citing a threat to the Baltic States and Poland, the North-Atlantic alliance plans to deploy as many as 4,000 additional troops in those countries. The initial plan was for the United States to provide half, with Germany and Britain shouldering the rest of the cost. However, last week the Wall Street Journal reported that Washington would only provide one 1,000-strong battalion and wanted the European members of the alliance to spend more on their own defense.

Britain's plan, however, remains the same. It will provide an armored battle group, which usually consists of about 1,000 troops, backed by tanks and artillery, to be deployed in the Baltic, the Times reported. Britain's other plans under consideration are to stockpile tanks and other military hardware across Eastern Europe and ramp up air defenses, the newspaper said.

Russia considers NATO's new deployments a hostile move and says they violate the spirit of the agreement the alliance signed with Moscow in 1994. NATO pledged not to deploy 'significant forces' in Eastern Europe on a permanent basis.

However, it has been circumventing its pledge by rotat-

ing troops, as is the case with the four planned battalions, and debating the meaning of the word 'significant' in the deal, which was not legally defined.

The alliance claims that its military buildup at the Russian border is needed to counter Russian aggression. It justified the stance using the Ukrainian crisis, during which its region Crimea opposed a coup-imposed government in Kiev and voted in a referendum to break up from Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

Moscow used its military, which was stationed in Crimea under a treaty with Ukraine, to prevent violence during the transition period. Kiev's foreign sponsors say the move was an annexation through military force rather than an exercise in self-determination.

The three Baltic nations, which were parts of the Soviet Union, and Poland are the most vocal European proponents of escalating the tension between NATO and Russia. Hosting additional troops gives those countries a boost to their local economies, but also makes them a target for Russian military planners, who respond to the extra military presence there.

Moscow insists that it poses no military threat to any NATO member and accuses the alliance of warmongering aimed at justifying greater military spending by European nations.

(Source: RT)

Iraqi forces complete buildup around IS-held Fallujah



The militants meanwhile launched an attack Sunday on the town of Hit, 85 miles (140 kilometers) west of Baghdad, which was recaptured by government troops last month. A military officer said the extremists entered three neighborhoods and were engaged in

heavy clashes with Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes.

By late afternoon, the forces had managed to push the militants out and were in control of the whole town. The officer was not authorized to release information so spoke on condition of anonymity.

Fallujah, which saw some of the heaviest fighting of the 2003-2011 U.S.-led military intervention, was the first city in Iraq to fall to IS. The extremists seized control of Fallujah in January 2014, six months before they swept across northern and western Iraq and declared a caliphate.

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NEWS

Russia's Novak not planning to take part in June OPEC meeting: RIA

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Saturday he was not planning to take part in an OPEC meeting in Vienna in June, RIA news agency reported.

Russia is not a member of the OPEC oil producers' group but consulted with its members in recent months when global oil prices collapsed to multi-year lows.

Earlier this year a proposed deal involving Russia and some OPEC members to freeze oil output to support prices fell apart.

At the April meeting, OPEC rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran could not agree on deal terms, triggering criticism that the producers' cartel had lost its ability to act.

At the next official meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), scheduled for June 2 in Austria's capital Vienna, al-Saleh said the focus would be on dialog, not market intervention. *(Source: Reuters)*

Economists overwhelmingly reject Brexit in boost for Cameron

Nine out of 10 of the country's top economists working across academia, the City, industry, small businesses and the public sector believe the British economy will be harmed by Brexit, according to the biggest survey of its kind ever conducted.

A poll commissioned for the Observer and carried out by Ipsos MORI, which drew responses from more than 600 economists, found 88% saying an exit from the EU and the single market would most likely damage Britain's growth prospects over the next five years.



A striking 82% of the economists who responded thought there would probably be a negative impact on household incomes over the next five years in the event of a Leave vote, with 61% thinking unemployment would rise.

Those surveyed were members of the profession's most respected representative bodies, the Royal Economic Society and the Society of Business Economists, and all who replied did so voluntarily.

Paul Johnson, director of the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, said the findings, from a survey unprecedented in its scale, showed an extraordinary level of unity. "For a profession known to agree about little, it is pretty remarkable to see this degree of consensus about anything," Johnson said. "It no doubt reflects the level of agreement among many economists about the benefits of free trade and the costs of uncertainty for economic growth."

The poll also found a majority of respondents – 57% – held the view that a vote for Brexit on 23 June would blow a hole in economic growth, cutting GDP by more than 3% over the next five years. Just 5% thought that there would probably be a positive impact.

The economists were also overwhelmingly pessimistic about the long-term economic impact of leaving the EU and the single market. Some 72% said that a vote to leave would most likely have a negative impact on growth for 10-20 years.

Just 4% of respondents who thought Brexit would mostly likely have a negative impact on GDP over the initial five years said it would have a positive effect over the longer term.

The findings – which come as 37 faith leaders write in a letter to the Observer warning that Brexit will damage the causes of peace and the fight against poverty – will bolster David Cameron and George Osborne, who have both argued strongly that the economy will be hit hard in the event of Brexit.

But the prime minister and chancellor have been criticized by the Michael Gove and Boris Johnson-led Leave campaign, which has claimed they are trying to scare the electorate and are buying into the establishment views of EU-funded international organizations. Last week Vote Leave accused the Institute for Fiscal Studies of being a "paid-up propaganda arm" of the European Union after it said that leaving the EU would result in an extra two years of austerity.

The main reasons cited by economists as to why the UK would suffer were "loss of access to the single market" (67%) and "increased uncertainty leading to reduced investment" (66%). The leading Leave campaigner Michael Gove has said Britain should leave the single market as well as the EU.

Economists working in the public sector tended to be slightly less negative about the economic impacts of leaving the EU than average. Non-UK citizens living in the UK were more likely to think a vote to leave would most likely have a negative impact on GDP over five years (96%) compared with British or Irish economists living in the UK (86%). By contrast, relatively few economists have publicly come out saying that leaving the EU would be good for British growth, and only a handful have signed up in support of the pro-Brexit group Economists for Britain.

Most studies of the impact on Britain's economy of a decision to quit the EU show the uncertainty will hit growth in the short term and the loss of access to the EU's single market will damage growth for decades to come.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the UK's National Institute of Economic and Social Research agree that there will be a loss of output as foreign investment shrivels and international businesses and banks shift work to the continent. Any cuts to migration would also have a huge impact on growth. *(Source: The Guardian)*

Iran, Lithuania ink blueprint on economic co-op

TEHRAN — Iran and Lithuania signed a blueprint covering operational programs for economic cooperation in Tehran on Sunday, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) reported.

According to the report, the agreement was signed by Mohammad Khazaei, the head of Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical As-



Mohammad Khazaei (L) , the head of Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (OIETAI), and Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius signing a blue print on economic cooperation in Tehran on Sunday

sistance of Iran (OIETAI), and Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius at the ministry of economic affair and finance building.

In the signing ceremony, Khazaie said

that the agreement will set the programs for future cooperation between the two countries in motion and it allows the parties to benefit from each other's economic privileges.

"The current economic relation between the two countries is close to zero and Lithuanian foreign minister's visit is an important step towards the expansion of bilateral ties," he added.



Lithuanian foreign minister for his part said, "I have had very good and constructive talks with Iranian officials in all of them deepening of bilateral ties has been emphasized."

Iran Agrofood 2016 to kick off today in Tehran

TEHRAN — The 23rd edition of Iran's international exhibition of agricultural products, foodstuff, machineries, and related industries, known as Iran Agrofood 2016, will start operation at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds today, IRIB

news reported.

The three-day event, which is the largest and the most famous international food fair in the Middle East ever, will kick off in the presence of Iranian Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hojjati and some senior officials from the Iranian

'Lithuania ready to co-op on telecom'

Also, on a Saturday meeting with Iran's Minister of Communications and



Iranian Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mahmoud Vaezi (R) met Linkevicius in Tehran on Saturday.

Information Technology Mahmoud Vaezi, Linkevicius said that Lithuania is ready to cooperate with Iran on telecommunications.

Touching upon Lithuania's 16th place in the world's telecommunications and information technology ranking, Vaezi said, "Lithuania has achieved considerable progress in various fields of communication and telecommunications, especially in the field of e-government, network security and software and this can be very effective for cooperation in these sectors."

"A joint committee can be set up by the communication ministries of Iran and Lithuania to follow up the implementation of joint cooperation programs be-



tween the two countries," he added. The Iranian minister emphasized the need for expansion of ties between Iran and Lithuania after the implementation of joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA), saying that "Iran is interested in expanding its relations with European Union members including Lithuania."

The Lithuanian foreign minister, heading a high-ranking delegation, arrived in Tehran on Saturday morning to discuss bilateral ties and regional developments with senior Iranian officials.

Non-oil exports from Iran planned to rise 20% by Mar. 2017

TEHRAN — Iran's non-oil exports value with a 20% increase is planned to reach over \$50 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2017), IRIB quoted the minister of industry, mine and trade as saying on Saturday.

Mohammadreza Nematzadeh made the remarks in a meeting with exporters and export associations' representatives in Tehran.

It is predicted that by the end of the current calendar year, the value of exports in industry, mine and trade sphere will reach \$38 billion and the figure for the agricultural products and gas condensate will stand at \$5 billion and \$7 billion, respectively, the minister added.



Mentioning that 32 countries have been already determined as export targets, Nematzadeh added, "Accord-

ing to the policies of Resistance Economy, comprehensive and goal-oriented support of exports and exporters is emphasized."

The minister also called for the attraction of investment in order to enhance exports.

According to Iran's Customs Administration, in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 19, 2016, the value of the country's non-oil trade reached over \$83 billion.

In the past year, the Tasnim news agency reported, Iran exported \$42.415 billion worth of goods while its imports reached \$41.499 billion, showing a 16.11 percent decrease in the value of exports and a 22.53 percent decline in the value of imports when compared to its previous year.

Fade the oil bounce, here's why: technician

This week, oil broke above the key \$50 level for the first time since October 2015. Yet rather than interpret the move as a sign to buy, one top technician is warning investors not to chase the rally.

"I think it's all about risk-reward and there's probably no more important chart right now than the oil chart," Chris Verrone, a technician at Strategas Research Partners, told CNBC's "Fast Money" this week.

According to Verrone, it's the steepness of the move that bothers him most. In the past 72 days, oil has moved 20 percent above its 200-day moving average. "It looks excessive to us, we think there's a higher likelihood you come back and retest the 200 near 39, 40 bucks," said Verrone.

Also troubling to Verrone is the fact that while crude has surged to new highs, energy stocks and the Mexican peso — both

of which are closely tied to oil — have not made new highs in a month.

Energy names have fallen since peaking on April 27, whereas crude has surged 12 percent. Since peaking back April 29, the peso's gains are still lagging those in oil. They are up 8 percent and 33 percent, respectively, this year.

Indeed, analysts at Bank of America Merrill Lynch warned this week that continued strength in the dollar could trigger a series of knock-on effects that may push crude off its new highs. The bank said a "black swan event" such as Saudi Arabia removing its currency peg could lead to a collapse of Brent crude to as deep as \$25 per barrel, and it expects oil prices to average \$46 per barrel this year. On Friday, crude ended the session above \$49 per barrel. *(Source: CNBC)*

Japan's Abe to delay sales tax hike until 2019: government source

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe plans to delay an increase in sales tax by two and a half years, a government official said on Sunday, as the economy sputters and Abe prepares for a national election.

Abe told Finance Minister Taro Aso and the secretary general of his ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Sadakazu Tanigaki, on Saturday of his plan to propose delaying the tax hike for a second time, until October 2019, said the official, who was briefed on the meeting.

The prime minister, who has promised to announce steps on Tuesday to spur economic growth and promote structural reform, is also expected to order an extra budget to fund stimulus measures, just two months into the fiscal year and on the heels of a supplement-

tary budget to pay for recovery from recent earthquakes in southern Japan.

After chairing a summit of Group of Seven leaders on Friday, Abe said Japan would mobilize "all policy tools" - including the possibility of delaying the tax hike - to avoid what he called an economic crisis on the scale of the global financial crisis that followed the 2008 Lehman Brothers bankruptcy.

"There is a risk of the global economy falling into crisis if appropriate policy responses are not made," Abe told a news conference after the summit. To play its part, Japan "must reignite powerfully the engine of Abenomics," he said, referring to his easy-money policies aimed at getting Japan out of two decades of deflation and fitful growth.

(Source: Reuters)



Pertamina to acquire minority stakes in two Rosneft oil blocks

Indonesia's state-owned energy company Pertamina will acquire minority stakes in two oil exploration blocks belonging to Russian energy giant Rosneft, an executive said earlier this week.

The acquisitions form part of an agreement between the two companies on Thursday to cooperate in the oil and gas sector, including plans to develop a refinery together.

"Pertamina targets production of around 35,000 barrels of oil per day, with 200 million barrels of oil reserves from the Russian blocks," Pertamina president director Dwi Soetjipto said. He added that Pertamina had been studying the two Russian oil blocks.



Google selling robotics division Boston Dynamics to Toyota

Alphabet, Google's parent company, was reported to be looking to unload robotics division Boston Dynamics back in March.

It would seem that this has been achieved, with sources telling Tech Insider that the deal is almost finalized.

The company that will be acquiring Boston Dynamics is none other than Toyota. The price of the acquisition has not been revealed, but Tech Insider's source claims that the "ink is nearly dry" for the agreement.

Alphabet executives did not believe that Boston Dynamics will be able to create a consumer product within the next few years, leading to the decision to look for a buyer for the unit.



General Electric develops new investment plans in Africa

The American power and energy giant, General Electric, has decided to club together with Pan-African multi-sector business services company Mara Group to make more inroads in Africa through investment in infrastructure, a domain still infant on the black continent.

General Electric plans to invest billions of dollars in Africa's infrastructure business industry, which according to pundits holds great future with needed investments estimated at \$90 billion every year.

To attain that goal the American giant announced on May 26 at Lusaka during the African Development Bank annual meetings the creation of the joint company with Mara Group, founded by British-Ugandan business tycoon Ashish J. Thakkar.

Peace and friendship, main theme of Tehran Intangible Cultural Heritage meeting

TOURISM TEHRAN — Promotion of peace and friendship is the main theme of the 3rd Ordinary Governing Council Meeting of Tehran Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Center, Iran's representative to the governing council Mohammad-Hassan Talebian said on Saturday.

The Regional Research Center for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in West and Central Asia under the auspices of UNESCO (Tehran ICH Center) is holding the meeting from May 28 to 30 at Tehran's Laleh Hotel.

Talebian stressed the importance of attending the event by representatives from other member countries since "it would lead to more under-



standing and friendship in the region."

"Eleven countries are already members of the center and Oman, Qatar, Turkmenistan, and Kuwait have applied for membership," he said.

Iran along with Armenia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Tajikistan, and Turkey are the members.

In 2006, Iran joined the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and on April 28, 2010 the agreement regarding the establishment of Tehran ICH Center was signed by Iran and UNESCO. The Center was officially inaugurated in November 2012.

Top national handicraft exhibitors to represent Iran in intl. fairs

TOURISM TEHRAN — The 30 best stands of the 26th National Handicraft Exhibition will represent Iran in international events in other countries, the deputy director of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization (CHTHO) said on Sunday.

The best stands would be selected according to their sales during the exhibition, the CHTHO official, Bahman Namvar-Motlaq, explained, IRNA reported.

He said that the 20 best participants in the previous edition of the exhibition hired stands with up to 50 percent discount on fees this year.

Over 360 participants from different parts of Iran are participating in the National Handicraft Exhibition, which is underway at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla. The 6-day event will wrap up today.

According to IRNA, from the five categories of the country's non-oil exports, Persian rugs and handicraft ranked last in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2016), with 12,000 tons of exports worth some \$333 million. The figure indicates a 14 percent decline in value as compared to the previous year and accounts for only 0.8 percent of Iran's non-oil trade.



A couple visiting the National Handicraft Exhibition (Mehr/ Damun Purnemati)

A CLOSER LOOK

Practical tips to wander around Tehran

A friend recently emailed me that he is going to visit Iran with a group of tourists and asked me some questions regarding getting around Tehran and traveling to other cities from the capital. I thought those questions plus some information I add in, might be every traveler's questions that is willing to visit Iran anytime soon.

Run errands in Tehran

Cost of traveling to any country depends so much on your own way of spending. Food, accommodation and transportation are so different for a budget traveler than lavish tourist. Food is cheap. There are fast food restaurants and local food (Iranian or Italian) which averagely cost 1\$ per dish. There are of course the fancy restaurants in which one may pay average more than 10\$ per dish too.

Public transportations in Tehran are available and convenient. It costs very little by bus in Tehran to go around the city. Tehran subway regardless of destination is about 2 cent or so. Public taxis start from a third of a dollar and Private taxis are more expensive but start from 2\$ and go up to 10\$ depending on the destination. In other big cities of Iran, the price is slightly cheaper. Can you sum up your daily expenses now?

Booking hotels

Iranians love to travel and since due to sanctions they have less chance to get visa for certain touristic countries, they travel inside Iran. Especially during holiday seasons i.e. Iranian New Year by end of March, it's so crowded in touristic areas, particularly Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad and north provinces at Caspian seacoast.

But if you are not arriving during the holiday season, and then would not get into trouble for hotels. I personally do not book hotel before I travel inside Iran. I usually go to the city and search there and then to find the best deal I want; the deal which suits me for the price & quality or service. In Touristic cities there are plenty of hotels & there is a wide range of choices.

Bring cash with you!

There is no transfer connection between Iranian banks and international banks. There is no western union branch, and Visa/MasterCards do not work here, though certain money exchangers work for sending/receiving money to/from abroad. But it may not be as convenient for a foreigner. So bring cash with yourself. It is easy to exchange money at the airport for your urgent need.

But best deal is to exchange in authorized money exchange shops outside the hotels & banks called Sarrafi available in every city. Think about it, be patient and get the best deal!

(Source: Dream of Iran)

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Trusting the power of the people

By John Yemma

Political parties are seldom beloved, but they keep the fires of politics burning when the people are busy with their lives.

As Sir David Attenborough might put it: This unusual creature remains dormant for long periods. Normally concerned with raising its young, securing food and shelter, and pursuing happiness, every quadrennium this species assembles into one collective entity – a body the ancient Greeks named the “polis” -- to decide who will lead them.

In “The Republic,” Plato thought the ideal leader for the polis, the citizenry, was a philosopher king. While a nice idea (if a little self-promoting for someone in the philosophy business), enlightened sovereigns are rare. Power need not corrupt, but it often does.

So, after centuries of political experimentation that brought terrible

wars, epic misrule, and unjust treatment of individuals and communities, the generally accepted solution to the governance problem has been periodic elections.

Some nations -- especially small and relatively homogeneous ones -- do this quickly and efficiently. A continental-sized polis such as the United States goes through an expensive, multistage campaign process that lasts a year or more.

■ Political parties

You and I might carry around ideas about how government ought to work and who would be a good person to steer it. But putting together a national campaign requires money and manpower, which is where political parties come in. There's nothing in the U.S. Constitution about parties. But parties have persisted as a practical necessity -- except for a brief period in the early 19th century known as the “Era of Good Feelings.”

Parties are rarely beloved. They engage in less-than-noble tactics -- constant fundraising, constant attacks on rivals -- but parties remain interested in politics when most people are not. Even during the raucous 2016 presidential race, the latest Gallup survey shows only 4 in 10 adult Americans currently paying close attention.

Up to now, the capture of the Republican Party by a Manhattan businessman/showman and the Democratic Party tug of war between an establishment candidate -- a former first lady, New York senator, and diplomat -- and an insurgent Vermont senator with a Millennial generation following have been playing to a limited audience. Though Democrats are arguing over how far left of center the party should be, the Republicans are undergoing a much more surprising change. Republicans had



Parties are rarely beloved. They engage in less-than-noble tactics -- constant fundraising, constant attacks on rivals -- but parties remain interested in politics when most people are not.

a reputation for being a wait-your-turn old boys' club. Donald Trump has stormed in; ignited populist and nativist passions amid a torrent of insults, declarations, and contradictions; and put the gilded Trump brand on the Republican club. In a Monitor cover story, Linda Feldmann delves into what Trump's takeover means for the Grand Old Party.

For the Trump factor alone, this year's race has already cinched a place in the history books. More history will be made on Nov. 8, when the polis assembles to choose who will govern. The choices aren't always ideal. Philosopher kings and queens are rare. But the polis usually chooses wisely -- after which the parties will regroup and plan for the next election and the polis will disband, returning to what it really wants to do: raise its young, secure a living, pursue happiness.

(Source: The CSM)

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Terrorism, refugees and migration — an interview with Germany's interior minister

Thomas de Maizière, the German minister of the interior, is one of Chancellor Angela Merkel's closest advisers, having served continuously in her cabinet since she took office in 2005. A former chief of staff to the chancellor and defense minister, de Maizière is now in his second, even more challenging, stint as interior minister. In that post, the 62-year-old lawyer deals with Germany's efforts to counter terrorism and with the handling of the migrant crisis that has undermined Merkel's once-astonomical popularity rating and called into question her prospects for a fourth term in elections in 2017.

What follows are lightly edited excerpts of an interview made by Ruth Marcus:

■ Q: Is the issue and challenge of homegrown terrorism similar between the United States and Germany, or are they different?

A: I think it's similar. If you see the backgrounds of the terrorists in Belgium and France, they are educated and socialized in France and Belgium, although some of them are foreign fighters. There were no hit teams from abroad to make a terrorist attack sent to Europe or America to make a terrorist attack, but they went to our schools, they did sports together with our kids, they went to our mosques, and they were radicalized in our neighborhoods. And this, of course, is a matter of concern. How can this happen? What is the role of the Internet, what is the role of the Internet providers, and how can it be that those ways of radicalization remained undetected? So I think this is a similar concern, and we are all working on that.

■ Q: Has Germany had to shift or change its attitudes or regulations on issues of privacy in order to deal with the new terrorism threat?

A: Privacy is very important in Germany and still very important. But, in a way, it's different. For us, for example, it's understood that every person has to tell the country, the state, where they live. We have the personal identity card. The country should only collect data from those people who



are suspected. And the discussion is: At what range starts suspicion? And the fight against terrorism needs to learn about contacts between relevant persons, at an early stage, where nothing happened, where they perhaps are not suspected.

■ Q: How prepared do you feel Germany is to prevent and detect an attack?

A: Of course security institutions are always concerned. That is what they are for. After 9/11, we did a lot in Germany. We didn't have a huge terrorist attack in Germany, so far and the reason for that is a mixture between efficiency and luck. So I cannot give the guarantee that nothing will happen, but I think we are well-prepared. Of course there is a new concern, about the impact of migration: Are there, among migrants and refugees, terrorists?

■ Q: What is your assessment?

A: For terrorists, there are easier ways to

come to Germany and Europe than danger to their own lives on little boats. But, yes, we saw some persons who were registered and then worked on the attack in Paris. They passed through Germany, and weekly we have hints that among the migrants are supporters of ISIL. About 300 hints, but among them, perhaps less than 50 real investigations. So this is a matter of concern, but if you compare less than 100 with a million [migrants], then the real terrorist threat comes not via the refugees.

■ Q: Going back on that, because there's obviously a parallel to the debate we've been having here on Syrian refugees, the homegrown terror threat would be, in your estimation, a greater threat than the threat of terrorist attacks plotted by migrants?

A: It's interesting. During the high times of al-Qaeda, we were concerned about hit teams from abroad. Then our next concern

was homegrown terrorism. Then, the next day, it was foreign fighters when they are back in Germany with fighting experience. And now, perhaps, it's all together, or a mixture of them. So it's even more difficult to be well-prepared.

■ Q: [Regarding the refugee crisis,] what is the situation now, and what has Germany learned from this episode, this phenomenon?

A: The situation now is that we see a bit more than one hundred refugees arriving every day — as opposed to seven to eight thousand per day last year. The reasons for that are that the Balkan route is closed, and our agreement with Turkey is effective. We have to speed up the procedures and make faster decisions about whether or not someone can stay. This week the government has decided an integration law where we in the government will concentrate our forces on those who stay. This will include language classes, jobs and housing without building ghettos. What we learned is that you have to strike a balance. If it is too much, then you lose the support of the people, you also cannot neglect your responsibility.

■ Q: Do you see the refugee issue as a pressure that is going to persist for years to come?

A: Migration will be a huge challenge for the next ten years or so. Resettlement is a challenge for all of us who are responsible. The difference between poverty and wealth is increasing, and the Internet and the media show to the poorest in the world that their situation could be better. The attraction to leave your own country is getting bigger. We will never close the difference between poor and rich countries, and an acceptable reason to leave your country cannot be that you can find a better future elsewhere in the world. If this were to be the motto, then the world would collapse. But to feel and to act and to assume responsibility for those who have to leave their countries because of conflict is a necessity.

(Source: Washington Post)

COMMENT

U.S.'s main objective in Middle East is to regain hegemony, not fight terror

Unfortunately, Washington's main objective in Syria isn't fighting terrorism, helping refugees or easing Syrians' suffering; it's about regime change and the restoration of U.S. dominance in the region. That's according to AN-SWER Coalition coordinator Richard Becker.

Speaking to Iran's Press TV on Friday, Becker suggested that unfortunately, that the prospects for peace finally coming to the war-torn country are low.

Asked by his interviewer why the U.S. has rejected cooperation with Russia in the war against the terrorists in Syria, Becker argued that it has to do with U.S. grand strategy.

"They could certainly cooperate if they wanted to; they can do a lot more if they wanted to, but that's not really the priority. The United States government does not like the ISIL [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant terrorist group] or the Al-Nusra Front, but their priority is not in fighting them. Their priority still remains bringing about a new government in Syria — regime change. [This] has been the U.S. objective now for five years."

Asked to comment on UN Syria Envoy Staffan de Mistura's remarks about the need for closer coordination and cooperation between Russia and the U.S., and whether the envoy was aware of the conflicting viewpoints of the two countries, Becker suggested that this was a case of "the wish taking precedent over reality."

Ultimately, Becker suggested that "unfortunately for the people of Syria, the prospects for a real agreement do not look bright. What's happened to Syria is one of the great tragedies of modern times, along with what's happened to Iraq, and what's happened to Yemen and what's happened to Libya, and all these places where Western intervention [essentially] has torn these countries apart."

"This is a truly, truly tragic situation that exists, but it doesn't have any impact on what Washington's foreign policy is. They pretend to be concerned about the refugees, about the suffering, but really they're trying to maintain, or to restore a position of dominance in the Middle East."

(Source: Sputnik)



During the high times of al-Qaeda, we were concerned about hit teams from abroad. Then our next concern was homegrown terrorism. Then, the next day, it was foreign fighters when they are back in Germany with fighting experience.



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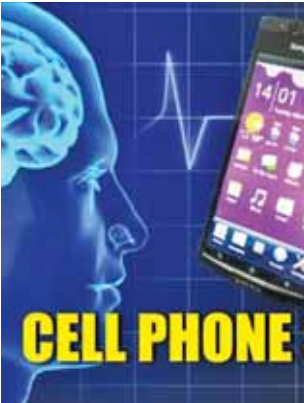
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Cell phone radiation increases cancers in rats, but should we worry?

The issue of whether cell phone use could cause cancer has been mired in confusion, with some studies failing to find an increased risk of brain tumors among cell phone users, while others suggest greater risk among the most frequent of users.

Part of the problem is that studying people is less controlled than testing animals in labs. Researchers have asked individuals



diagnosed with brain tumors to recall how much they used their cell phones and compared it with usage by healthy people, but it can be hard for people to accurately remember their use.

Other studies have followed healthy people for years to see whether those who use their phones the most develop more cancers, and while they have not found that to be the case, heavy users could differ in other ways that affect their cancer risk.

To get around these challenges, some researchers have turned to rodents. They expose mice or rats to known doses of radiation that are equivalent to -- or sometimes more than -- what people get from their cell phones.

In the latest rodent study, released Friday, researchers at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences gave rats high doses of radiation every day for two years and compared them with rats that did not receive radiation. The researchers looked at how many animals developed tumors in the brain and in nerve cells of the heart.

The researchers found that 2% to 3% of the hundreds of male rats that were irradiated developed brain tumors, compared with none of the control rats. *(Source: CNN)*

Mismatch vascular and neural responses suggest limits of fMRI

Investigators at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) report that, during sensory stimulation, increases in blood flow are not precisely "tuned" to local neural activity, challenging the long-held view that vascular and local neural responses are tightly coupled.

Many brain-imaging techniques that rely on changes in the flow and oxygenation of blood -- including functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) -- assume that vascular changes reflect a proportional change in local neural activity.

"Because there isn't enough blood to send everywhere in the brain at the same time with the optimal levels of oxygen and glucose needed to support neural activity, it is widely accepted that the brain has a built-in auto-regulatory mechanism for increasing blood flow to regions with increased activity," says Prakash Kara, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Neurosciences at MUSC and senior author on the Nature article.

But how precise is this auto-regulation? With resolution typically at about one millimeter, the fMRI signal represents the blood flow averaged across many blood vessels. Using micron-scale resolution two-photon imaging in an animal model, the MUSC team studied blood flow in single vessels simultaneously with neural activity.

Instead, Kara and colleagues showed that, while blood flow did increase with neural activity, it also increased in response to certain sensory stimuli that did not evoke local neural activity. *(Source: EurekAlert)*

A new 'space taxi' may be in the works thanks to Russian company Energia

It might have been absurd when Rose said it to Jack in Titanic, but taking a taxi to the moon soon may not be such a stretch of the imagination if Russia has anything to say about it. According to news reports, Russian space company Energia has revealed plans



for a "new reusable space vehicle," the primary purpose of which will be to move cargo and crew members between the International Space Station and the moon.

Dubbed "Ryvok," this space taxi will be stationed on the space station and is meant to cut both costs and time needed to shuttle equipment and human capital to and from outer space. Each time Ryvok needs to make a trip, it will make use of a "modernized standard accelerator block," which will provide

enough energy for the shuttle to reach the moon in five days. And on its way back, the shuttle will dock on the space station by way of a 55-square-meter umbrella of sorts that will reduce its velocity.

While Ryvok is not the only space shuttle currently in the works for Energia, the company believes that it may be the most efficient option. The "cost of the Ryvok reusable manned spacecraft mission is a third lower than the costs of (alternatives)," said Energia's representative, Yuri Makushenko.

The development of such a space taxi could have major implications on the future not only of space travel, but colonization as well. According to Thomas Reiter, astronaut and director of the European Space Agency Directorate of Human Spaceflight and Operations, the group is already looking into concepts like a "moon village." *(Source: Digital Trends)*

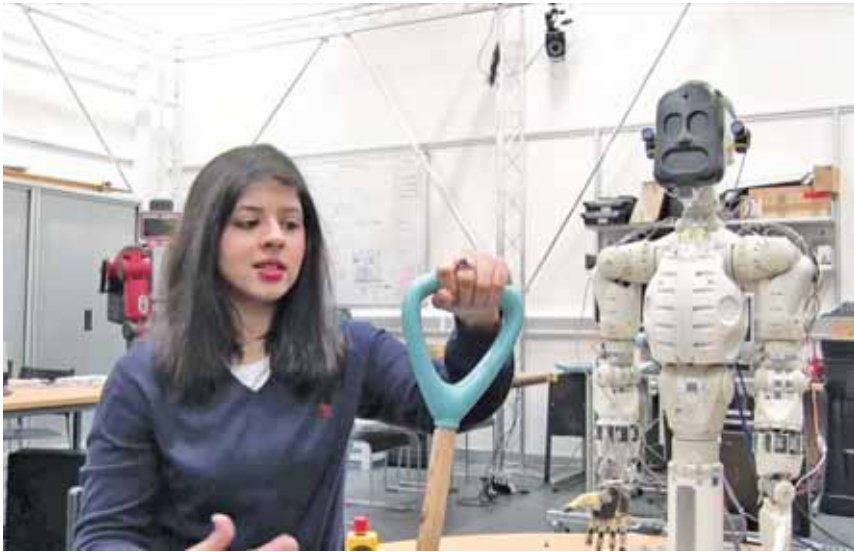
Student-designed walking stick could aid Parkinson's patients

A product design technology graduate has developed a 'smart' walking stick that could help increase the mobility of Parkinson's sufferers.

Neha Shahid Chaudhry was inspired to create Walk to Beat after seeing her late grandfather struggle with the disease. The device uses a sensor to detect when a user's limbs have frozen, then prompts him or her to continue walking via a small vibration in the handle that helps reestablish rhythm.

"People with Parkinson's get jammed in one place and can't step forward -- it can cause falls," said 23-year-old Neha. "They need any kind of rhythm or sequence to get them started again, because it acts as a reminder. The beat is inside the handle -- it senses when you stop and turns off automatically when you start walking again. Patients say it encourages them to walk and they learn to pace with it."

Originally from Pakistan, Neha is currently studying for a master's degree in marketing at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol). Walk to Beat is be-



Originally from Pakistan, Neha is currently studying for a master's degree in marketing at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol).

World's fastest helicopter with hybrid design could revolutionize air travel

Airbus has filed a patent update to its experimental hybrid X3 helicopter -- the world's fastest chopper that can soar through the skies at speeds of 293mph by using innovative aeroplane-like, wing-mounted propellers.

The aerospace manufacturer has been secretly working on its high-speed hybrid helicopter X3 design for years, which was previously known as the Eurocopter X3 with its first flight taking place back in 2010.

What makes this aircraft so special is its revolutionary compound design that uses a traditional main rotor for vertical take-off but also wing propellers you'd see on an aeroplane.

Once airborne it can fire up the wing rotors, flying like an aeroplane to offer unprecedented forward thrust not seen on a helicopter.

Modern helicopters

In test flights it was able to hit record-breaking 293mph (472km/h) speeds. The current highest-speed



of a modern helicopters range from 150-160mph, so if this project gets off the ground it would be a revolutionary evolution for aviation technology.

This newly filed patent looks to update to its design by placing the motors behind the wings rather than at the front "which results in comfort by reducing noise and vibrations and increased passenger safety" according to the

patent granted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The X3, interestingly doesn't feature a tail rotor like every other helicopter. Instead, the wing-mounted propellers are able to counter the torque of the main rotor to stabilize the aircraft and to turn. The motors for the wing propeller are expected to be powered by twin Rolls-Royce engines with each producing 2,270 shaft horsepower.

Further to this, the patent also indicates future designs could feature turbojet engines, meaning the X3 could theoretically fly much faster than the 293mph it currently can travel.

Having a chopper that can hit high-speeds for long distances could be a huge advantage for military missions and medical evacuations as well as changing the landscape for business travel. However, the X3 is still well and truly in the developmental stage and as to when we might actually see these flying through the skies is still unknown. *(Source: ibtimes.co.uk)*

Brains of schizophrenia patients attempt to self-repair, MRI scans reveal

Schizophrenia, a mental disorder that influences how a person thinks, acts and feels, currently does not have a cure, but the findings of a new study using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), offers hope to patients affected by the condition.

For their research in the Psychology Medicine Journal, Lena Palaniyappan from London Health Sciences Center (LHSC) used MRI and a covariance analysis to record the increase of brain tissue in 98 patients with schizophrenia and compared the results with those of 83 without the disease.

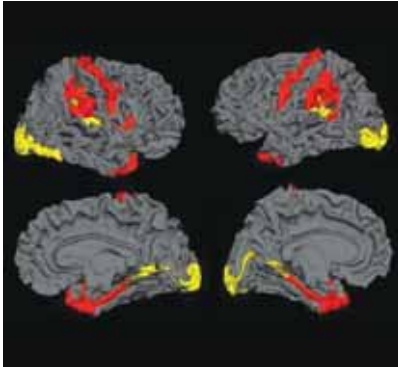
The researchers found evidence that suggests the brains of schizophrenia patients have the ability to repair themselves to fight the mental illness.

Schizophrenia, a condition marked by the inability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, is believed to be a degenerative illness. Current treatments for schizophrenic patients are mostly focused on reducing and managing symptoms rather than reversing the condition.

Subtle increase in tissue

The study, however, showed that while schizophrenia is generally linked to a widespread reduction in brain tissue volume, certain regions of the brain among those with the condition showed a subtle increase in tissue over time.

The findings suggest that in terms of gray matter volume, the brains of schizophrenic patients become more "normal" the longer that they have the condition. *(Source: Tech Times)*



"Within the patient group, reduced thickness was consistently accompanied by increased thickness in distributed brain regions," the researchers reported in their study.

"While temporo-limbic and fronto-parietal regions showed reduced thickness, the occipital cortex showed increased thickness, especially in those with a long-standing illness."

The findings of the study are important in that it shows brain tissue can repair itself. This suggests of the possibility for targeted treatments that can potentially reverse the effects of schizophrenia.

"Dr. Palaniyappan and his colleagues have opened new avenues of research into our understanding of schizophrenia," said LHSC Psychiatry Chief Paul Links. "Their findings may lead us to be able to harness the brain's own compensatory changes in the face of this illness and improve recovery."

Infection raises specter of superbugs resistant to all antibiotics

American military researchers have identified the first patient in the United States to be infected with bacteria that are resistant to an antibiotic that was the last resort against drug-resistant germs.

The patient is well now, but the case raises the specter of superbugs that could cause untreatable infections, because the bacteria can easily transmit their resistance to other germs that are already resistant to additional antibiotics. The resistance can spread because it arises from loose genetic material that bacteria typically share with one another.

"Think of a puzzle," said Dr. Beth Bell, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "You need lots of different pieces to get a result that is resistant to everything. This is the last piece of that puzzle, unfortunately, in the United States. We have that genetic element that would allow for bacteria that are resistant to every antibiotic"

Carbapenem-resistant bacteria

The bacteria are resistant to a drug called colistin, an old antibiotic that in the United States is held in reserve to treat especially dangerous infections that are resistant to a class of drugs called carbapenems. If carbapenem-resistant bacteria, called CRE, also pick up resistance to colistin, they will be unstoppable.

"This is huge," said Dr. Lance Price,



a researcher at George Washington University. "We are one step away from CRE strains that cannot be treated with antibiotics. We now have all the pieces in place for it to be untreatable."

The gene for resistance to colistin was first found in China, where the drug is used in pig and poultry farming. Researchers reported its discovery there in November. It has also been found in the intestine of one pig in the United States.

CRE is still relatively rare, causing just 600 deaths a year, but by 2013, researchers had identified it in health care facilities in 44 states. Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, often calls it the "nightmare superbug" because it is resistant to all but one antibiotic -- colistin. *(Source: The NYT)*

Global warming on other planets to stop us finding aliens, scientists say

Global warming might mean that many of those billions of planets aren't able to host life, despite being similar to the Earth, according to new research.

But there still could be a "bonanza" of small planets the size of Mars that might be able to host aliens, the research suggests.

Scientists had previously thought that Earth-sized planet close to red dwarf stars could have the right conditions for supporting life.

But despite the fact that they are the right distance from the stars to allow for liquid surface water - thought to be necessary to support living things - their environment probably means that they are far too hot to actually support it.

Their thick atmospheres would cause a runaway greenhouse effect, boiling away water and rendering them too hot for life. A similar effect is seen on Venus, where surface temperatures are hot enough to melt lead.



Habitable planets

Since red dwarfs make up around three-quarters of the stars in the Milky Way, scientists had expected them to host billions of habitable planets.

Although many of these planets are born with thick hydrogen and helium atmospheres, radiation from the parent stars was expected to blast away much of the gas.

Detailed computer simulations have now shown that planets the size of Earth or larger orbiting close to red dwarfs are likely to retain their thick atmospheres.

On the other hand, smaller planets similar in size to Mars might lose enough of their atmospheres to make them habitable.

Dr. Subhanjoy Mohanty, one of the researchers from Imperial College London, said: "There are hints from recent exoplanet discoveries that relatively puny planets may be even more common around red dwarfs than Earth mass or larger ones, in which case there may indeed be a bonanza of potentially habitable planets whirling around these cool red stars." The study is published in the journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society. *(Source: The Independent)*

Palestinian leaders want NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) to substitute IDF (Israel Defense Forces) forces in the West Bank as part of any sustainable peace deal and a two-state solution with Israel. France is mounting up international support to hold a conference after United States led negotiations collapsed.

"Now we talk about the French initiative... Its purpose must be to implement the visions of both states, based on the border agreement of 1967 and the capital of the Palestinian state being eastern Jerusalem, so that both countries can live side by side, in safety, stability and peace – if Israel wishes to seek peace," Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in a speech at a meeting of foreign ministers at the Arab League.

Throughout the previous peace negotiations and to this day the Palestinian Authority insists that the West Bank must be a part of their sovereign nation, and that the presence of Israeli military control is a violation of their right to rule. While the United Nations calls the West Bank and Gaza Strip Israeli-occupied territories, Israel considers them disputed.

The idea of introducing NATO forces in the Middle East country has been voiced by Abbas before during the last peace negotiations. The original idea was for the IDF to remain in the Palestinian state for a transitional period of five years after which the Israeli forces could be replaced by NATO forces along with Palestinian Arab police and security

Abbas wants NATO to replace IDF in West Bank



units.

Tel Aviv argues that it keeps its IDF forces in West Bank to protect themselves from the perceived threat of "Palestinian terrorism." To solidify their claims, in addition to military presence, Israel has been building settlements in the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem), and on a number of occasions refusing to negotiate the status of al-Quds.

On Saturday, Abbas presented conditions that will most likely be rejected by Israel. Besides insisting that East al-Quds would be the capital of Palestine, Abbas also rejected the notion of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state.

"We have previously recognized the state of Israel but we will not accept or recognize the terms of a Jewish state. We demand a Palestinian state on Palestinian lands and we will not allow any Israel-

li presence inside Palestinian territory," President Abbas said.

At the same time Abbas said that there is a slight room for negotiations on land boundaries.

"When we need to demarcate these borders, we will be prepared to accept a slight exchange of territory," he told the Arab ministers.

Recognition of Israel as the Jewish state, and proclaiming the entire al-Quds as its capital have been the main cornerstones of Israel's position in negotiating a two-state solution with Palestine. Demilitarized Palestine with the IDF military presence in the West Bank have also been the points of the contention in the negotiations.

Last month the Palestinians welcomed France's initiative to hold an international conference aimed at kick-starting a new round of peace talks after the two sides failed to reach an agreement in April 2014. But Prime Minister Netanyahu rejected the French initiative, saying the "best way to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestinians is through direct, bilateral negotiations."

Representatives of some 20 countries, including U.S., Egypt, and the House of Saud regime and Jordan, will attend the French-backed ministerial meeting on the topic next week. Israel and the Palestine will not take part in the conference. The French hope to convene a full blown international conference in the autumn, with Israelis and Palestinians in attendance.

(Source: RT)

Breakaway Taliban faction expresses support for peace talks

A breakaway Taliban faction is willing to hold peace talks with the Afghan government but will demand the imposition of law and the departure of all foreign forces, a senior leader of the group said on Sunday.

Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi told a group of around 200 followers in eastern Afghanistan that his faction had no faith in the government but was willing to negotiate without preconditions.

Niazi is deputy to Mullah Mohammad Rasool, who split from the Taliban last summer after Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was chosen to succeed the group's late founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Mansoor was killed earlier this month in a United States drone strike in Pakistan and was replaced days later by a little known conservative cleric, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada.

The main Taliban faction has expressed similar demands, but says it will only enter peace talks after they have been met. The U.S. and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) officially ended their combat mission more than a year ago, but thousands of foreign soldiers remain in the country, mainly carrying out training, support and counterterrorism operations.

Mansoor had refused to participate in a peace process initiated by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that included Pakistan, the United States and China.

Representatives of the four countries have held five meetings, without inviting the Taliban. Their aim is to chart a roadmap toward talks between the Afghan government and the insurgents

to end the 15-year war, but the disparity within the Taliban has complicated those efforts.

The Taliban's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, has branded Rasool's faction "a government army in the shape of the Taliban." Speaking to the AP on Sunday, he claimed that Rasool was supported by Kabul and Washington.

"For us he is nothing more than a local policeman or a puppet of Afghan intelligence," he said. Rasool's followers met in the mountainous Shindand district, near the border with Iran. Snipers on hilltops surveyed dirt roads leading to the area, which serves as the main base for the mobile fighters. The encampment where the meeting was held is only accessible by motorbike or horse.

The turbaned followers of Rasool — who is believed to have been detained in Pakistan — appeared to be armed with new weapons, including automatic rifles and grenade launchers.

The Taliban have continued to launch major attacks on government forces despite the internal conflict, and the war has shown no sign of abating over the past year.

The Taliban attacked checkpoints in the southern Helmand province late on Saturday, killing four police, according to the provincial governor's spokesman, Omar Zawaq.

Among those killed was local police commander Safar Mohammad, who in recent years had successfully kept highways in the area open to traffic. Zawaq said another nine police officers and one soldier were wounded in the attack.

(Source: AP)

Armed group blows up major pipeline in Nigeria

For the third time in a week, an armed group has attacked a major pipeline in Nigeria's Delta region, two officials have said, hours after the Niger Delta Avengers group claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) have been sabotaging Nigeria's oil infrastructure for months in bombings that have forced production to drop from 2.2 million barrels per day to twenty-year lows of 1.4 million barrels per day.

Early on Saturday morning the group attacked the Nembe pipeline carrying crude exports.

"I am aware that there was a dynamite attack on the pipeline," Nengi James, chairman of the Nembe Oil and Gas Committee, told AFP news agency.

Al Jazeera's Ahmed Idris, reporting from Warri in Delta state, said the attack disrupted deliveries promised by oil companies.

The NDA appeared to claim the Saturday attack on a Twitter account bearing its name in a post that said it had blown up the "Nembe 1, 2 and 3 Brass to Bonny trunk line" at 2:15 am.

Earlier attacks attributed to NDA this week have seen Chevron and Nigeria's state-owned oil and gas infrastructure blown up.

Continued violence could result in mass evacuations of staff that would "cripple onshore production of about one million barrels per day," Philippe de Pontent, sub-Saharan Africa analyst at political risk research firm Eurasia Group,

said in a recent report.

Like other groups before it, the NDA wants a fairer share of oil revenues for the impoverished and polluted southern region.

The group claims that the majority of the country's oil wealth is owned by people from the country's north and has plans to realize an independent state by October 2016, according to online statements credited to NDA spokesman Mudoch Agbinibo.

In response to the sabotage, southern government officials this week urged President Buhari to enter a peaceful dialogue with Niger delta communities instead of using military force to restore oil production.

But on Saturday, residents said Nigerian soldiers invaded Oporoza town, a stronghold of a former rebel leader Government "Tompolo" Ekpemupolo.

The Nigerian government has issued an arrest warrant for Tompolo, alleging the former leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) stole millions from the federal government after he started working as a security contractor as part of an amnesty program.

There are rumors that Tompolo has been orchestrating the NDA attacks, but he has denied any collaboration.

Previous crackdowns on armed groups in the past were ineffective and the chaos in Nigeria's southern swamplands was only restored after the introduction of a costly amnesty program for the rebels.

(Source: agencies)

NEWS

Inmates in Syria's Hama prison capture Syrian officials

Prisoners inside Syria's Hama central prison have captured several government officers, including a high ranked police officer, a source inside the jail told Al Jazeera on Saturday.

The head of the prison, a police officer and nine other government forces were captured by the prisoners, Britain-based so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, confirming the incident.

After judge Rida Musa told inmates that 11 of them will be transferred to the capital, Damascus, for the death penalty, fellow prisoners revolted.

Musa arrived in the prison to discuss about the shortage of food, water and other basic amenities.

Inmates have previously demanded restoration of electricity and water amid food shortages and serious medical conditions, the Observatory said.

Government forces surrounded the prison and fired tear gas during that revolt in an effort to quell the unrest, according to the Observatory.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Anti-Islam protest descends into violence in Australia

Police in Australia have used pepper spray to separate more than 300 angry protesters as anti-Islam and anti-racism groups clashed in the streets of Melbourne, the country's second biggest city.

Seven men were arrested in Coburg, a northern suburb of Melbourne on Saturday after anti-Islam protesters, some of whom were draped in the Australian flag, began fighting with their rivals.

TV Footage showed protesters using Australian flags to beat other demonstrators, before police moved in and used capsicum spray to stop the violence.

In one incident, a member of the United Patriots Front (UPF), which organized Saturday's anti-Islam and anti-immigrant rally, fell to the ground was kicked several times by two anti-racism activists.

Attacks against Australia's Muslim community have increased in recent years partly due to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.

In November, a survey by the Western Sydney University found that Muslims in Australia experience racism three times the national average.

(Source: agencies)

Israeli deputy PM admits to visiting Aleppo secretly

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ayoub Kara has acknowledged to have paid a clandestine visit to Syria's Aleppo, which is under the control of foreign-backed Takfiri terrorists.

The Syrian army and its allies have been fighting to wrest control of the country's second city from terrorists who have reportedly received advanced weapons in recent weeks.

Kara did not say when his visit took place, saying "I won't get into it," the Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

"Aleppo today is abandoned... Today when you enter it, you won't even think that it's Aleppo. It doesn't even remind you of Aleppo," he said instead.

Late last month, Syrian officials and locals confiscated a vehicle loaded with Israeli-manufactured weapons in the southern province of Suwayda.

A military source told Syria's official news agency SANA that the vehicle was traveling from the eastern countryside of Dara'a to the desert region of Badiya.

(Source: Press TV)



New BMI CEO named

ECONOMY d e s k In a new directive issued by the Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) Ali Tayyebnia, Mohammad-Reza Hosseinzadeh was introduced as Chairman of the Board of Directors

and Managing Director of Bank Melli Iran (BMI).

Pursuant to the minute of Ordinary General Assembly (Extraordinarily), Hosseinzadeh current caretaker of BMI was appointed as the managing director of the

bank on May 28. It should be noted that Hosseinzadeh is one of the most experienced and talented managers of the bank, benefitted from professional records, the report ended.

Bank Mellat unveils latest Iranian e-banking system dubbed "farabank"

ECONOMY d e s k Bank Mellat unveiled up-to-date Iranian electronic banking system in the presence of chief executive, staff, personnel and managers of the bank in line with promoting and streamlining electronic banking services. CEO of Bank Mellat Ali Rastegar was the first speaker in the unveiling ceremony and pointed to the plan as most modern electronic system inside the country and said: "This giant project was launched at the bank for the first time in the country, benefitted from the most experienced domestic engineers within the framework of 2400 man/hour research activities."

Considering the complexities of business in the contemporary world of today, he said: "Bank Mellat has thus far taken giant strides towards meeting demands of its customers in the best form possible."

Farabank or branch-free bank is a project which will replace paper docu-

ments with electronic documents, based on which, paper will be saved considerably in transactions, he said, adding: "Launching farabank will also help conserve environment, reduce air pollution and traffic congestion."

Turning to the services of this system, he said: "In farabank system of Bank Mellat, three important steps will be put into operation including requesting for special draft of farabank via phone, requesting gift card via phone and online services as well as requesting to open current account"

Member of Board of Director of Bank Mellat Hossein Heidari was the next speaker in this prestigious ceremony who pointed to the significance of this project at the bank and said: "Lack of such similar system in the country is considered as one of strengths of the bank as compared with other banks, based on which, current activities of the bank will be facilitated."

BANK DAY new caretaker introduced

ECONOMY d e s k A glorious ceremony was held to honor 30-month activities and performance of former Managing Director of BANK DAY Dr. Ahmad Shafi'zadeh.

Given the above issue, Dr. Alireza Atefifar replaced Dr. Ahmad Shafi'zadeh as new caretaker of BANK DAY in the presence of Deputy Leader's Representative in Veteran and Martyrs Affairs Foundation Hojjatolislam Seyyed Habibollah Hasani, members of the Board of Directors and senior directors of the bank.

Former managing director of the Bank was the first speaker who expressed his special thanks to the unflinching efforts of directors and managers of the bank during his term in office as chief executive of the bank and said: "With the coordination made in this regard, BANK DAY attained numerous achievements in previous

Iranian calendar year in 1394 (ended March 19, 2016)."

He pointed to the appropriateness and ownership of Damavand Power Plant and said: "Suitable way has been paved in this regard for offering stocks of the bank in Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), based on which, a lucrative asset worth 50,000 billion rials was provided for the bank."

Deputy Managing Director and Credits and Marketing Affairs of the bank Dr. Alireza Atefifar replaced Dr. Ahmad Shafi'zadeh as new caretaker of BANK DAY.

In the end, the new caretaker of the bank said: "BANK DAY owes its success to the unsparing and unflinching efforts of senior managers and directors of the bank especially Dr. Shafi'zadeh who took giant strides to meet most objectives of the bank during his tenure."

French PM vows not to backtrack on recovery plan

By insisting that the government will press ahead with its plans, François Fillon risked provoking further protests like those seen last week, when at least a million people demonstrated against President Nicolas Sarkozy's handling of the economic crisis and his reform agenda.

"There will be no turning back on our economic and social policies," Fillon told the newspaper Le Monde.

"We do not underestimate the concerns, but in the situation of extreme crisis that we find ourselves in, nothing would be worse than a change of direction or absence of decision-making."

Fillon dismissed the union demands that the government add measures to its 26 billion euro (£23.5 billion) recovery plan to boost consumer spending as "demagoguery."

At present the focus is on targeted investment, whose positive effects, unions say, will not be felt by households until at least next year.

Fillon said the recovery plan had entered its "concrete phase" as he unveiled details of funding for 1,000 projects to "boost" the French economy, whose effects, he said, would be felt this year and early in 2010. A third of the plan's funding will go to businesses in need of cash, while a further 11 billion euros will go to "operations funded by the state budget."

There appears no chance that the government will heed union calls to freeze plans not to replace thousands of public sector jobs this year, given the crisis. Fillon said it was more important to protect jobs than to boost salaries, amid news that the number of jobless rose in December by 45,000 to well over two million people.

(Source: The Telegraph)

IRAN'S WILDLIFE

Traces of extinction

By Farnaz Heidari

M.Sc. of Environmental Science Engineering

TEHRAN — Tigers used to occur across Asia as far west as Turkey. Isolated populations of tigers developed into eight different subspecies.

Three generations ago, the tiger ranged from the Caucasus and Turkey through the southern Caspian region of northern Iran to the forested areas along the Oxus River in Afghanistan, the shores of the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash, Sinkiang, the Altai and the Irtish Basin. Since the beginning of 20th century numbers have sharply declined, usually through conflict with humans.

Caspian Tiger (*Panthera tigris virgate*) experienced the same decline and by the 1950s had become extinct. This specific subspecies as an intermediate subspecies between the Siberian and Indian Tigers, once ranged throughout the lowland forests and extensive reed-beds in the Caspian provinces. Although Iran lost this specific subspecies forever, India now has 70 percent of world's tiger population because of unique experiments in wildlife conservation plans.

■ Iran lost tigers forever



By the 1950s three of the tiger subspecies (Caspian, Bali and Javan) have become extinct. There is absolutely no alive Caspian tiger in the world, not just in the wild and not even in Zoos around the world. Extinction of Caspian tiger is a great regret especially knowing that tigers can breed well in captivity and they are unlikely to become extinct.

Some experts say the last Caspian tiger were shot in Golestan National Park in 1953, although there was a reliable

report of a sighting in the Golestan area in 1958. Biologists from the Department of the environment devoted several years in the early 1970s to searching for Caspian tiger in the uninhabited areas of the Caspian forests, but no trace or evidence was found. It is believed that tigers disappeared from Afghanistan at about the same time as it did from Iran, if not earlier.

Tehran Zoo has two subspecies of Tigers: The largest subspecies, the Amur or Siberian tiger once ranged throughout the forest areas of China and Korea, north to the forested edges of Siberia. And the Bengal tiger which is found primarily in India with smaller populations in Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. It is the most numerous of all tiger subspecies with more than 2,500 left in the wild.

■ A valuable resource for investigating the genetic diversity

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is the world's largest field species and is predicted to soon become extinct if effective conservation measures are not deployed.

The preservation of wild tiger populations, currently estimated to total less than 4000 individuals, is now a major goal of animal conservationists. Three years ago, Yun Sung Cho and his colleagues presented the first tiger genome sequence assembly, utilizing the DNA of a nine-year old tiger from Everland Zoo, Korea, and sequence four additional *Panthera* genomes in order to better understand the predatory adaptations and evolution of big cats.

The team identified 1,376 big-cat specific amino acids changes indicative of a carnivorous diet, through a comparative analysis of genomes including tiger, human, dog and mouse, and provided evidence for the rapid evolution of genes involved in muscle contraction and the actin cytoskeleton.

The team also identified two candidate genes that may have been important in the snow leopard's adaptation to high altitudes and pinpointed a potential coat color gene in the white lion.

Dr. Jong Bhak from Personal Genomics Institute, Genome Research Foundation in Korea mentioned that "Tigers are apex predator; humans and tigers cannot co-exist in the same area and without protection, Amur tigers must be extinct by now."

He went on to say that Korean tigers (which are slightly smaller and more yellowish) extincted in 1950-60s as Caspian tigers due to the same reasons such as excessive thoughtless hunting and farmland expansion and it is a grave mistake of us to eradicate them for many reasons.

Dr. Bhak also addressed the importance of conservation plans and said "Now people can more effectively preserve subspecies in zoos, for instance, in Korea, all the major TV broadcasting companies aired the tiger genome news at the prime news time."

"This made almost everyone to know that Amur tigers are endangered and I am sure more funding can be produced indirectly," he said, adding, "The most important thing for the tigers is that now the public is aware of their problem."

■ The future of wildlife depends on scientific decisions

Tigers taught us good lessons, we lost Caspian tiger just because of breaking the laws of nature. We lost the chance of having Caspian Tigers not only in the wild but also in Zoos.

It would be relatively easy to breed captive tigers for reintroduction to the wild, but there is not enough suitable habitat left to release of captive-bred stock. By ignoring this simple factor, Iran conservationists experienced unsuccessful tiger captive breeding project which also caused many problems.

In 2010, two Siberian tigers sent from Russia to Iran in exchange for a pair of Persian leopards were set to be reintroduced in the wild to replace at the Miankaleh peninsula within the next five years. In December 2010, one of the captive Siberian tigers died because of contagious disease and it affected the whole project.

Female Amur Tiger after 5 years of Quarantine, now is alive and lives in good condition in Tehran Zoo.

This experience demonstrated that the future of wildlife lies just in careful management programs. There is absolutely no genetic information from Caspian tigers, so thinking about reintroduction of similar subspecies was a great mistake.

We must notice that the habitat of Caspian tiger is totally changed and tigers cannot adapt themselves even if they reintroduced to wild. Tigers had good lessons for us, not just in the past but also in recent years. We must know that when proper data are in place, yielding results started. So we must focus on saving other important wildlife species e.g. Asiatic cheetah or Persian leopards instead of regretting the loss of tigers.

'Car-free Tuesdays' gains momentum in Iran

➔1 Very soon, TV channel one introduced the car-free Tuesdays during My Homeland Program. In the fourth week, I talked to Mr. Mohammad Darvish at the Department of Environment, who supported the campaign and introduced it wherever he went."

Before talking to Mohammad, I had gone to the Department of Environment on Thursday to see Darvish, head of the education and environmental contributions, to know more about the burgeoning campaign.

Darvish began by quoting Gustavo Petro, the mayor of Bogotá in Colombia, who had said, "A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transportation."

Introducing Mohammad Bakhtiari and his campaign, he explained that "70 million litter of fuel is used every day in Iran, 20 million of which is imported from outside. Figures show that 15 percent of the traffic in Iran is unnecessary. We are not looking for an ideal condition at all. But we win if we can cut that 20 million of import by stopping those pointless drives."

Tuesday was chosen because it is in the middle of Iranian week when traffic congestion is high and air pollution at peak, Darvish explained, adding, "If we succeed to bring Tuesdays' traffic under control, we can see its impact throughout the week."

A total 600 weeks have been planned for the movement to be internalized in the Iranian society and the first 100 weeks are set for having people to know about it, Darvish explained.



Mohammad Darvish is riding a bike to attend a session at the presidential office's department for science and technology in an undated photo

"Sixty percent of the people who know there is such a campaign have supported it. Our first step is to tell people that there is such a movement. The second step is to tell them why they should support it. The third step is to have incentives for those who join the campaign. And the fourth step is to push the government to carry out its responsibilities at a more rapid pace."

Darvish went on to say that "government must create safe bike routes; allocate subsidy for purchasing bikes and electric and hybrid motorcycles. Instead of expanding streets, constructing two or three floor

highways or tunnels, the ruling body must move towards improving BRTs and public transportation. It also needs to make car driving more difficult for people so they opt for public transportation or bikes."

Asked how one can see the impact of the campaign on Tuesday's traffic, the environment official said air pollution and traffic congestion as well as number of accidents and traffic tickets are being monitored on Tuesdays.

Inquired if he sees any future for the campaign, Darvish's response was positive with a big smile in his face, saying

All intl. environmental MOUs brought into effect: Ebtekar

➔1 "Depending on the situation we cannot fully agree or disagree with such a plan but first we need to take other options such as recycling or reforming farming patterns into consideration before moving onto more environmentally invasive alternatives," she suggested.

■ Production of genetically modified food stuff not legally approved by DoE

Inquiring about the genetically modified food stuff in Iran Ebtekar said that production of genetically modified food stuff is not legally approved by DoE.

Should they get required documents for mass production they need to observe Biosafety Protocol, she said.

The Biosafety Protocol makes clear that products from new technologies must be based on the precautionary principle and allow developing nations to balance public health against economic benefits.

She further explained that in case such products shipped to Iran they need to be labeled to inform the consumers about their genetically altered organisms.

■ Economic exploitation of forest resources in Iran is illicit

Ebtekar stressed that according to a law passed in January 2015 any economic exploitation of the forest resources in Iran is prohibited save broken or damaged trees.

She argued that "despite some beneficiaries attempts to legitimize such unfair exploitation we cannot afford to lose more forests and we can easily import woods using



Persian Gulf or Caspian Sea ports."

As much trees as we plant they never turn into the natural forests we have right now as the forest are million years old and possess a unique and complex ecosystem, she warned.

■ Tehran's sand and gravel factories an obstacle for air pollution mitigation

Mentioning DoE's effective measures to minimize air pollution in the metropolises of Iran Ebtekar regretted that sand and gravel mines in the suburb area of Tehran are of the main sources of air pollution.

"Based on the permits such mines have obtained over

What a circus: Clowns beg lawmakers not to ban animal shows

A public hearing on a proposed wild-animal entertainment ban that would keep circuses and similar shows out of the city ended up being a circus of sorts, complete with clowns who begged the City Council not to enact the measure.

Syria Shrine clowns held signs outside the City-County Building that said, "We love our animals," and "Councilman Kraus makes clowns cry!"

That referred to Democratic Councilman Bruce Kraus, whose bill was supported

by animal rights activists at Tuesday's public hearing. Animal Defender International, based in Los Angeles, said more than 30 U.S. municipalities have similar laws.

Supporters of the bill contend that animals don't jump through fiery hoops because they enjoy it.

"They perform out of fear of what will happen to them if they don't," said Brian Bonsteel, founder of Humane Action Pittsburgh, an animal rights group that helped

draft the legislation.

City Council President Darlene Harris said she'll vote against the bill and believes circus animals are motivated to perform by the good relationships they have with their trainers.

"I have never seen any animal do a trick for a person who abuses and beats them. Never," Harris said. "If I hit my dog, do you think she would sit up and roll over and dance for me?"

"None of the speakers in favor of this ordinance have any experience or exper-

"Iranians are unpredictable."

The official who rides bike to office and his sessions across the capital says "the campaign is a point of unity between the government and people; it promotes social capital and unity; it is different from other campaigns in that all enjoy the benefits. The movement is to change people's mindset, particularly the educated and the lovers of environment, to assume responsibility for their society."

Many officials, according to Darvish, have already joined the campaign including Mrs. Masumeh Ebtekar, the head of department, who uses subway and taxi on Tuesdays to go to her office.

"The Department of Environment is also paving the way for the campaign to be recognized among people. We have negotiated with insurance companies to give discount on third-party and body-part insurances to the drivers without traffic tickets on Tuesdays. We have also talked to municipality officials to specify some places in subways and BRTs for the campaign's posters which appear soon. Also, there are some companies and organizations like the Department of Environment which have planned some incentives for their employees who do not use personal cars for commuting between home and office," he explained.

This campaign will certainly broaden Iranians' cultural horizon, setting them as an example in the region where most of the countries are entangled in domestic conflict, the official concluded as he was watering the flowers in his office.

the past administration we cannot take any legal actions against them," she lamented, adding "a wind blow can easily bring all the dust and pollution they cause to Tehran."

"We have made great accomplishment in reducing air pollution so far as the number of clean days in Isfahan has tripled although it is not in a good condition regarding its annual precipitations," she said.

However, she said, "dust particle coming from border countries such as Iraq and also these mines is not in our control."

■ Cyber police help to minimize animal abuse, poaching

As some have the audacity to share their pictures while abusing animals or poaching them the DoE chief noted that with the help of the cyber police criminals will face legal consequences.

■ Bees are vulnerable to insecticide

On the subject of the insecticides Ebtekar felt repentant for the bees which are absolutely vulnerable to such toxic substances, particularly neonicotinoid.

"60 percent of the agricultural products depend on the pollination process by the bees," she said, stating, "Provided they die it would be almost impossible for farmers to cultivate their products."

"We are planning on promoting beekeeping, enhance awareness about the important role of the bees and insects in general in the environment and the negative outcomes of their extinction."

tise in actually working with wild exotic animals," said Dr. Barbara Baker, the zoo's president and CEO.

Kraus said he's gotten 9,000 emails from around the country, most of them supporting the measure he first proposed May 3.

Kraus said the bill will be vetted before it comes up for a vote.

Mayor Bill Peduto is waiting to see what happens to the bill before staking out a position, his spokesman said.

(Source: ABC News)

Tiger shark caught for 2nd time by same fisherman

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. (AP) — It seems a huge tiger shark named Chessie likes the South Carolina coast.

Local news outlets report the 1,400-pound shark tagged a year ago was caught again this week off Hilton Head Island by the same fisherman.

Fisherman Chip Michalove first caught Chessie, named for the nearby Chechessee River, in May 2015. On Wednesday, he caught the shark about a half-mile offshore.

Chessie has traveled 2,000 miles in the past year and also gained some weight. The shark weighed 1,200 pounds last year.

The tracking is a project of the non-profit OCEARCH, which works to learn about the movement of sharks. It's most famous subject is Mary Lee, a 3,500-pound tagged great white that routinely makes the news as it wanders along the East Coast.

IN FOCUS Mehr/ Tirdad kadhoda-Shafi



Hayat animal shelter is the first center for vaccination and treatment of the shelterless animals in the city of Arak, Markazi province.

Iran fights back to defeat Canada at WOQT

Iran recovered to win the match from two sets down against Australia 3-2 (27-29, 19-25, 25-20, 25-21, 16-14) on the second day of the Men's World Olympic Qualification Tournament at Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium on Sunday.

Milad Ebadipour tallied 26 points to lead the Iranian offensive. Ebadipour had a solid stint at the flank and buried 25 attacks then helped out on defence with one block. His team-mate Amir Ghafour likewise contributed in their victory with 19 markers. Gavin Schmitt of Canada topped all scorers with 27 points.

Iran and Canada had a drawn-out exchange of points and errors that resulted to numerous deadlocks in the opening set. The two sides almost had an equal production on attacks, blocks and aces, and the only difference separating them was Iran's two errors. Canada earned a one-point cushion from Schmitt's attack then sealed the first set victory 29-27, as an Iranian spike went out of bounds. Canada imposed a punishing high block that intimidated the Iranian hitters to hold on to an 18-10 lead. Iran then scored a 5-0 run, including three service aces from Seyed Mohammad Mousavi, to cut down the Canadian lead to 18-15. Canada managed to regroup and a soft tip shot by Schmitt concluded the set 25-19.

Iran recovered from their losses in the first two sets and gave a more convincing performance that put them ahead in the third set 14-10. Iran maintained their four-point edge at the second technical timeout 16-12, then extended it to 20-13 as their blockers applied more pressure on the Canadian hitters. Canada staged a comeback to cut down the lead of Iran to just four at 23-19, but Shahram Mamoudi's attack and Schmitt's service error eventually sealed the victory for Iran in the third set 25-20. Iran came into the fourth set with the same intensity and protected their lead



with the help of Ghafour and Ebadipour's excellent offence. Iran were up by three points at 23-20 but extended their lead as Schmitt committed another service error. Mahmoudi secured the fourth set victory for Iran 25-21.

Iran led in the fifth set and a smart drop by captain Mir Saied Maroufakrani put them further ahead 8-6 at side change. Canada tried to keep up with the momentum of their opponents but Iran scored two important blocks in the

final stretch to conclude set and match 16-14.

"Canada showed good level of play. They had a hard match on Saturday against Poland and had to come back and play. I'm happy with the result. We were close in the first set but could not control the tempo. We got our rhythm back so our defence was better from the third set," Iran coach Raul Lozano said.

(Source: FIVB)

Basketball team heads to WABA Championship



S P O R T S Iran basketball team travelled to Amman, Jordan on Sunday to participate at the 2016 West Asia Championship.

The WABA Championship will take place in the Jordanian capital of Amman from 30 May-3 June.

The tournament brings Jordan (host),

Iran, titleholder Lebanon, Iraq and Syria together.

The 2016 West Asia Basketball Championship will serve as a qualifier for the 2016 FIBA Asia Challenge.

Iranian national basketball team is preparing for the Olympic Qualifying Tournament (OQT), slated for July 4-9.

Junior handball team wins Poland tournament



S P O R T S Iran junior handball team claimed the title of the Poland tournament.

The Iranian team defeated Ukraine and Lithuania and lost to Poland in the competition.

Poland finished in second place due to inferior goal difference, followed by

Ukraine and Lithuania.

Amin Yusefnejhad from Iran became the best goal scorer of the tournament and Arash Norouzi was named as the best goalkeeper of the competition.

Iran is preparing for the 15th Asian Men's Junior Championship which will be held in Jordan in August.

Amir Ghalenoei extends contract with Iran's Tractor Sazi

Amir Ghalenoei has signed a new one-year contract with Iran's Tractor Sazi of Tabriz on Saturday.

The ex-Iran coach was appointed as coach of Tabriz based team in December 2015 for the second time.

In the 2011-12 season, Tractor Sazi had finished runner-up in Iran Professional League under Ghalenoei's

management.

Ghalenoei, who replaced Toni Oliveira in Tractor Sazi, led the team to the AFC Champions League Round of 16 where the Iranian team lost to the UAE's Al Nasr 5-4 on aggregate.

(Source: Tasnim)



Moussa Coulibaly joins Sepahan

S P O R T S Esteghlal Khuzestan defender Moussa Coulibaly has signed a two-year contract with Sepahan on Sunday.

Coulibaly moves to Isfahani club just three days after Abdollah Veisi accepted to be the head coach of Sepahan.

The 23-year old Malian, who joined Esteghlal Khuzestan in 2013 from Djoliba, scored four goals in 67 appearances for the Ahvaz based football team.

Veisi, who led Esteghlal Khuzestan to 2015-16 Iran Professional League season title, is trying to build a strong squad for Sepahan in the next season.

He did the same for Esteghlal Khuzestan as they narrowly escaped relegation last season but finished top in this season. Esteghlal Khuzestan dubbed the Iranian Leicester City who won the English Premier League this season for the first time in history.

Sepahan had a poor performance in the Iran Professional League and finished in 11th place.



Amir Hashemi appointed as SC NEC coach

S P O R T S Former Esteghlal striker Amir Hashemi Moghaddam has been appointed as the new head coach of SC NEC on a one-year contract.

Hashemi, who has an "UEFA A" license, has previously coached VV Lunteren, RKSV Margriet and RKTVC.

"After a couple of meetings we came to an agreement and I signed a one-year contract. NEC has a lot of talented youth players and that's why I'm here, I love to work with young players," the 49-year-old coach said.

Hashemi played 14 times for the Iran national football team in mid 80's against Poland, Russia, Angola, Japan, S. Korea, Qatar, Thailand and some other teams.

He is also the agent of AZ Alkmaar Iranian winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh. He played a key role in transferring Jahanbakhsh from Damash Gilan to NEC Nijmegen in the summer of 2013.



Ebrahimi linked with Qatar's Al Ahli move

Esteghlal's defensive midfielder Omid Ebrahimi has been linked with a move to Qatari football club Al Ahli.

The Iranian international midfielder, whose contracts expire at summer, has been a key player for Esteghlal in the Iranian Professional League.

The Qatari media reported he will replace his countryman Pejman Montazeri in Al Ahli.

Ebrahimi, who signed a two-year contract with Esteghlal in June 2014, has also played in Shahrdari Bandar Abbas and Sepahan.

Ebrahimi made his debut under management of Carlos Queiroz on 9 December 2012 in match against Saudi Arabia in 2012 WAFF. He was a member of Team Melli in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

(Source: Tasnim)

FOOTBALL

Cristiano Ronaldo should stay at Real Madrid forever - Florentino Perez

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has said he wants Cristiano Ronaldo to stay at the club "forever" after the Portuguese superstar's shootout penalty won the Champions League final.

Ronaldo had struggled to make a major impression as Real drew 1-1 with Atletico Madrid after extra time in Milan -- but he stepped up to smash home his side's fifth successful penalty to seal a 5-3 shootout success.

"Everyone knows I want Cristiano to stay here forever," he told Antena 3 television. "He is one of the pillars of the team and of the history of the club.

"Real Madrid have made a new era with him."

Perez hailed coach Zinedine Zidane, who lifted the trophy as a Madrid player in 2002, scoring the winner against Bayer Leverkusen, and was assistant coach to Carlo Ancelotti for the 2014 final victory over Atletico.

"Zidane, for me, for Madrid and its history, has been very important," he said.

"He changed history in 2002, and he has won the Champions League as a player, an assistant and now as the coach."

The president said the Bernabeu club had enjoyed "a good league" despite narrowly losing the Liga title to rivals Barcelona.

"All seasons are tough, but we fought to the end," he added. "La Liga is very difficult. We've fought.

"I won't say more. We had a good League, and we had a good European Cup."

Perez paid tribute to Atletico, who eliminated both Barcelona and Bayern Munich from this season's competition but, for the second time in three campaigns, were unable to defeat city rivals Real in the final.

"I would like to dedicate a few words to Atletico, our neighbour and friend," he said. "In the last few years, they have shown the level they are at.

"You feel for them because of the effort they have made, but I am sure they will win it in the future."

He dedicated the club's victory to fans who died in a terror attack in Iraq earlier this month, saying they were people "who transmitted the values of Madrid."

(Source: ESPN)

French prosecutor considering Qatar 2022 World Cup investigation

French financial authorities are considering investigating how Qatar was awarded the 2022 soccer World Cup, financial prosecutor Eliane Houlette said on Sunday.

"We are thinking about it, we have several elements that encourage us to investigate," Houlette told French radio Europe 1. The financial prosecutors can investigate if they have reasons to believe French nationals are involved in a case or if unlawful acts related to it were committed in France.

Former UEFA president Michel Platini, banished from the sport for ethics violations, could be a person of interest.

"If there is an investigation, Mr Platini's role will be crucial but the investigation would not focus on Mr Platini," said Houlette.

Platini was banned for four years over a payment of two million Swiss francs (\$2.08 million) made to him by FIFA with former president Sepp Blatter's approval in 2011 for consultancy services provided a decade earlier.

(Source: Reuters)

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang move speculation 'nonsense' - Dortmund

Borussia Dortmund have dismissed rumours that star striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is about to leave as "nonsense."

Speculation that Gabon international Aubameyang was set to depart increased after journalist Francois David wrote on Twitter that national manager Jorge Costa had been asked not to select him against Mauritania "because he is in the process of changing clubs."

The 26-year-old, who scored 39 goals in all competitions for Dortmund last season, has been linked with a £70 million move to Manchester United. Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester City and Arsenal also reported to be keen.

But Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke told Sport Bild: "That's all nonsense."

Earlier this month, Aubameyang told Ruhr Nachrichten he "could not imagine a nicer place" to be play than Dortmund, even though he added that he would be interested in a move to La Liga one day.

Aubameyang, crowned CAF 2015 African Footballer of the Year in January, said earlier this season that his "childhood dream" was to play for Real Madrid.

He signed a new five-year contract at Dortmund last summer and told the paper: "It was not for nothing that I prolonged my contract until 2020.

"It was a conscious decision. I can even imagine staying here for longer, even though I would like to play in Spain one day.

"In football, however, you never really know what will happen. Fundamentally, I feel so good here that I could not imagine a nicer place for me right now."

Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke said in January that the club would not sell Aubameyang even if offered €100m.

But he has also admitted that an offer in excess of that figure might force them to reconsider.

(Source: ESPN)

